

ROSIE THE RIVETER AND THE KITCHEN SOLDIER: FIGHTING THE SECOND WORLD WAR FROM WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA

by

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The purpose of this thesis is to examine whether or not traditional gender norms remained standing at the conclusion of World War II in Wilmington, North Carolina. This topic would have been impossible to cover on a national scale, which is the reason this thesis focuses on the city of Wilmington. Wilmington was home to the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company, nearby Camp Davis and Camp Lejeune, and Fort Fisher. The introduction of the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company and military families to the city led to a dramatic increase in population, which resulted in some positive and negative effects, including housing, transportation, and food shortages. Life changed completely for Wilmingtonians, particularly women, with the United States entry into the war in December 1941, transforming Wilmington into a wartime boomtown.

From 1941-1945, women experienced significant changes, as the government called upon them to fill traditionally male jobs in the workforce. Although the war presented new obligations for women, some aspects of society remained the same. Through the use of various newspaper articles and advertisements, this thesis shows the way the Office of War Information and corporations attempted to uphold traditional gender norms throughout the war. One method examined in this study is the way advertisements focused on war workers protecting their feminine identity and taking a motherly role in saving the nation. Another method focused on

the way articles and advertisements presented women working within the home to remind women that they should focus on their role in the private sector. These, as well as the important role women played in the home during the war, will be explored to determine whether traditional gender norms remained standing at the end of World War II.

ROSIE THE RIVETER AND THE KITCHEN SOLDIER: FIGHTING THE SECOND WORLD
WAR FROM WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA

A Thesis

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by

Victoria Whitfield

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my late grandfather, David L. Hodge Jr., who was not only a strong mentor, but also the man who believed in my abilities to pursue a degree in American History. He began my love affair with history and without his love, dedication, and stories, this work would not have been possible.

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I would like to thank Dr. M. Todd Bennett for seeing the potential in this topic and working through the entire process with me. My committee members, Dr. Wade Dudley, Dr. Christopher Oakley, and Ralph Scott, also deserve recognition for their support and advice. I would also like to thank Dr. Chad Ross, whose continued encouragement and inspiring metaphors made me realize all over again why I wanted to get my Master's Degree and complete this Master's Thesis. I must also thank the students in East Carolina's History Lab who went through this process with me and provided inspiration in the writing process. Ingrid Meyer also deserves recognition for answering every question I had about graduate school and my thesis.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

World War II transformed America, historians commonly argue.¹ The war changed American society in numerous ways, they say, including liberating many women by catapulting the Rosie the Riveters among them out of the domestic sphere and into the public world of work outside the home. Indeed, World War II altered women's lives in many respects. Yet, this thesis will demonstrate that much remained the same. Using Wilmington, North Carolina as a case study, this thesis addresses the issue of whether, and how, the war affected traditional gender norms. Conventional gender norms defined women's place as in the domestic sphere and men's as in the public sphere. To be sure, the war posed a challenge to these roles, particularly those of females, because it led millions of additional women to work outside the home in customarily male jobs.

Initially, the culture celebrated these Rosie the Riveters. While more women worked outside the home during the war, most continued their role as homemakers. Yet, as several historians have shown, the male-dominated powers-that-be attempted to maintain the gender status quo in part by emphasizing that women's war work was only temporary.² Advertisements presented women workers less as strong individuals and more as attractive women playing a

¹ Some historians that argue World War II transformed America include: Michael C. Adams, *The Best War Ever: America and World War II* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994); John Morton Blum, *V was for victory: politics and American culture during World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976); and Roger Lotchin, *The Bad City in the Good War: San Francisco, Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Diego; American West in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

² Some works that argue this point include: Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981); Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984); and Leila J. Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

motherly role for their country. This thesis contributes to that literature by focusing on Wilmington, where the culture celebrated not only Rosie the Riveter as she labored at the local shipyard but also the “kitchen soldier,” who contributed to national defense by remaining in the home to feed, clothe, and otherwise protect the country’s health. In their rush to document the millions of women who entered the industrial workforce during World War II, historians have overlooked the “kitchen soldier,” who made an important contribution to the American war effort even as her image helped to maintain gender order.

It is difficult enough to prove that traditional gender norms remained standing immediately following the war on a national scale, which is why this thesis focuses on a local case study: Wilmington, North Carolina. This port city, the county seat of New Hanover County, is located on the southeastern coast of North Carolina, not far from the South Carolina border. The American South, along with the West, experienced significant population growth during the war because of the construction of military bases, shipyards, and the conversion of industrial manufacturing to war production. Even though the South played such a vital role in World War II, the historiography on the subject is lacking.³ This study seeks to flesh out that literature by examining Wilmington, a city transformed into a wartime boomtown between 1941-1945. After World War I, Wilmington decreased in size and became a peaceful, quiet town. This abruptly changed in 1940 with the introduction of the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company, and nearby Camp Davis and Camp Lejeune. These industries propelled Wilmington into a new age of prosperity, in which the city gained the name of “Defense Capital” of North Carolina.

³ Some of the existing works include: Fritz P. Hamer, *Charleston Reborn: A Southern City, Its Navy Yard, and World War II* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2005) and Jerry P. Sanson, *Louisiana during World War II: Politics and Society, 1939-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999).

Wilmington's sudden growth created overcrowding, housing shortages, and transportation problems of an unprecedented level. The first chapter of this thesis outlines these problems, as well as the ways in which Wilmington coped with them. This background is imperative to understanding the reason Wilmington serves as such an illustrative case study. Chapter Two examines the jobs women in Wilmington took outside of the home, particularly at the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company. That chapter focuses on the ways in which the local culture, as reflected in newspaper columns, circumscribed the image of local Rosie the Riveters, portrayed not as strong individuals taking their rightful places in the workforce but as mothers temporarily doing their duty for the country. The final chapter explores the role of Wilmington's kitchen soldier and her job of protecting the health of the nation. Like chapter two, the third chapter samples the city's culture, especially newspaper articles and advertisements, to uncover the way in which the Office of War Information and corporations utilized the kitchen soldier as a reminder of women's place in the home. The evidence displayed in chapters two and three is used to determine whether conventional gender norms remained standing in Wilmington at the war's conclusion.

At their peak, wartime defense industries nationally employed nearly 19 million women, an increase of 47 percent from 1940, including many middle-class married women and mothers.⁴ Most of these women left the workforce at the end of the war, however. In 1945, there were 69.9 million women in the United States who differed in age, gender, race, ethnicity, and regional upbringing, and their individual wartime experiences varied greatly.⁵ It is impossible to study the experiences of each of these women individually, and it can be misleading to generalize

⁴ Anderson, *Wartime Women*, 4.

⁵ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 32.

about women's experiences as a group. Nevertheless, as pointed out by historian Leila Rupp, "one can study a popular conception of women, since it treats all women alike."⁶ This thesis attempts to do just that by observing the ways in which wartime advertisements and articles in Wilmington presented women and affected the way society viewed their wartime role. It concludes that, while the movement of women into the labor force placed greater strains on gender norms, those norms ultimately remained unchanged, as the culture encouraged women to return to the home by upholding the homemaker, rather than the shipyard worker, as the feminine ideal.

This study contributes to the fields of cultural and gender history. It uses popular culture and mass media from the time period as primary source evidence to explore the construction of gender. According to historian Kristin Hoganson, "gender refers to social-determined symbols, norms, and identities" and is "an analytical category akin to class and race in its potential to elucidate social and institutional relationships."⁷ World War II provoked a crisis in gender, and by examining the ways in which Wilmingtonians navigated that crisis, this thesis makes a significant contribution to the field. It does so as well by devoting long overdue attention to kitchen soldiers, those women who remained in the home but nevertheless made significant contributions to the U.S. war effort.⁸

This thesis utilizes *The Wilmington Star-News*, the city's daily newspaper during the war, as its main primary source. Articles and advertisements from *The North Carolina Shipbuilder*,

⁶ Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War*, 5.

⁷ Kristin Hoganson, "What's Gender Got to Do with It? Gender History as Foreign Relations History," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, ed. Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 304.

⁸ Some works in the field of gender history include: Anderson, *Wartime Women*, 1981; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2008; Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War*, 1978.

which was the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company's primary, monthly newspaper, are also examined. Other primary sources include interviews with Wilmington citizens compiled by the University of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNC-W) and the Cape Fear Museum. This thesis employs two manuscript collections created by historians who researched and wrote on Wilmington in World War II. Wilbur Jones, who grew up in Wilmington during the war, wrote two works on wartime life in Wilmington, founded the World War II Wilmington Home Front Heritage Coalition, and donated his research to the UNC-W's Randall Library. Jones' extensive manuscript collection proved extremely helpful in researching this thesis. Ralph Scott, who wrote his thesis and first book on the Wilmington shipyard, also left a manuscript collection stocked with his research to East Carolina University's Joyner Library. Scott's collection provided important background on wartime Wilmington as well as key information about the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company.

This thesis also contributes to the literature on World War II. Historians have written a great deal about World War II. Military and diplomatic histories dominated the war's early historiography.⁹ As the historical field experienced a cultural turn in the 1970s and 1980s, works that focused on the American home front appeared. Such works examined the cultural changes that occurred as a result of the war, as well as the ways in which ordinary Americans aided the war effort.¹⁰ The 1980s also marked the first publications on particular regions in the United States. The majority of these works focused on the American North and West, depicting the

⁹ Charles Beard, *President Roosevelt and the Coming of War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948); George Morgenstern, *Pearl Harbor: The Story of the Secret War* (New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1947); Winston Churchill, *The Second World War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1948-1952).

¹⁰ Early works that focused on the American home front include: Blum, *V was for Victory*, 1976; Geoffrey Perrett, *Days of Sadness, Years of Triumph: The American People, 1939-1946* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973); Richard Polenberg, *War and Society: The United States, 1941-1945* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1972).

demographic changes, including urbanization, which resulted from the war.¹¹ Few histories exist on Southern communities' wartime experiences, which is a topic that deserves more attention since the South also faced dramatic social changes, as was evident in Wilmington.¹² This thesis will help to fill the gap in this literature by bringing to life an important city in North Carolina. This study also focuses on one aspect of society that remained unchanged following the war, which is something many of these works fail to discuss.

In the latter third of the twentieth century, as the war's fiftieth anniversary approached, a shift occurred in World War II historiography. Revisionist historians began to write critically about the home front and highlight some aspects that historians had previously overlooked. More gender histories that focused on women's role on the home front began to appear. Historians disagree as to the extent of wartime changes in women's status. One early work, which appeared in 1972 and argued World War II was a turning point for American women, was William Chafe's *The American Women: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles 1920-1970*. Chafe claimed that war work in the 1940s led to major changes and more opportunities for women following the war. This thesis contradicts Chafe's turning point theory because it shows that traditional gender norms actually remained standing in the late 1940s and that attitudes about women's place in society persisted in postwar America. Chafe also argued that Americans accepted women in the workforce, but only where conventional gender roles were not threatened.¹³ This study adds to this particular argument by showing that some women

¹¹ Alan Clive, *State of War: Michigan in World War II* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979); Lotchin, *The Bad City in the Good War*, 2003; and George Nash, *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

¹² See footnote 3 for the existing literature on the South in World War II.

¹³ William H. Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Role, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

did continue to work outside the home after the war, but mainly in clerical positions and not in traditionally male jobs as they had during the war.

Many historians disagree with Chafe's turning point theory and look at the ways the war helped to cement traditional gender norms. This thesis complements these works, and helps fill in the gap by focusing on one city in the American South. One such book is historian Karen Anderson's *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II*. Anderson focused on three major wartime cities, Baltimore, Seattle, and Detroit, to determine the "relative importance of local institutions and cultural values in promoting or impeding an altered social role for women."¹⁴ She concluded that, although women found new opportunities during World War II, working women found their status largely unaltered by the war; conventional attitudes about the role of women remained unchanged from the prewar years. Susan Hartmann's work, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s*, paralleled Anderson's by arguing that wartime propaganda articulated the importance of women to the war effort, but it also reminded them that their war work was not permanent.¹⁵ This thesis contributes to both of these works by also focusing on a city during the war, particularly one that experienced significant wartime changes and growth. More importantly, it adds to their arguments by proving that wartime culture helped to cement conventional gender norms in a southern city, which Anderson does not mention. One aspect this study covers that the aforementioned works fail to devote attention to is the role of the homemaker during the war.

¹⁴ Anderson, *Wartime Women*, 12.

¹⁵ Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982).

This thesis fills the gap in the historiography by proving the way advertisements promoted women's role in the home as a method of protecting traditional gender norms.¹⁶

There are two other important works that argued against the turning point theory and are important for this particular topic because of their emphasis on the cultural icon, "Rosie the Riveter." Historian Leila Rupp, in *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945*, pointed out that wartime changes "were in a large sense superficial, because they were meant by the government, and understood by the public, to be temporary."¹⁷ This can be attributed not only to the strong prevailing beliefs in conventional gender roles, but also to the efforts taken by the Office of War Information and other corporations to preserve the feminine identity. Historian Maureen Honey, in *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II*, argued that "For a variety of reasons, war workers served as a symbol of the ideal home-front spirit, standing for national unity...this image both idealized women as strong...and undercut the notion that women deserved and wanted a larger role in society."¹⁸ This thesis confirms these two works by taking the arguments they made on a national scale and using them as part of local history. The aforementioned books are important for the study of gender history and for home front history, but many of them are too general because of their attempt to prove an argument on a national scale. Focusing on one area in the United States allowed this study to go into more detail about different articles and advertisements, as well as use interviews to show that traditional gender norms remained standing following the war.

¹⁶ One work that highlights women's role in the home and its importance is Amy Bentley's *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998). See her work for information on national food campaigns and why the government chose to direct the campaigns towards women.

¹⁷ Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War*, 138.

¹⁸ Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter*, 1.

The historiography of Wilmington in World War II is almost nonexistent, even though the city held such an important role in the American war effort. There are three main works on the subject, two of which proved important for this thesis. The first is Jones' *A Sentimental Journey: Memoirs of a Wartime Boomtown*, which provided a good background on Wilmington, but failed to make a solid argument about wartime Wilmington because it reads more as a narrative.¹⁹ The second work, Ralph Scott's *The Wilmington Shipyard: Welding a Fleet for Victory in World War II*, provided an excellent description of the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company, which was at the heart of many of the changes Wilmington experienced. This thesis adds to that small body of literature, helping to fill the gaps in historical knowledge of the wartime developments that occurred in the "Defense Capital" of North Carolina.

This study brings the wartime boomtown of Wilmington to life and gives agency to those women in Wilmington that have been previously neglected. As indicated by the historiography provided on the home front, and more particularly gender roles, in World War II, there is room for more works on particular cities in America and the way the war affected conventional gender norms. This thesis adds to the existing literature by using wartime advertisements to prove their effects on gender norms at the local level, but it also fills the gap in the literature on the women that worked in the home during the war. By pinpointing one city, this study also uncovers the importance of local histories and their effects on the war. It shows the creativity of local women, the way they coped with wartime changes, the way they protected the health of the nation, as well as the way local newspapers affected what women thought about their wartime roles.

Before the research questions can be answered for this study, a background on Wilmington must

¹⁹ Wilbur Jones, *A Sentimental Journey: Memoirs of a Wartime Boomtown* (Shippensburg, PA: Maine Books, 2005). Jones wrote a sequel to this work titled *The Journey Continues: The World War II Home Front* that is useful for those seeking more information on wartime Wilmington.

be given. The first chapter explores life in the city, the positive and negative effects that accompanied the war, and the way Wilmington citizens coped with these changes.

CHAPTER TWO

BOOMTOWN

As it did to many other American port cities, the Second World War transformed sleepy, Depression-wracked Wilmington, North Carolina into a boomtown. Home to a major shipyard as well as several military bases, Wilmington became known as the “Defense Capital” of North Carolina. Wilmingtonians may have been eager to help the American war effort by producing liberty ships and training men for the military, but they were prepared for neither the rapid growth nor the wrenching change that would result. As shipbuilders and soldiers poured in, the city’s population virtually doubled overnight. The sudden influx of people caused overcrowded conditions, overstressed transportation, and housing and food shortages, all of which affected daily life. Nationwide rationing only made those shortages worse, giving rise to a black market and sparking competition for everyday needs. Even as early as January 1942, restaurant patrons jostled for the few remaining menu items, and liquor stores had emptied out all together. The attack on Pearl Harbor startled awake sleepy, Depression-era Wilmington and turned it into booming, wartime Wilmington, for better or worse.

Boomtown

Like many other places, Wilmington was still feeling the effects of the Great Depression in 1940. An article from the *Federal Writer’s Guide to North Carolina* described Wilmington during the Great Depression:

White and Negro hucksters cry their wares in the early morning on residential streets and Negro stevedores sing work songs on the docks as they handle cotton, sugar and odorous

fertilizer. Saturday brings a horde of farmers from outlying farms. The peal of many church bells breaks the Sunday calm.¹

Wilmington housed only three state banks, one national bank, and four hotels, all located in the small downtown area. The depression affected farming families, as well as industrial works. In 1940, the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce reported “a payroll of \$14 million for a work force of 14,000 men and 5,000 women- for an average wage of about \$736 a year.”² Despite employment at the Atlantic Coastline Railroad, Seaboard Air Line, textile mills, and the Cotton Exchange, many Wilmington citizens remained unemployed during the depression. This left Wilmington a quiet, little port city during the 1930s.

But the wartime mobilization that began in 1940 turned many port cities into boomtowns. According to historian John Morton Blum, World War II created, “such an economic demand for goods and services, and assured such a concurrent demand for labor... that it liquidated the conditions of depression that had characterized American life” during the 1930s.³ Typically, the booms began with an influx of people who came to port cities in search of jobs in factories or shipyards. Between 1940 and 1945, more than 55,000 people migrated to Charleston, South Carolina in search of work in the city’s navy yard, for instance. Home to a shipyard, as well as several major factories that produced munitions, Baltimore, Maryland, another key port city, similarly welcomed an enormous immigration of prospective employees.⁴

¹ Ralph Scott, *The Wilmington Shipyard: Welding A Fleet For Victory in World War II* (Charleston, South Carolina: The History Press, 2007), 33.

² “World War II awakened sleepy town: Wilmington residents lived quiet, simple lives,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, December 1, 1991.

³ John Morton Blum, *V was for Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976).

⁴ Amy Bentley, *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

Wilmington was no different. Established in 1941, the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company drove the city's growth. Indeed, the shipyard helped give the city its identity as the "Defense Capital" of the state. Between 1941 and 1946, the company produced 243 vessels. Most were liberty ships, cargo vessels used to transport goods across the Atlantic and thus the most common targets of German U-boats. The company proved to be the most efficient producer of liberty ships, producing them at "the lowest in dollar cost and second in man-hours per ship", in the nation."⁵ By the time it launched its first liberty ship, the *Zebulon Vance*, in December 1941, the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company already employed 7,500 people, including women.⁶ In September 1942, according to the *News and Observer*, the shipyard took the title of North Carolina's largest industry from Winston-Salem's R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, which employed 13,000 at the time.⁷ By 1943, the shipyard's peak year, the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company employed 21,000.⁸

Attesting to the transformative power of World War II, the shipyard helped industrialize Wilmington and reverse its economic fortunes. According to a December 1941 article in *The Wilmington Star-News*, "more than \$600,000 monthly is being poured into banks and trade channels in the Wilmington area by the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company. And that's only the beginning."⁹ The newspaper also claimed that nearby Camp Davis acted as a major

⁵ Scott, *The Wilmington Shipyard*, 35-71.

⁶ "Yards Payroll Tops \$600,000: By Next March It Will Approximate \$1,200,000, When 7,500 Are on Job," *The Wilmington Star-News*, December 6, 1941.

⁷ North Carolina Shipbuilding Collection (#62.2b; *News and Observer Clippings*), East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J. Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

⁸ "At War and At Work: War Needs Brought Home Front Boom," *The Wilmington Star-News*, December 2, 1941.

⁹ "Yards Payroll Tops \$600,000: By Next March It Will Approximate \$1,200,000, When 7,500 Are on Job," *The Wilmington Star-News*, December 6, 1941.

economic contributor as well, “pouring out \$54,761 daily in Wilmington.”¹⁰ Such investments combined to create an economic boom that pulled not only Wilmington, but also New Hanover County out of the Great Depression.

The shipyard fueled Wilmington’s demographic growth, as well. In 1940, Wilmington’s population stood at just 33,407, roughly the same as it had been in 1920.¹¹ Wilmington resident Clifton Daniels recalled, “it was said that you could fire a shotgun down Front Street in the middle of the day and not hit a soul.”¹² Yet wartime Wilmington experienced rapid population growth, as people flocked to the area in search of work. Most new arrivals, African-Americans as well as whites, came from rural areas in North Carolina. Many were women, who comprised about one-third of Wilmington’s workforce. These women came to Wilmington with experience in farm work, millwork, and café work.¹³ By early 1944, over 55,000 people resided within the city, a figure that does not account for the thousands of soldiers from Camp Davis and Fort Fisher who flocked to Wilmington on weekends, especially on pay days, as figure 1.1 shows. More than 100,000 people resided in New Hanover County, whose 1940 population totaled only 47,935.¹⁴ In fact, according to a report from the Office of Community War Service, New Hanover was the only county in all of North Carolina to gain population during the war.¹⁵

¹⁰ “Davis Spending Million Monthly: Survey Shows Wilmington Receives Lion’s Share of Post’s Expenses,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, January 1, 1942.

¹¹ “World War II Awakened Sleepy Town,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, December 1, 1991.

¹² World War II Wartime Wilmington Series (WWII Subject File: “Training camps turned a sleepy town into a bustling city”), New Hanover County Public Library North Carolina Collection, New Hanover County Public Library, Wilmington, North Carolina.

¹³ Scott, *The Wilmington Shipyard*, 34-41.

¹⁴ World War II Wartime Wilmington Series (WWII Subject File: “The Growth of Wilmington.” *THE STATE: A Weekly Survey of North Carolina*, August 9, 1947), New Hanover County Public Library North Carolina Collection.

¹⁵ North Carolina Shipbuilding Collection (Volume 62.4b; Office of Community War Service Report), East Carolina Manuscript Collection.

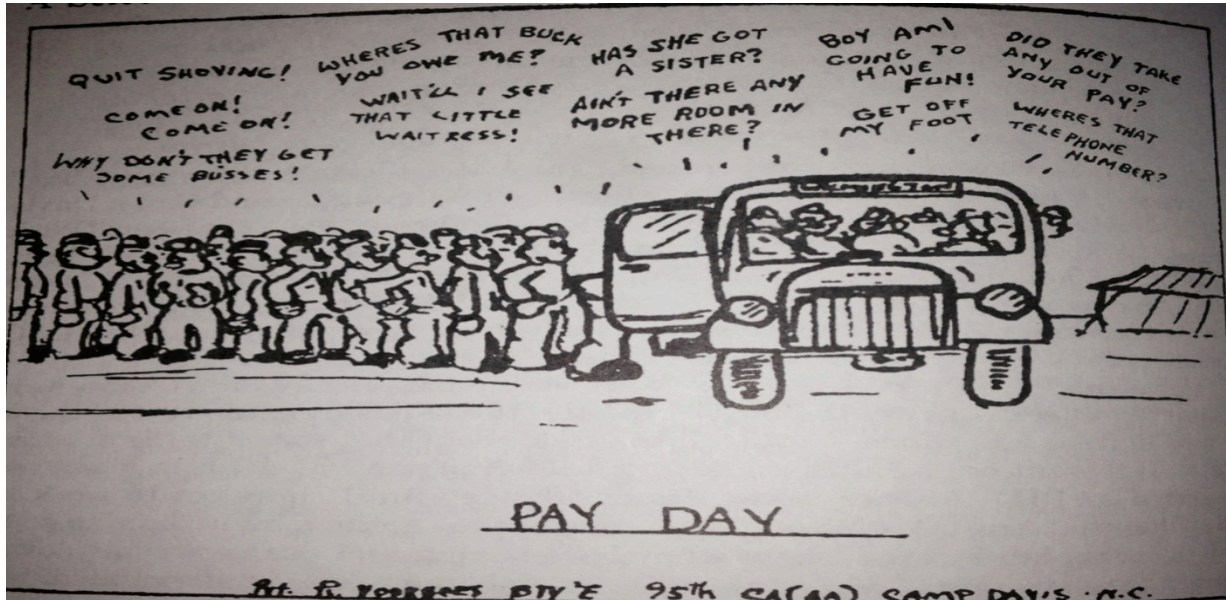


Figure 1.1: Pay Day, Soldiers Leaving From Camp Davis. Wilbur D. Jones, Jr., *A Sentimental Journey: Memoirs of a Wartime Boomtown* (Shippensburg: White Mane Books, 2002), 180.

Life in Wartime Wilmington

Daily life in Wilmington differed from that of the 1930s. For one, citizens mobilized to meet wartime defense demands through such means as civilian defense programs. Created in 1940, the Wilmington Defense Council aided the government in registering citizens for military service or for volunteer defense work. The Council urged citizens to do their part for the war effort by volunteering, something the Council considered a patriotic duty. The Council organized such volunteer activities as air raid warden duty, nurse's aide service, rescue squad service, emergency food and housing corps, and many others.¹⁶ It placed advertisements in *The*

¹⁶ "Wilmingtonians Doff Peace Era For All-Out War," *The Wilmington Star-News*, December 9, 1941.

Wilmington Star-News to encourage readers to register for civilian defense. One such 1942 ad (figure 1.2) suggested that everyone who was “fighting mad!” – including men who were not in the armed services but especially women – could do their part at home to secure victory abroad. Another such ad read: “Let every citizen realize the need for absolute cooperation and all-out effort in our country’s cause. Be alert. Serve when you are called, give willingly and freely to the demands of your time, and labor.”¹⁷



Figure 1.2: Civilian Defense Advertisement. “Has Our Town Gone Mad” *The Wilmington Star-News*, February 7, 1943.

Another volunteer organization, the Civilian Defense Committee held classes every week for basic military training and first aid. This committee also helped to prepare young men for defense work and the military, as well as registered volunteers to staff the U.S. Army Signal Corps’ Information and Filter Center. Situated in Wilmington, the Filter Center located enemy

¹⁷ “The New Wilmington: The Spirit of Wilmington, the Spirit of Victory,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, December 14, 1941.

aircraft and pinpointed the planes' distances from the coast. One volunteer was Kathleen Somerset, who moved from Brunswick County after seeing a newspaper ad calling for volunteers. According to Somerset, she and her fellow volunteers joined strictly for "the love of country, the love of people, and the protection of the town."¹⁸

Although the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company's production of liberty ships made the shipyard an essential part of the American war effort, it also made Wilmington a potential target for enemy attack. Blackouts and air raid drills became part of daily life and, in addition to rationing, form the core of Wilmingtonians' collective memory. Nancy West Jones remembered, "air raid wardens coming around to check on our security, making sure all lights were out, and everyone was off the streets."¹⁹ The level of wartime vigilance extended even to little things such as an excess of light. For example, Marie Burgwin Sanborn remembered the "blackout shades that had to be pulled down on every window facing east," as well as that the top half of the headlights on all vehicles had to be painted black.²⁰ Streetlights were also not to be lit at night.²¹

¹⁸ Kathleen Somerset, Interviewed by Paul Zarbock, 19 September 2001, World War II: Through the Eyes of the Cape Fear Collection Number 083, transcript, University of North Carolina at Wilmington Digital Collection, University of North Carolina at Wilmington, Wilmington, NC.

¹⁹ [Series 4: Nancy West Jones Interview, Interviewed by Wilbur Jones, 13 November 1998] Wilbur D. Jones, Jr. Papers, MS204, William Randall Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina Wilmington, Wilmington, NC.

²⁰ [Series 4: Marie Burgwin Sanborn Interview, Interviewed by Wilbur Jones, 21 October 1998] Wilbur D. Jones, Jr. Papers, MS204, William Randall Library Special Collections.

²¹ [Series 4: Marie Burgwin Sanborn Interview, Interviewed by Wilbur Jones, 21 October 1998] Wilbur D. Jones, Jr. Papers, MS204, William Randall Library Special Collections..

Effects of Overcrowding in Wilmington

Combined with the imposition of nationwide rationing, the aforementioned population boom led to housing and transportation shortages and thus conflict among civilians and soldiers. Like other overpopulated cities, Wilmington experienced its share of conflict, especially between soldiers and civilians. Although many men in Wilmington volunteered for or were drafted into the armed services, some soldiers resented men who were not in uniform. Some men in Wilmington could not serve because of family status, age, health, and disability. Robert Pollock, a worker at the shipyard, remembered that in the overcrowded entertainment venues in Wilmington tensions between soldiers and civilians often arose. He recalled, “some sailors had things to say to us about still being civilians,” sometimes leading to fights.²² Sometimes fights broke out between soldiers and civilians. A shipyard worker, J.E. Wheeler and Camp Davis Sergeant Swan E. Nelson got into a brawl after Wheeler objected to soldiers getting priority at restaurants and soda shops. Wheeler hit Nelson in the back of the head with a beer bottle, paralyzing him.²³ Tensions also existed between civilians and soldiers over the local women, as many civilians saw soldiers as trespassing on their domain.

The implementation of nationwide rationing made the effects of overcrowding worse in wartime Wilmington. In April 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order that established the Office of Price Administration (OPA). Roosevelt tasked the OPA with finding ways to prevent rapid increases in prices. Its job became more important with the United States declaration of war in late 1941. On January 30, 1942, Congress passed the Emergency Price Control Act that gave the OPA the power to freeze retail prices, which began nationwide

²² [Series 4: Robert S. Pollock Interview, Interviewed by Wilbur Jones, 20 October 1998] Wilbur D. Jones, Jr. Papers, MS204, William Randall Library Special Collections.

²³ “Shipyard Worker Held for Trial,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, August 30, 1944.

rationing on different types of commodities.²⁴ Roosevelt, in his “Cost of Living” speech to Congress in April 1942, articulated the goals of rationing in stating, “But where any important article becomes scarce, rationing is the democratic, equitable solution.” The goal of nationwide rationing was to ensure equitable distribution of scarce resources and to preserve items for use by the armed services and war workers.²⁵ An important effect of this was a dramatic increase in prices, which is the reason the OPA also attempted to control prices. The first commodities rationed, beginning in January 1942, were tires and gasoline, followed by sugar, coffee, shoes, butter, canned goods, and red meat. In addition to following the different rationed items, citizens had to learn the various methods of rationing.

Certificate rationing, stamp rationing, and point rationing were the main methods carried out by the OPA. Under the certificate rationing program, citizens could apply for tires, cars, and stoves by demonstrating they had a need. Food items fell under stamp and point rationing, in which the OPA allocated citizens stamp or war ration books. The stamp method, used for sugar and coffee, gave consumers a stamp to purchase an allowed amount of either sugar or coffee every few weeks. Point rationing focused on items that could be grouped, such as processed foods and meats, and provided equivalent shares of coupons issued for points. The OPA assigned each item a certain point value based on consumer demand and availability. To accurately represent the public in determining point values, the OPA employed twenty-five thousand homemakers to keep monthly wartime diaries. This alludes to the important role homemakers played in the rationing process, which will be discussed in chapter three.

²⁴ William H. Young and Nancy K. Young, *World War II and the Postwar Years in America: A Historical and Cultural Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 575.

²⁵ Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 14 and 19.

Wartime scarcity dramatically increased prices nationwide, giving rise to a black market for goods. As a boomtown, Wilmington was a prime location for black markets. A March 1943 newspaper article described that the illegal buying and selling of goods was implemented on a “large scale” in Wilmington and that “Wilmington is one of a very few communities in the state which the black market practice has been attempted on so heavy a scale.”²⁶ The dramatic increase in population was one of the main reasons for the black market’s prevalence, but the food culture in the South also played a role. Meat was a staple in Southern culinary tradition, which is one of the main reasons the black market thrived in Wilmington. Although black market prices were higher than regular prices, Wilmingtonians bought from the black market because they wanted the items that they could no longer get. This occurred despite the OPA’s attempts to combat the black market by promoting a pledge campaign among homemakers and businessmen: “I will buy no products which are listed above the ceiling price; I will not buy products without surrendering the necessary rationing points.”²⁷ Black markets were not unique to Wilmington and proved to be a problem throughout the nation during the war years.

Theft was another type of crime that flourished in wartime Wilmington. In November 1942, *The Wilmington Star-News* reported, “Wilmington is not meeting its crime emergency. Because the city has outgrown the police force and additional officers are unobtainable, thieves are holding high carnival.”²⁸ The New Hanover County police force numbers doubled during the war, as opposed to those in surrounding counties.²⁹ Houses were robbed in the middle of the

²⁶ “Black Market in Meat Here is Disclosed,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, March 5, 1943.

²⁷ “People Told Black Marts Their Making,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, October 15, 1943.

²⁸ [Series 4: *Wilmington Star-News Clippings and Thematic Notes; The Wilmington Star-News*, November 18, 1942] Wilbur D. Jones, Jr. Papers, MS204, William Randall Library Special Collections.

²⁹ North Carolina Shipbuilding Collection (#62.4b; Police and Fire Protection Report), East Carolina Manuscript Collection.

night, especially on payday. For example, in 1942, *The Wilmington Star-News* explained that some men robbed soldiers of their wallets while they slept on the train. The article also described that pocketbooks and billfolds were stolen from hotel rooms, downtown stores, and taxicabs. Overpopulation and the lack of a sufficient police force led to many thieves never being caught. Juvenile delinquency also flourished in Wilmington, as it did nationwide, because teenagers had more freedom. Not only were fathers overseas, but many mothers also worked outside the home. Among juveniles, theft was the most common crime.³⁰

Prostitution was another form of crime that thrived during the war. Wilmington had “an untold number of ‘designated whore houses (illegal, of course), and untold other edifices where illicit, commercial, or unmarried sex was a by-product.”³¹ Women would stand on the streets of downtown and right outside of the U.S.O. buildings waiting to be picked up by soldiers; prostitutes also worked the two major hotels in Wilmington. Figure 1.3 is an example of a political cartoon from the *Wilmington Star-News* that hinted at the prostitution problem. It depicted a woman scandalously dressed with the word ‘overconfidence’ written on her sleeve and a bubble that read ‘What’s your hurry, big boy? Victory is in the bag. I hear the war will be over in a few months.’” This implied that the workers and the military men were getting distracted at home and forgetting about what needed to be done to help the war effort. It was also a not too subtle hint about the prostitution problem.

³⁰ “Juvenile Delinquency Shows No Rise,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, September 24, 1942.

³¹ Wilbur D. Jones, Jr., *A Sentimental Journey: Memoirs of a Wartime Boomtown* (Shippensburg: White Mane Books, 2005), 151.

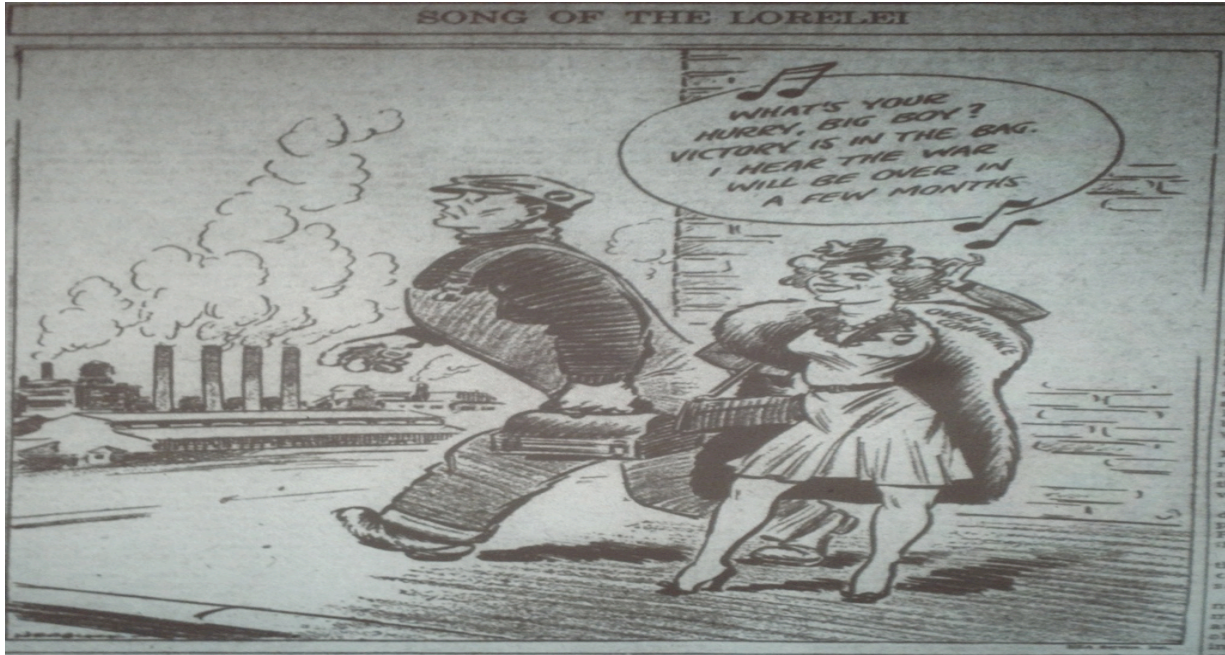


Figure 1.3: Political Cartoon about the Prostitution Problem. “Song of the Lorelei,” *The Wilmington-Star News*, January 10, 1943.

Murders also rose in Wilmington between 1941 and 1945 because of the many tensions caused by the rapid increase in population. Most of the murders depicted in the newspapers were those of African-Americans killing other African-Americans, but the stories were always short and never appeared on the front page. At the end of 1943, Wilmington recorded eighteen murders, an extremely high amount for the 1940s.³² By 1945, Wilmington’s crime rate had reached an unprecedented number and was recognized nationally. In 1946, the FBI reported, “more crimes were committed in Wilmington during the past year, in proportion to population, than in most of the nation’s cities. Wilmington police handled 1,861 cases, representing a rate of 5,310 offenses per 100,000 population.”³³ These statistics of crime from Wilmington are evidence of the conflict that became part of daily life in wartime boomtowns.

³² “Violent Death Total 34 Here: Check of Police Records Shows 18 Murders So Far This Year,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, December 19, 1943.

³³ Jones, *A Sentimental Journey*, 160.

Although wartime life in Wilmington greatly differed from life before, some things remained unchanged. For example, Wilmington continued to be segregated even though African-Americans had more opportunities to work. This was not unique to Wilmington, though, as segregation was still part of American culture. The shipyard attracted many African-Americans workers, but their jobs remained segregated from whites. In addition to working on separate parts of the ship, many African-Americans had to work on completely different ships than whites. Government set up segregated defense housing in Wilmington to meet living shortages. Other segregated forums were buses, restaurants, and entertainment venues. The U.S.O. even had a separate building set up in Wilmington for African-Americans. The strains created by overpopulation in Wilmington affected African-Americans immensely, particularly with transportation. Transportation shortages increased conflict between African-Americans and whites on buses since seats were in short supply. *The Wilmington Star-News* described a fight that almost turned into a riot on a city bus between Alex Pridgen and James Lumpkins. Pridgen, a white man, claimed to have asked Lumpkins, an African-American to move further back in the bus, which escalated into Lumpkins stabbing him with a knife.³⁴ Assaults between whites and African-Americans persisted in Wilmington during the war years because many white men believed that, by working at the shipyard and other industries, African-Americans were trespassing on what had always been a white mans' domain.

The population boom in Wilmington put unprecedented stress on the city, creating housing and transportation shortages. Housing problems during the war led to many social changes in Wilmington, including the development of new wartime housing. Transportation

³⁴ Wilbur D. Jones, Jr., *The Journey Continues: The World War II Home Front* (Shippensburg: White Mane Books, 2005), 115.

problems led to the construction of new parking lots, as well as the creation of buses to transport war workers to the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company.

Housing

In his history of wartime Wilmington, Wilbur Jones tells an apocryphal story that nevertheless illustrates the severity of the housing problem that beset the city. He tells a story about a man, who in 1942, was sitting on a beach in Wilmington enjoying the weather. All of the sudden, he sees another man drowning. Instead of going to help the man in the water, the man on the beach just yells out and asks what his address was. As the man was drowning, he shouted back his address and the man on the beach left. He went to the address and asked the property owner for the room since the tenant would no longer need it. The property owner replied, “the guy who pushed him in already rented it.”³⁵ Housing was in short supply once the United States entered the war in December 1941.

Defense housing projects were Wilmington’s primary method of coping with the ever-expanding population. In 1941, Wilmington established the War Housing Center to work alongside the Wilmington Housing Authority to create housing, particularly for workers from the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company. The federal government paid for the costs of the construction for the new housing units, making Wilmington the first city in the country to have a federally funded trailer park.³⁶ The trailer park, which contained 530 units, was set up near the shipyard for war workers.³⁷ The North Carolina Shipbuilding Company also took part in helping with the housing problem by setting up a Community Housing Committee. In a monthly report

³⁵ Jones, *A Sentimental Journey*, 87.

³⁶ Scott, *The Wilmington Shipyard*, 35.

³⁷ North Carolina Shipbuilding Collection (#62.2g; Five Years of North Carolina Shipbuilding), East Carolina Manuscript Collection.

from April 30, 1941, Arthur Freeman, the Resident Plant Engineer at the shipyard, explained that the committee's goal was to "maintain complete files on all available housing facilities...and to attempt to keep rental and boarding rates at a reasonable level."³⁸ It was imperative to the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company and the government to find workers housing because of the shipyard's vital importance to American defense efforts.

The federal government also funded three housing projects for shipyard workers, located at Greenfield Terrace, Lake Village, and Hillcrest Extension. The first two housed 775 white families and Hillcrest Extension housed 126 African-American families. Rent at Hillcrest Extension was set lower than the other projects because African-Americans' paychecks were significantly lower at the shipyard than that of whites.³⁹ In contrast to Greenfield Terrace and Hillcrest Extension, Lake Village included demountable units, which could be removed after the need disappeared.⁴⁰ Another set of apartments called Maffitt Village, which included 3,762 rooms and was within walking distance to the shipyard, had to be erected in 1942 with the continued increase in employment.⁴¹ The Defense Housing Program completed its four million dollar project on February 15, 1942, taking only eight months.⁴² Although these defense housing projects eased the housing problem, they did not fully solve it. Some shipyard workers chose to find rooms in boardinghouses instead of live in the defense housing units because of the

³⁸ North Carolina Shipbuilding Collection (#62.2a; N.C.S.E. Co. Plant Monthly Report), East Carolina Manuscript Collection.

³⁹"Three Housing Projects for Shipyard Workers," *The Wilmington Star-News*, December 6, 1941.

⁴⁰ "Council Executes 2 Housing Contracts With U.S. Designed To Raise \$40,000," *The Wilmington Star-News*, January 1, 1942.

⁴¹ North Carolina Shipbuilding Collection (#62.2g; Five Years of North Carolina Shipbuilding), East Carolina Manuscript Collection and "180 More Housing Units Completed," *The Wilmington Star News*, January 3, 1943.

⁴²"Large Defense Housing Program Completed Here," *The Wilmington Star-News*, February 15, 1942.

conditions. The style of living was not the most comfortable, as most units were wooden houses with coal stoves for heating and kerosene stoves for cooking. Earl Page recalled his dad summarizing the living style by noting, “that we lost about a house once a week due to kerosene stove explosions.”⁴³ The defense housing projects were mainly for shipyard workers and did not meet the need of housing for enlisted men. Men from nearby bases, such as Camp Lejeune, Fort Fisher, and Camp Davis traveled to Wilmington during leave and needed a place to stay. Their families also attempted to locate themselves in Wilmington while their spouses were in training. Enlisted men and their families turned towards a different type of housing once the defense units ran out.

The Wilmington War Housing Center undertook projects to transform existing buildings in Wilmington into more housing options. An old carriage house, located on Sixth Street between Orange and Dock Streets, was the first to be approved for conversion into four apartments. The government also approved an antique shop for conversion into eight apartments. By early 1943, the government received sixty-one applications for approval to turn residential homes into war housing centers. Under this war housing plan, “owners lease homes or other approved structures to the government for seven years for a figure arrived at by negotiation between the government and the owner.”⁴⁴ Many of these apartments are still used today to house University of North Carolina at Wilmington students.

Citizens’ transforming their homes into boarding houses was another way Wilmington attempted to alleviate the housing dilemma. *The Wilmington Star-News* ran articles that urged individuals to open up their homes. Defense Housing Chair Henry R. Emory, in a 1942 article

⁴³ [Series 4: Earl Page Interview, Interviewed by Wilbur Jones, 1 June 1999] Wilbur D. Jones, Jr. Papers, MS204, William Randall Library Special Collections.

⁴⁴“Carriage House Will be Rebuilt Into Apartments,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, January 10, 1943.

titled “Defense Workers Need Housing: Shipyard Employees Quit Jobs because of Lack of Suitable Housing,” stated, “It is urged that they do so as a patriotic gesture. It is one of the best ways the public...can help the war effort.”⁴⁵ A newspaper headline from February 7, 1943 read “Call for Rooms is Sounded Here: Wilmingtonians Are Asked to Open Homes to Young Couples, Single Girls.”⁴⁶ Fran Vogt, a child in Wilmington during World War II, remembered that, when the housing construction stopped, people began to use every inch of space...in the existing homes.⁴⁷ Elizabeth P. Stanfield, who was in sixth grade when the United States entered the war, remembered public service announcements on the radio in Wilmington saying “if you have an extra bedroom in your house, please allow some soldier or his wife and so forth to rent this room and share your home with you.”⁴⁸

Opening one’s home to strangers raised a number of concerns, however, including safety. Crime during the war was on the rise and many worried that strangers in their homes would steal from them or worse. Allowing a stranger to stay in your home is something that would never have happened in the prewar years because it went against traditional social boundaries. As Wilbur Jones described it, “Rationing, U-boats, air-raid drills, and jam-packed movie theaters-so what. To tolerate such discomforts and fears amounted to little compared to enduring the

⁴⁵“Defense Workers Need Housing: Shipyard Employees Quit Jobs because of Lack of Suitable Housing,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, June 17, 1942.

⁴⁶“Call for Rooms is Sounded Here: Wilmingtonians Are Asked to Open Homes to Young Couples, Single Girls,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, February 7, 1943.

⁴⁷North Carolina Research Subject File (World War II Folder #2: “WWII as seen by a child growing up in Wilmington”), New Hanover County Public Library North Carolina Collection, New Hanover County Public Library, Wilmington, North Carolina.

⁴⁸Elizabeth P. Stanfield, Interviewed by Sherman Hayes, 22 April 2004, World War II: Through the Eyes of the Cape Fear Collection Number 083, transcript, University of North Carolina at Wilmington Digital Collection, University of North Carolina at Wilmington, Wilmington, NC.

invasion of one's home and being 'put out.'"⁴⁹ The initial uneasiness felt by Wilmingtonians about opening up their homes seemed to disappear as the war progressed because they realized it was their patriotic duty.⁵⁰

"Want ads" were also placed in the *Wilmington Star-News* by enlisted men and workers looking for housing. One example stated, "Homely non-drinking family desire to rent near bus line; references," while another read, "Gentleman desires room and board. Close in. Preferably with private family. Require packed lunch."⁵¹ Some ads specified a certain location: "Room for man. Convenient to the shipyard."⁵² Such "want ads" continued to appear in Sunday's newspaper throughout the war, revealing that the housing problem could never fully be solved. In an interview in 1992, 82 year-old Elizabeth Tate described this situation, stating, "everybody that had a spare room took in somebody to live. Sometimes the beds never got cold because the men who worked in shifts slept in shifts."⁵³ Some families even turned their homes into boarding houses for enlisted men and war workers. A survey carried out by the Wilmington Recreation Division of the OCWS estimated that between 6,000 and 7,500 people lived in boarding houses during the war. The majority of the men that stayed in the boarding houses were service members, estimated to be between 20,000 and 25,000, who visited Wilmington on the weekends.⁵⁴

An example of a boarding house in Wilmington was the "Chateau Bethell," so called by the enlisted men that stayed there. According to Mary Eloise Bethell, her parents, Mary and

⁴⁹ Jones, *A Sentimental Journey*, 88.

⁵⁰ "Want Ads," *The Wilmington Star-News*, October 31, 1942.

⁵¹ "Want Ads," *The Wilmington Star-News*, January 4, 1942.

⁵² "Want Ads," *The Wilmington Star-News*, June 20, 1942.

⁵³ "War Made Wilmington a Boom Town," *The Wilmington Star-News*, December 2, 1991.

⁵⁴ North Carolina Shipbuilding Collection (#62.4b; Basic Survey: Recreation Division), East Carolina Manuscript Collection.

William Bethell, turned three of the four bedrooms in their home into rooms for soldiers from Camp Davis.⁵⁵ Many of the enlisted men wrote letters back to the Bethell family expressing their gratitude for opening up their home and telling them stories from overseas. Hannah Block, to whom the U.S.O. building on 2nd and Orange Street is dedicated, described that “on any given weekend, I did not know who was sleeping on my floor.” This put stress on local homemakers who were already having trouble feeding themselves because of rationing. Some enlisted men, as Hannah Block explained, would pay her with bacon and other commodities rationed to help lessen the burden.⁵⁶ Although this form of wartime housing brought stress to many citizens, particularly local homemakers, the stress was merely temporary, as the strains disappeared with the end of the war.

The U.S.O.’s buildings throughout Wilmington attempted to alleviate the housing problem as well by opening their doors to servicemen. The U.S.O. not only provided housing, but also provided food and entertainment to keep soldiers busy and keep up their morale while on leave. According to the 1943 Recreation Division basic survey, the U.S.O. clubs provided rooms for fifty women, sixty-six men, and sixty African-Americans on the weekends. The Young Men’s Christian Association (Y.M.C.A) also provided rooms for servicemen, averaging fifty people, the majority women, on weekends.⁵⁷ This was important for women because it was difficult for them to find housing elsewhere. A *Wilmington Star-News* article from February 7, 1943 urged citizens to open their doors to single girls and young couples, “It is learned that

⁵⁵ North Carolina Research Subject File (World War II Folder #2: “A Picture of the Wilmington Home Front During World War II”), New Hanover County Public Library North Carolina Collection.

⁵⁶ World War II Wartime Wilmington Series (WWII Subject File: “Training camps turned a sleepy town into a bustling city”), New Hanover Country Public Library North Carolina Collection.

⁵⁷ North Carolina Shipbuilding Collection (#62.4: Basic Survey: Recreation Division, OCWS; Wilmington, NC: Sept 20, 1943), East Carolina Manuscript Collection.

people with rooms are ready to rent to single men, but loath to house couples and girls...because they may prove undesirable.”⁵⁸ This could have been because homemakers worried single women would bring home random men or homemakers saw opening up their homes to soldiers as their patriotic duty. Families were more likely to open up their home to a man defending their country. This sentiment appeared in the ‘want ads’ as well. ‘For Rent’ ads read, “NICELY FURNISHED BEDROOM twin beds. Private shower bath. Gentlemen only” and “ROOMS FOR RENT: SEMI-HOTEL accommodations for men.”⁵⁹ In *Journey through Chaos*, a wartime diary describing the author’s time in Wilmington, Agnes Meyers recalled that army wives demanded to be taken care of by somebody in Wilmington. The Army billeting officers and the Travelers’ Aid worked hard to find living arrangements for these women in Wilmington that did not involve staying in another family’s home.⁶⁰

The church was the last major community center that provided housing for servicemen and war workers. Protestant churches were the most common churches in the area, and they often allowed soldiers to sleep on their floors. One such church that allowed soldiers to sleep on the weekends was the St. Andrews-Covenant Presbyterian Church. St. Andrews kept careful, accurate records of people it served. At the end of 1942, St. Andrews averaged twenty-two men each Saturday, the majority coming from Camp Davis; by mid-1943, it was accommodating up to seventy men. This demonstrates the continuous rise in population as the war progressed. In all, between December 12, 1942 and May 22, 1943, St. Andrews “furnished sleeping

⁵⁸“Call for Rooms Is Sounded Here,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, February 7, 1943.

⁵⁹“Want Ads,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, September 5, 1943.

⁶⁰ North Carolina Shipbuilding Collection (#62.4j: *Journey Through Chaos*), East Carolina Manuscript Collection.

accommodations for 1,053 men of all branches of the service.”⁶¹ Although this helped to lessen the housing problem, the majority of churches and community centers that allowed soldiers to sleep there only did so on Saturdays. Although downtown Wilmington was the most crowded on the weekends when soldiers went on leave, the Recreation Division estimated in 1943 that anywhere from 5,000 to 10,000 soldiers traveled from Camp Lejeune and Camp Davis to Wilmington during the week.⁶² Boarding homes, community centers, and churches put forth an excellent effort to lessen the housing problem, but the demand could never fully be met.

Transportation

Transportation also became a major problem in Wilmington with the rapid increase in population. During the war, downtown Wilmington became congested with people and cars, leading to traffic jams. Margaret Rogers, who was a little girl in Wilmington at the time, remembered that all the people walking around and all the convoys coming through the city caused major traffic jams.⁶³ Convoys traveled through the narrow, one-way streets of Wilmington on a daily basis going between the different military bases. High employment at the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company also created transportation problems. According to a transportation survey, in June of 1943, “56 percent of the workers, or 11,852 people, resided within the Wilmington city limits... 16 percent lived more than twenty-five miles away from the

⁶¹ [Church of the Covenant Roster of Sleeping Accommodations for Service Men 1942-1943] St. Andrews Covenant Presbyterian Church, MS180, William M. Randall Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina Wilmington, Wilmington, NC.

⁶² North Carolina Shipbuilding Collection (#62.4b; Basic Survey: Recreation Division), East Carolina Manuscript Collection.

⁶³ Margaret Rogers, Interviewer unknown, 2 December 1998, World War II: Through the Eyes of the Cape Fear Collection Number 019, transcript, University of North Carolina at Wilmington Digital Collection, University of North Carolina at Wilmington, Wilmington, NC.

yard.”⁶⁴ The North Carolina Shipbuilding Company attempted to ease the problem by creating new roads near the yard and establishing “well laid out parking areas and an open bus terminal.”⁶⁵ This was imperative because, according to a 1943 transportation survey, “some forty cars and eight trucks were used to move 349 workers to and from Whiteville, NC. In total some 4,295 cars were used by yard employees every day commuting to and from work.”⁶⁶ Traffic and parking were not the only problems that shipyard workers faced; they also had to deal with tire and gasoline rationing.

Starting in 1942, this rationing made it difficult for shipyard workers to make it to work. Local bus companies carried many men to work, but could not provide transportation for all workers that lived too far away to walk. The newspaper urged workers to carpool or to make their own bus to take other people to work. Phil Dresser, a worker at the shipyard, remembered sharing rides with neighborhood workers who were on the same shift and that “after nation-wide gas rationing was enforced, the shipyard began operating buses (with plywood bodies) from New Hanover, Brunswick, and Pender counties to help commuters make it to work.”⁶⁷ Many workers became creative in beating the tire and gasoline rationing ban by turning old vans into buses that could carry many workers to the shipyard everyday. Mr. McMahon, in an interview with Ralph Scott, articulated the reason workers ‘gang-rode’, “They could get special rationing if they took so many people in a car, and to a critical job, and they did that.”⁶⁸ The Maritime Commission aided with transportation as well by obtaining eleven trailer buses to transport workers from

⁶⁴ Scott, *The Wilmington Shipyard*, 36.

⁶⁵ North Carolina Shipbuilding Collection (#62.2g: Five Years of North Carolina Shipbuilding), East Carolina Manuscript Collection.

⁶⁶ Scott, *The Wilmington Shipyard*, 36.

⁶⁷ [Phil Dresser, Interviewed by Wilbur Jones, 23 July 1999] Wilbur D. Jones, Jr. Papers, MS204, William Randall Library Special Collections.

⁶⁸ North Carolina Shipbuilding Collection (#62.5c; Interview with Mr. McMahon), East Carolina Manuscript Collection.

Carolina Beach, Southport, Little River, Whiteville, Acme, Atkinson, and Warsaw, North Carolina. These buses were able to seat sixty people and could only be used by the shipyard workers and their families.⁶⁹ Figure 1.4 is a picture from the *Wilmington Star-News* that depicts one of the large buses used by the shipbuilding company.



Figure 1.4: Example of a bus operating for the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company. “Now in Operation,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, December 13, 1942.

The Atlantic Coastline Railroad, which was a U.S. Class I railroad that served the Southeast, also provided transportation for war workers and enlisted men. The railroad, which was also a business that contributed to Wilmington being named the “Defense Capital” of the State, was the chief employer in Wilmington before the introduction of the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company. According to Wilbur Jones, “The Atlantic Coastline Railroad was the principal means of transportation for military and civilian personnel, cargo, and war materials entering and departing Wilmington.” The line became a popular form of transportation during

⁶⁹ Scott, *The Wilmington Shipyard*, 36.

the war because of gasoline and tire rationing; in 1944, it carried about nine million military and civilian passengers, which was a major jump from that of two million in 1940.⁷⁰ Although the Atlantic Coastline Railroad helped to ease the transportation problems in Wilmington, it did not benefit the workers that already lived in Wilmington.

Delivery trucks were another form of transportation affected by the population increase and rationing. Tire and gasoline rationing, as well as traffic, made it difficult for delivery trucks to maneuver through Wilmington. Before World War II, it was common for people to have their milk delivered to their homes, as well as have delivery trucks bring items they bought from department stores. The *Wilmington Star-News* urged, “persons should endeavor to carry home their purchases instead of asking to have them delivered.”⁷¹ Although Wilmington had to make changes to meet the transportation problem, it presented those changes as helping the city to grow in size. Throughout the war, *The Sunday Star-News* featured an article titled the “New Wilmington” that sought to present Wilmington’s problems in a positive way. It featured transportation in one of these articles, which stated, “Our transportation has helped our City Grow Great. Our Transportation Will Be Managed So Our City Will Continue Great...On With Wilmington.”⁷² Answers to the transportation problems during the war did help Wilmington to grow, although Wilmington continued to have problems with traffic and congestion until the war ended.

⁷⁰ Jones, *A Sentimental Journey*, 64.

⁷¹ “Tire Rationing Affects Trucks,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, January 11, 1942.

⁷² “Transportation,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, January 11, 1942.

Conclusion

War is hell, it is said, and though they did not undergo enemy fire, the good people of Wilmington did endure significant social conflict. The raging boomtown lost its men to the armed forces and those left behind had to learn to navigate the new environment of change and shortage without a map. Women, in particular, experienced many changes, including the opportunity to work outside the home in jobs previously held by men. The next chapter explores these new opportunities, with an emphasis on the various ways institutions used articles and advertisements to remind women that their work was temporary.

CHAPTER THREE

“CLAD IN COVERALLS”

In 1948, President Harry S. Truman addressed a Women’s Bureau conference marking the 100th anniversary of the first American women’s rights convention at Seneca Falls, New York. Organizers titled the conference “The American Woman, Her Changing Role: Worker, Homemaker, Citizen,” but President Truman insisted on reversing the order of those roles in his remarks, placing “homemaker” first.¹ Truman’s reversal is noteworthy, for it suggests the way postwar authorities perceived gender. World War II upset traditional gender norms, as millions of American women entered the paid workforce for the first time. As historian Maureen Honey points out, “the fact that a woman could step into a man’s shoes and wear them comfortably posed an implicit challenge to traditional notions about femininity and female limitations.”² In fact, Rosie the Riveter posed such a strong challenge to custom as to provoke efforts to uphold traditional gender norms, creating a tension reflected in wartime advertisements and newspaper columns. These advertisements indicate what advertisers, government officials, and corporate executives, the vast majority of whom were men, wanted women to think about their role in society, which was that their war work was only temporary. Although many advertisements urged women to emulate “Rosie the Riveter,” an iconic figure that represented American women who worked in factories during the war, they still sought to preserve femininity, as then conventionally defined. As Truman indicated in 1948, “homemaker” came first in his mind, followed by “worker.”

¹ Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 164.

² Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 1.

Two images of Rosie the Riveter have received the most attention since World War II. Artist J. Howard Miller created the first poster of Rosie, depicted in figure 2.1, in 1942 for the Westinghouse Power Company, with the famous slogan “We can Do it!” Famous artist Norman Rockwell painted the second iconic image of Rosie in 1943, which is shown in figure 2.2. Although both of the images present the same cultural icon, they are extremely different and imply different messages about working women in World War II. In the Westinghouse poster, Rosie retains her feminine look; she is wearing makeup and has long eyelashes, manicured nails, curled hair, and tiny arms. In Rockwell’s painting, Rosie appears more manly. She is dressed in overalls, has large arms and holds a riveting tool; her hair is not a main focal point. These images represent the way the Office of War Information and other corporations used advertisements during World War II to manipulate citizens’ thoughts, particularly those of women. In figure 2.1, the focus is on the way Rosie looks, whereas the focus of figure 2.2 is on the war and the work being done in the factories. Today, Miller’s depiction of Rosie stands as a symbol of feminist power, but during the war, it stood to remind women of their true feminine identity.



Figure 2.1: Rosie the Riveter, “We Can Do It!” Sandy Webbere, “Posters Help Win the War at Home,” NCpedia, <http://ncpedia.org/history/20th-Century/wwii-propaganda> (accessed March 1, 2015).



Figure 2.2: Rosie the Riveter, *The Saturday Evening Post*. Mary Kennedy Knight, “Rosie the Riveter,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, <http://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/2013/07/01/art-entertainment/norman-rockwell-art-entertainment/rosie-the-riveter.html> (accessed March 1, 2015).

Historian Susan Hartmann argued that “in the public image, women took war jobs to help make the world a more secure place for their children...thus as women moved into the public sphere, they were reminded that their new positions were temporary, that retaining familial roles continued to take precedence over all others.”³ Focusing on Wilmington, this chapter discusses this meaning in greater detail. Wilmington provides a revealing case study because it was home to the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company, which provided women positions in traditional male jobs. Advertisements, daily newspaper columns, and interviews with Wilmington women prove that, although women felt inspired by their war work, at the end of the war, gender norms

³ Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 23.

remained standing. In order to use Wilmington as a case for this, it is imperative to understand the roles women filled in the workforce during the war.

“Rosie the Riveters” in Wilmington

Background on Women in the National Workforce

On June 25, 1941, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, which barred discrimination in federal defense industry work.⁴ This opened the door for women and other minorities to enter the workforce in unprecedented numbers. By 1943, the United States had been at war for over a year, leading to an increase of men in the armed forces. The demand for war workers toppled the boundaries of gender, creating an even stronger opening for women to take over traditionally male jobs. Women not only accepted female positions, including clerical work, typing, and nursing, but also took jobs considered “unwomanly” at the time. For the first time in American history, women freely took jobs as welders, security guards, cab drivers, ambulance drivers, filter center operators, and plane spotters. The manufacturing sector received the greatest increase of female workers during the war because of the transformation of many American factories to defense work. According to Karen Anderson, women’s share of jobs in the manufacturing sector increased from 22.0 percent to 32.7 percent between 1941 and 1945.⁵

Another unprecedented statistic from World War II was the amount of married women that entered the workforce. Heretofore, childless, single women were normally the women who worked outside the home. This was, in part, because of the popular belief that married women,

⁴ Roger Lotchin, *The Way We Really Were: The Golden State in the Second Great War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 20.

⁵ Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), 6 and 32.

especially those with children, should stay home and take care of their families. The Great Depression cemented this ideology, where “a general consensus hardened around the position that married women should not work outside the home....wives who worked outside the home were viewed as selfish, greedy women who took jobs away from male breadwinners.”⁶ This belief did not disappear, as is depicted in the statement by the War Manpower Commission, which was an agency of the United States government in charge of balancing labor needs during the war: “no women responsible for the care of young children should be encouraged or compelled to seek employment which deprives their children of essential care until all other sources of supply are exhausted.” The demand that the national emergency, however, put on receiving active support from every member of the American community led to more married women entering the workforce. Statistics showed that married women whose husbands were in the armed forces were more likely to enter the workforce than those whose husbands remained home. Between “April 1940 and March 1944, the number of married women gainfully employed increased by two million, 72.2 percent of the total increase.”⁷ This emergence was also brought about by the dramatic decrease in the number of single women in America. The war led to a major increase in marriage rates because of the fear that many men would not make it back home. This was the first time in American history where married women outnumbered single women in the workforce.

This entry of women in the workforce led to the creation of a new public image for women war workers. Rosie the Riveter represented the woman who went into defense work, but also retained her feminine qualities. “Rosie”, as depicted in figure 2.1, first appeared in 1942 on

⁶ Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 16-17.

⁷ Anderson, *Wartime Women*, 4- 5.

a poster for the Westinghouse Power Company. This figure became even more popular in 1943 with the release of the song “Rosie the Riveter” written by Redd Evans and John Jacob Loeb:

All the day long whether rain or shine, she’s a part of the assembly line. She’s making history, working for victory, Rosie the Riveter. Keeps a sharp lookout for sabotage, sitting up there on the fuselage. The little frail can do more than a male can do, Rosie the Riveter.⁸

The first “Rosies” began work on the West coast, particularly in California, where defense industries sprang up at the start of the war. California, commonly referred to as the “arsenal of democracy” during World War II, was home to several major aviation factories and shipyards. California housed the most predominant shipyard in the United States at the time, Kaiser Shipyards, which was where the first “Rosies” began work in manufacturing. Women made up twenty-seven percent of employees at the shipyard, making it a good comparison to Wilmington, where the numbers were similar.

Wilmington Women in the Workforce

“Clad in Coveralls,” Wilmington women took up the national call to fill traditionally male jobs in defense industries. *The Wilmington Star-News* used this phrase to portray that women appeared on the war scene. According to the 1940 U.S. Census, the New Hanover County labor force consisted of 20,287 people, which accounted for 55 percent of the county’s population. In Wilmington, nearly 30 percent of female residents were in the labor force.⁹ These women, particularly single, white women, worked mainly in clerical positions. A statistical summary of the Wilmington area from 1944 showed that, in 1940, “almost 45 percent of all women employed in the county (New Hanover) were in personal services,” and “less than

⁸ “Rosie the Riveter Song,” last modified January 10, 2009; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55NCElsbjeQ>.

⁹ Ralph Scott, *The Wilmington Shipyard: Welding a Fleet for Victory in World War II* (Charleston: The History Press, 2007), 34.

ten percent of all employed women were in manufacturing.” This changed, however, once the United States entered the war and the manufacturing sector expanded drastically.¹⁰ By 1943, employment in manufacturing in Wilmington jumped significantly from 2,412 to 23,000 people.¹¹ The opening of the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company as a major employer in 1941 was the main reason for this increase. Female workers flooded the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company, as well as other manufacturing sectors in Wilmington, including Camp Davis. According to the 1943 basic survey of the recreation division in Wilmington, most of the women employed as industrial war workers were married and were the wives of soldiers or male industrial workers. The survey also indicated that few single women worked in the industrial section.¹² This fits the national pattern of married women, particularly those whose husbands were overseas, entering the workforce in unprecedented numbers during World War II.

The Wilmington Star-News ran articles urging women to take defense jobs. Mrs. Eddie Rickenbacker (her first name was not mentioned in the article), wife of the famous flier from World War I, encouraged Wilmington women to work, stating, “If women fail to cooperate in the war effort by not volunteering for the jobs they can fill, they will bear part of the responsibility for prolonging this war.”¹³ The newspaper also praised Wilmington women for stepping up to fill jobs traditionally held by men throughout the war. A 1942 article, “Women Answer the Call to Work,” quoted Felix Scroggs, manager of the United States Employment Service, stating, “the response of women to accept jobs, many of which were formerly held by

¹⁰ North Carolina Shipbuilding Collection (#62.4j; *A Statistical Summary of the Wilmington Area: New Hanover County, North Carolina*; June 3, 1944), East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

¹¹ Scott, *The Wilmington Shipyard*, 34.

¹² North Carolina Shipbuilding Collection (#62.4b; Basic Survey: Recreation Division, OCWS; Wilmington, NC: Sept 20, 1943), East Carolina Manuscript Collection.

¹³ “City Honors Wife of Famous Flier,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, June 6, 1942.

men, has been most gratifying.” Scrogg explained that women took on manual jobs in areas that included filling stations, meatpacking houses, and spot welding.¹⁴ The newspaper praised women not only for taking the jobs, but also for doing the jobs just as well as men. A 1943 column went into more detail about women workers in Wilmington by describing not only their work at the shipyard, but also their new jobs as bus drivers. The Heavy Tide Water Power Company buses were powered under “the expert guidance of increasing numbers of women drivers.”¹⁵ The emergence of articles, such as the aforementioned, made it clear by mid-1943 to Wilmington citizens, that, regardless of public opinion about women working in paid labor, more women would continue to enter the workforce.

As the war progressed, *The Wilmington Star-News* highlighted the roles of certain women in war jobs to show that Wilmington women met the national call to work. The North Carolina Shipbuilding Company, the Wilmington Information and Filter Center, and Camp Davis employed the majority of these women. One editorial, “Teacher Turns Defense Worker,” described that Eleanor Wood worked at the Sorosis Baby Clinic from nine to twelve every morning and then immediately rushed to the Wilmington Information and Filter Center to work the afternoon shift from twelve to three. Wood began at the Filter Center as a plotter, but eventually worked her way to operations supervisor.¹⁶ Another piece featured a husband and wife pair, showing that it was possible for married women to play a role in defense work. The newspaper praised Mr. and Mrs. Robert B. Conway (the article never mentioned Mrs. Conway’s

¹⁴ [Series 4: *Wilmington Star-News Clippings and Thematic Notes*: “Women Answer the Call to Work,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, November 12, 1942] Wilbur D. Jones, Jr. Papers, MS204, William Randall Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina Wilmington, Wilmington, NC.

¹⁵ [Series 4: *Wilmington Star-News Clippings and Thematic Notes*; “Women Appear on the War Scene,” February 7, 1943] Wilbur D. Jones, Jr. Papers, MS204, William Randall Library Special Collections.

¹⁶ “Teacher Turns Defense Worker,” *The Wilmington-Star News*, June 10, 1942.

first name) for both working on the same job, “the defense of Wilmington and all American cities against enemy air raids.” Mrs. Conway worked as a plotter in the Filter Center, while her husband worked as a pilot. The newspaper wrote that “this husband and wife team illustrate the cooperative system among civilians and all branches of the armed forces developed for defense of the United States.”¹⁷ These articles show that Wilmington women stepped into the role of defense worker during the war and indicate the ways newspapers encouraged women to fill the void in defense industries.

The North Carolina Shipbuilding Company was the main employer of women in the manufacturing sector during the war and therefore provides the best evidence for the number of “Rosies” in Wilmington. At the peak of its employment in 1943, the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company employed 21,000 people, 1,628 of whom were female.¹⁸ That meant nearly eight out of every hundred workers were women. According to *The Wilmington Star News*, the need for employees trumped the traditional boundaries of gender: “At the yards of the NC Shipbuilding Company here, women work along side men on the hulls of 10,000-ton Liberty freighters, handling welder’s torches and other tools. Trained at the NYA resident center, women are entering the shipbuilding company’s employ in a steady stream.”¹⁹ Fifteen different shipyard departments employed women in jobs including welding, woodworking machine operators, tool checkers, messengers, chauffeurs, drill press operators, and metal checkers. The plumbing department, where workers produced the threading needed for pipes, housed the largest group of

¹⁷ [Series 4: *Wilmington Star-News Clippings and Thematic Notes*; “Mr. and Mrs. Robert B. Conway Aiding Country in Defense Work,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, June 20, 1942] Wilbur D. Jones, Jr. Papers, MS204, William Randall Library Special Collections.

¹⁸ North Carolina Shipbuilding Collection (#62.2g; *Five Years of North Carolina Shipbuilding*), East Carolina Manuscript Collection.

¹⁹ [Series 4: *Wilmington Star-News Clippings and Thematic Notes*; “Women on the War Scene,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, February 7, 1943] Wilbur D. Jones, Jr. Papers, MS204, William Randall Library Special Collections.

women at the yard.²⁰ Female workers began as tool checkers at the yard and then moved to welders once they proved they had the necessary skills.

In order to become a welder, the shipyard required women to complete training in welding school. *The North Carolina Shipbuilder*, the newspaper printed each month at the yard, praised the first woman to complete this training, Edith C. Phillips. She completed welding school in two months and began work for the shipyard in December 1942. When the issue came out on June 1, 1945, Phillips was the only woman pipe welder in the yard.²¹ Elizabeth Hughes, who also worked as a welder at the shipyard during the war, excelled in the training course and ended up teaching other women to weld before she had even completed the course. Hughes explained that she told her boss when she took the job, “I can do anything any man in this shipyard can do.” Hughes impressed her employers so much that she was among the last three employees when the yard closed.²²

Wilmington women not only answered the call to work in manufacturing sectors, but many volunteered in other areas of war work. Over 500 women volunteered at the Wilmington Filter Center, allowing the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAACs), who had operated the station, to go relieve men in other defense areas. Women also assisted the local rationing board by registering citizens and handing out war ration books.²³ In addition to these volunteer efforts, women also enlisted in the “Gray Ladies” units. These units worked at the local hospital and Camp Davis cheering up the injured soldiers, sponsoring entertainment, and writing letters for

²⁰ Scott, *The Wilmington Shipyard*, 40.

²¹ [Documents Relating to Historical Events; *The North Carolina Shipbuilder* Newspapers, 1945] Katherine Harriss Byers Collection, MS225, William Randall Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina Wilmington, Wilmington, North Carolina.

²² “At war and at work,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, December 2, 1991.

²³ “Local Women Aid Rationing Board,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, February 4, 1943.

the patients.²⁴ Women's volunteer efforts in World War II are often overlooked because of the emphasis placed on women working in defense industries, but they are also an important part of the home front story.

Rosie the Riveter: A Temporary Phenomenon

As previously indicated, many women answered the call to work in defense industries in Wilmington, particularly at the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company. The *Wilmington Star-News* ran numerous articles praising women for working in these defense jobs. A closer look at many of the columns reveals the way they were used to make women feel they had a stronger role in society, while simultaneously upholding traditional gender norms. For example, a 1943 advertisement for the Tide Water Power Company in *The Wilmington Star-News*, stated:

She is making even greater sacrifices; doing her part in the war effort; taking a man's place in a defense industry has become a natural occurrence to her. Yet she is able to keep home the place it always was: the place where we can relax and forget our troubles; the cookie jar is still full; the pantry never without goodies.²⁵

This advertisement praised women working in defense industries, but made sure to end the paragraph by reminding women of their important role at home. The wording also reveals a method used to make sure women knew their work was temporary. Instead of saying that women entered the workforce in defense industries, many advertisements emphasized that women took the man's place. This implied that these were not women's jobs and that their war work would be brief.

²⁴ [Series 4: *Wilmington Star-News Clippings and Thematic Notes*; "Gray Ladies' Unit is Planned Here: Mrs. Avery Heads Group to Serve Among Hospitalized Soldiers," *The Wilmington Star-News*, June 27, 1943] Wilbur D. Jones, Jr. Papers, MS204, William Randall Library Special Collections.

²⁵ [*Wilmington Star-News Clippings and Thematic Notes*; *The Wilmington Star-News*, May 9, 1943] Wilbur D. Jones, Jr. Papers, MS204, William Randall Library Special Collections.

Instead of portraying women as strong individuals pursuing careers, many articles depicted women as taking on a motherly role for the country. This reminded women of their jobs as homemakers and helped to uphold traditional gender roles during the war. Instead of giving women a strong sense of personal achievement, “her apotheosis as a soldier-oriented, self-sacrificing martyr...reinforced notions about woman’s traditional family role as supporter of the husband, without personal ambition or drive to make a lasting mark on the world.”²⁶ Columns and images put emphasis on women doing their patriotic duty for their country. One column praised eight women for taking war jobs in the ordinance shop at Camp Davis: these women “laid aside their aprons and notebooks and took up arms for the love of America.”²⁷ Another column referred to women working at the Filter Center: “The safety of all southeastern North Carolina, in an attack emergency, must depend chiefly upon the efficient service of the Wilmington Filter Center.”²⁸ Articles such as these made women believe the fate of the United States was in their hands and their chief concern should be protecting the home and their men overseas. Wilmington citizen Elizabeth Jones Garniss explained that she took a job at the shipyard because she thought she needed to do what she could on the home front. She felt that “in some small way I (she) was helping Wilmington’s war effort.”²⁹ Garniss’s thoughts about her work divulge that she did not believe her new job was a big step for her as a woman, but that she took it as a means of helping the war effort.

²⁶ Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter*, 6.

²⁷ “Women Help War Effort in Davis Ordinance Shop,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, November 8, 1942.

²⁸ [Series 4: *Wilmington Star-News Clippings and Thematic Notes*; “The Filter Center Calls,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, May 11, 1943] Wilbur D. Jones, Jr. Papers, MS204, William Randall Library Special Collections.

²⁹ [Series 4: *Wilmington Star-News Clippings and Thematic Notes*; WWII Memoir of Elizabeth Jones Garniss, February 2, 1999] Wilbur D. Jones, Jr. Papers, MS204, William Randall Library Special Collections.

Even in 1944, with the war coming to a close, articles stressed that “the war is not yet won, and, most important, that the length- and even the outcome- depended largely upon the women of America.”³⁰ This is exactly the same motherly role women held in the home. This emphasis on women as caregivers depicted what society wanted women to think of their wartime role, which was that working outside the home was for the sole purpose of protecting the country, not for advancing the woman’s role in society. Women did their “bit for defense” and that was it.³¹ This was a primary reason gender roles remained standing at the end of the war.

The Boom-Town Girl

Portraying women in a caregiver role in the workforce was not the only way the Office of War Information and corporations attempted to uphold traditional gender roles. They also did so by glamorizing women’s war work, portraying workers as “boom-town” girls. In 1943, the *Women’s Home Companion* took four women war workers to Hollywood as a campaign to show that women workers could also be beautiful. According to historian Leila Rupp, “the resulting article proclaimed proudly that American women were learning not only how to put together tanks, read blueprints, weld, and rivet, but also how to look smart in overalls, and be glamorous after work.”³² Many advertisements and articles written for and about women in World War II focused less on what women did in the workforce, and more on their appearance. Women in overalls, large boots, and bandanas went against the traditional way women dressed in public at the time and presented a challenge to conventional gender roles. Constantly reminding women

³⁰ [Series 4: *Wilmington Star-News Clippings and Thematic Notes*; “Women in War,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, April 9, 1944] Wilbur D. Jones, Jr. Papers, MS204, William Randall Library Special Collections.

³¹ “The Ears of Safety,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, December 14, 1941.

³² Leila J. Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 147-150.

of their appearance and teaching them to look glamorous while at work was a way to preserve the feminine identity.

This was apparent in two *Wilmington-Star News* columns from the war: one titled “Glorify Yourself,” and one written by Ruth Millett, a national syndicated newspaper columnist from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. The “Glorify Yourself” columns focused on keeping women war workers glamorous while at their dirty jobs. These columns disclose that many women wanted to make sure they did not lose their femininity while at work, an aspect of women war workers that is often not discussed. This was an indication that “the feminist dream of equal opportunity, personified by Rosie the Riveter was so remote from the concerns of the typical woman as to have little relevance.”³³ Ruth Millett’s column conveyed this same notion and reminded Wilmington women that they should be more concerned with their home than war work. These columns are another reason traditional gender roles survived the war and remained standing in Wilmington at its conclusion.

The “Glorify Yourself” column, which ran daily in the Society section provided beauty advice for women, particularly women war workers. The war work that women did in the plant did not concern author Alice Hart. Instead, she focused her attention on helping women look beautiful while on the job. Her column proved helpful to women at the time because rationing made it hard for them to buy certain beauty products and clothing that were normally available. It was a way for women war workers to cope with their new role in society and make them feel more empowered by retaining their feminine qualities at work. In doing this, these columns simultaneously reminded women of their traditional gender roles.

³³ Everard H. Smith, *Victory on the Home Front: The USO in New Hanover County, North Carolina, 1941-1946* (Wilmington: The Author, 1999), 24-25.

In the popular image of Rosie the Riveter, she is shown with manicured fingernails, make-up, and a carefully styled hairdo. Advertisers used this propaganda tool to preserve the feminine identity by making women's war work look glamorous. This technique can also be seen in the "Glorify Yourself" columns, which taught women defense workers how to keep their face, nails, and hair looking good. One column emphasized the importance of covering broken and injured nails while at work, something that seemed of little importance at a time when the world was at war. The article taught women the way to apply artificial fingernails to keep their hands looking nice at work.³⁴ In another column, Hart described what women on the assembly line and men in war work thought about their hands: "The girls want their hands to be pretty, and the men find that well-groomed hands are more efficient."³⁵ Instead of saying that women wanted their hands to be well-kept in order to speed production, Hart only wrote that women wanted them to be pretty. This implied that the male was most concerned with the actual work they were doing, whereas the female war worker was most concerned with her appearance. These columns did not necessarily articulate what women thought about themselves in war work, but portrayed the popular image society expected women to fit. Society expected women to work hard, but be as "pretty" as Rosie the Riveter. Images and columns about women's war work failed to represent what women actually did in war plants and did not present them as strong individuals taking a larger role in society. This was a method of preserving feminine qualities because what women were doing in war factories was not as glamorous as portrayed. By focusing more on beauty, these columns reinforced traditional notions of gender.

³⁴ "Glorify Yourself," *The Wilmington Star-News*, February 9, 1943.

³⁵ "Glorify Yourself: Hand Beauty Hints From Working Girls," *The Wilmington Star-News*, March 4, 1943.

Another “Glorify Yourself” piece explained the ways women war workers could take care of “beauty hazards” on the job. Hart used a woman who built tires as an example: “She’s building tires...Here is a typical man’s job of the traditional kind- dirty, heavy. Yet she keeps fit and pretty by means of quick tricks at work and restorative home care.” The column goes on to explain that “before starting her eight-hour shift, the rubber girl covers her face...with vanishing cream...and uses a creamy lipstick. These protect as well as beautify.”³⁶ The focus of this article is not a strong woman who worked hard manufacturing tires, but instead a woman that mastered holding onto her femininity at work. Articles such as these implied that women did not care about the new role these jobs gave them in society, but were more focused on looking good at work.

Millett’s column also focused on the way women had conquered looking glamorous while at work. In one column, Millett argued that “it has taken women to show men that one can do hard dirty work and still not look the part.” According to Millett, “Their craving to retain their feminine good looks even while doing the work of men is so important to them that several war plants have installed well-equipped beauty salons for its women workers.” This emphasis on beauty at work constantly referenced traditional gender roles and continued to put women in a different, if not lower, category than men. In the same article, Millett stated, “The women’s determination not to look like factory workers may have some effect on the men who worked beside them.”³⁷ This portrayal of women at work did not make them stand out as strong workers, but as a distraction to the men. The woman war worker in this depiction appeared more

³⁶ “Glorify Yourself: Take Notes from Woman Tire Builder Who Controls Beauty Hazards on Job,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, March 2, 1943.

³⁷ “Women War Workers May Change Factory Styles,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, January 1, 1943.

as a beautiful woman concerned with preserving her femininity, than a woman concerned with creating a stronger position for herself in society.

Millett also highlighted what other women at the time thought of women war workers. The column featured an image, displayed in figure 2.3, of women working on airplanes in a war plant with the title “It’s too bad the overalled women couldn’t speak for themselves but...they were still at their machines.” Millett explained other women’s opinions in stating, “They all agreed that it was a disgusting sight, the way the women defense workers ran around the streets in their work clothes...I think it’s all right for them to wear overalls or slacks to work in- but why can’t they wear dresses to and from the factory.”³⁸ This depiction indicated that views of traditional gender roles did not change even though more women took on traditionally male jobs. Instead of praising women for stepping outside of their comfort zone to work in factories, society focused more on the way women looked and presented themselves in public. This was also evident in the “blueprint for a dream girl, 1942 model” put together by the *Ladies’ Home Journal*. After asking soldiers, sailors, and marines what their ideal woman was like, the consensus focused on a woman devoted to children and the home, fond of dancing, who had the ability to cook good meals. Most of the men also preferred their woman to stay home and not work.³⁹ This ideal woman envisioned by American men during the war indicated that the “beautiful welder” was a temporary phenomenon.

³⁸ “It’s too bad the overalled women couldn’t speak for themselves but...they were still at their machines,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, April 20, 1943.

³⁹ Rupp, *Mobilizing Women*, 151-152.

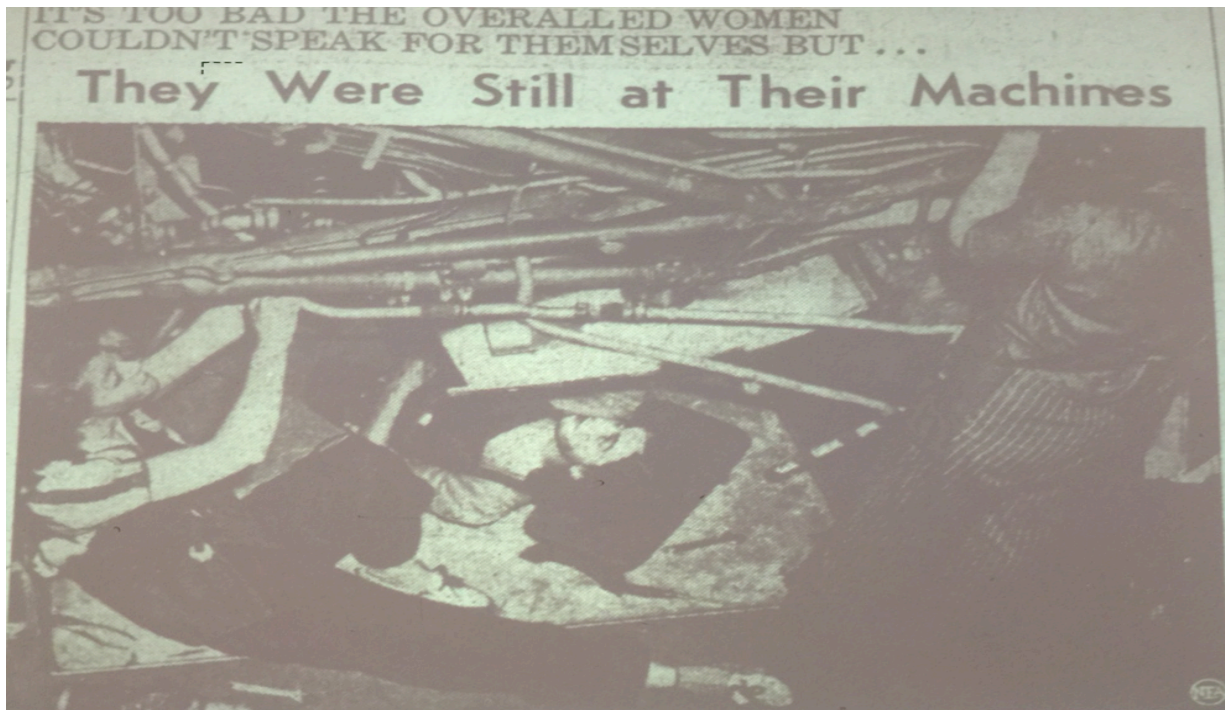


Figure 2.3: Women War Workers. “It’s Too Bad the Overalled Women Couldn’t Speak for themselves but....They were Still at Their Machines,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, April 20, 1943.

The Wilmington Star-News was not the only newspaper in Wilmington that reminded women of the feminine identities. *The North Carolina Shipbuilder*, the monthly newspaper printed by the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company, ran articles and images that glamorized women war workers. Even defense industries, such as the shipyard, fought to preserve traditional gender roles. The front page of the May 1945 issue of *The North Carolina Shipbuilder* portrayed the “May Queens.”⁴⁰ These women were all workers employed in various departments of the shipyard. The newspaper praised the women for taking positions at the yard, while simultaneously depicting women as objects of femininity. *The Shipbuilder* also ran a “Strictly for Girls” section that updated the shipyard on which women were engaged, getting

⁴⁰ [Documents Relating to Historical Events: *The North Carolina Shipbuilder* Newspapers, 1945] Katherine Harriss Byers Collection, MS255, William Randall Library Special Collections.

married, or received flowers from their husbands. Within these columns, “the real Rosie the Riveter found little affirmation of her ability to do a man’s work...nor did she see much indication that the war was a historic opportunity for escaping the female job ghetto.”⁴¹ Women war workers were not constantly reminded that they had the ability to do men’s jobs, but were instead reminded that they should be focused with “typical” female concerns of marriage and the home. This persistent emphasis on customary female tasks during the war led to the return to traditional gender norms following the war.

Millett also continually reminded women that it was wonderful they were taking part in defense, but they should not forget that their role was in the home. In one column, Millett described a mother who put her younger children in a nursery school while she took a war job because she believed they would be better off that way. Millett argued against this statement, “Let’s not kid ourselves...They aren’t going to be better off with a mother who must put her jobs before their wants and their needs...She will be helping Uncle Sam. But it is doubtful whether she wouldn’t be helping him more...by staying home and taking care of them.” She articulated that taking care of children and the home was the woman’s first job and that “if we women mess up the lives of a whole generation of children-just because we couldn’t resist a pay check or the urge to be ‘heroines’- we aren’t very bright.”⁴² This emphasis on conventional gender roles stressed to women that their real place was the home. This article is an excellent example of the way, coupled with propaganda images, women were shown that their war work was temporary. The war may have provided women more opportunities, but the belief that women’s role was in the home, could not be broken.

⁴¹ Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter*, 8.

⁴² “Mother’s First Duty is Her Child’s Care,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, April 6, 1943.

Conclusion

According to historian Leila Rupp, “the War Manpower Commission and the Office of War Information envisioned the woman worker as ‘the girl behind the man behind the gun’ rather than the soldier of the home front.”⁴³ Wartime propaganda and newspaper articles about women war workers reveal the ways in which society wanted women to view their work, which was that it was temporary. Portrayal of women war workers as glamorous and as caregivers made it difficult for women to be ambitious about their new roles in society. Women felt a new sense of responsibility, but were reminded of the importance of preserving their femininity. This helped to cement traditional gender norms at the end of the war. This side of “Rosie the Riveter” is an important part of the home front story that deserves more attention. Another area often overlooked is the work women did in the home to help the war effort. As the next chapter discusses, the idea of the “Kitchen Soldier” adds more weight to the argument that, despite the many changes women experienced during the war, gender norms remained standing in 1945.

⁴³ Rupp, *Mobilizing Women*, 166.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE KITCHEN SOLDIER

When Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, “American women left the kitchen and never returned,” or so claimed the keynote speaker at a 1995 conference marking the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II.¹ Millions of women did in fact join the workforce during the war, forever turning Rosie the Riveter into an icon of female emancipation. Despite her legend, however, the wartime woman did not leave her domestic duties behind. As other historians have shown, the wartime emergency challenged but also reinforced traditional gender roles.² One can see that tension at work in American government propaganda, which encouraged the wartime woman to emulate Rosie the Riveter even as it urged her to serve as a “wartime homemaker” or a “kitchen soldier,” labels that validated those who successfully adapted to the shortages caused by nationwide rationing in order to “fight” hunger and malnutrition.³ The health of the nation depended on the kitchen soldier, making her role extremely important in helping the United States to win World War II. Certainly that was true in Wilmington, where those food shortages fell disproportionately on women, not only because many men were away serving in the armed forces, but also because women still customarily served as homemakers and household consumers. As pointed out by historian Susan Hartmann, “In the Depression decade, those wives who worked outside the home were viewed as selfish, greedy women who took jobs away

¹ Joanne Lamb Hayes, *Grandma's Wartime Kitchen: World War II and the Way we Cooked* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), x.

² Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981) and Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers), 1982.

³ Amy Bentley, *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 31.

from male breadwinners.”⁴ Understanding the important role the kitchen soldier played in the war provides a more three-dimensional portrait of wartime women. This chapter examines not only the way the city’s women coped with such shortages and the way wartime conditions altered household practices, but also the important role the kitchen soldier played in helping the United States win the war.

Food Rationing in Wilmington

Rationing made a strong impression on those Americans who experienced it. In fact, an Office of Price Administration (OPA) report found that, except for the draft, rationing “probably had a greater impact on civilian consciousness than any other measure during the war.”⁵ The government realized that rationing, or some kind of price control, on certain foods was necessary the day after Pearl Harbor, when Americans rushed to the grocery stores to buy sugar, sending prices up. Nationwide rationing began in January of 1942 with the rationing of tires. Sugar was the first food item to be rationed in May 1942, followed by coffee, processed foods, meats, fats, canned fish, cheese, and canned milk. Rationing of most of these items ended in 1945, except coffee, which ended in 1943. The OPA first rationed sugar because of the loss of cane fields in the Philippines, as well as the transition of cargo ships to carrying wartime materials. Although imported, the main reason the OPA rationed coffee early was because Americans began hoarding; they feared it would become scarce, as it had in World War I. The OPA also rationed butter because butter factories needed to be converted to produce weapons for the war effort. The government ran an advertisement with the slogan “guns or butter” that urged citizens to

⁴ Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 17.

⁵ North Carolina Shipbuilding Collection (#62.3h; Rationing in World War II), East Carolina Shipbuilding Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, Easter Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

cook with something else. Meat rationing, which had the strongest effect on Southern food culture, began in early 1943 and made some Americans take a second look at the black market.⁶

The OPA administered rationing at the national level in Washington, D.C., where it formulated rationing policies. Offices known as War Price and Rationing Boards carried out OPA policies at the local level and linked the OPA with consumers. The OPA developed different methods of rationing based on the commodity. Stamp rationing proved to be the most effective method for food items. Stamp books, more commonly known as war ration books, consisted of stamps to be used for a stated equal quantity of a commodity. The OPA combined another method, point rationing, with stamp rationing which began in 1942. Based on diaries kept by homemakers about the amount they bought of certain items, the OPA created a point system for each commodity rationed, with more scarce items having higher point values. Each stamp in a war ration book constituted a certain point value that corresponded with the amount of a commodity that could be bought.⁷ For example, one ration book consisted of forty-eight blue stamps per month for canned foods and sixty-four red points for meat, cheese, and oil.⁸ This is where meal planning and kitchen creativity came into play for homemakers because once a consumer's stamps ran out for that month, she could no longer purchase these items. As point values changed and more commodities became rationed, the OPA had to distribute a series of war ration books. It tasked local War Price and Rationing Boards, such as the one pictured in figure 3.1, with distributing them. Citizens registered for rationing books by filling out a form, such as the one displayed in figure 3.2, which asked a series of questions based on the amount of the commodity already in the household and the size of the family. These charts helped the OPA

⁶ Hayes, *Grandma's Wartime Kitchen*, 3 -101.

⁷ Bentley, *Eating of Victory*, 16

⁸ "The Patriotic Cook: Rationing called for kitchen creativity," *The Wilmington Star-News*, December 4, 1991.

figure out the amount of food to allocate to Wilmington for its citizens. Adults and children registered for war ration books, making the books a part of daily life in wartime Wilmington and the nation.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
OFFICE OF PRICE ADMINISTRATION

No. 4539497BU

WAR RATION BOOK No. 3

Void if altered

Identification of person to whom issued: PRINT IN FULL

D.P.A. VALID U.S.A. NOT VALID WITHOUT STAMP Address and Sign

D.P.A. VALID U.S.A. NOT VALID WITHOUT STAMP

Wayne A. Jonville
(First name) (Middle name) (Last name)

Street number or rural route _____

City or post office _____ State _____

AGE	SEX	WEIGHT <small>Lbs.</small>	HEIGHT <small> Ft. In.</small>		OCCUPATION

SIGNATURE _____
(Person to whom book is issued. If such person is unable to sign because of age or incapacity, another may sign in his behalf.)

WARNING

This book is the property of the United States Government. It is unlawful to sell it to any other person, or to use it or permit anyone else to use it, except to obtain rationed goods in accordance with regulations of the Office of Price Administration. Any person who finds a lost War Ration Book must return it to the War Price and Rationing Board which issued it. Persons who violate rationing regulations are subject to \$10,000 fine or imprisonment, or both.

LOCAL BOARD ACTION

Issued by _____
(Local board number) (Date)

Street address _____

City _____ State _____

(Signature of issuing officer)

OPA Form No. R-130

Figure 3.1: War Ration Book No. 3. “Belongings Exhibit #143,” World War II: Through the Eyes of the Cape Fear Collection. University of North Carolina at Wilmington Digital Collection. University of North Carolina at Wilmington, Wilmington, NC.

CUT THIS OUT—

**Here's Form You'll File
To Get Ration Book No. 2
—FOR CANNED GOODS AND MEAT**

Form Approved. Budget Bureau No. GS-R156-42

GPA Form No. R-1901

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

OFFICE OF
PRICE ADMINISTRATION

One copy of this Declaration must be filed with the Office of Price Administration by each person applying for War Ration Book Two for the members of a family unit, and by each person who is not a member of a family unit. File at the site designated. Coupons will be deducted for excess supplies of the foods listed below according to the schedule announced by the Office of Price Administration.

CONSUMER DECLARATION
Processed Foods and Coffee

I HEREBY CERTIFY that I am authorized to apply for and receive a War Ration Book Two for each person listed below who is a member of my family unit, or the other person or persons for whom I am acting, whose War Ration Book One I have submitted to the Board;

That the name of each person and number of his or her War Ration Book One are accurately listed below;

That none of these persons is confined or resident in an institution, or is a member of the Armed Forces receiving subsistence in kind or eating in separate messes under an officer's command;

That no other application for War Ration Book Two for these persons has been made;

That the following inventory statements are true and include all indicated foods owned by all persons included in this Declaration:

Coffee

1. Pounds of coffee owned on November 28, 1942, minus 1 pound for each person included in this Declaration whose age as stated on War Ration Book One is 16 years or older.
2. Number of persons included in this Declaration whose age as stated on War Ration Book One is 14 years or older.

Canned Foods

Include all commercially canned fruits (including spiced); canned vegetables; canned fruit and vegetable juices; canned soups, chili sauce, and catsup.

Do not include canned olives; canned meat and fish; pickles, relish; jellies, jams, and preserves; spaghetti; macaroni, and noodles; or home-canned foods.

3. Number of cans, bottles, and jars (8-ounce size or larger) of commercially packed fruits, vegetables, juices and soups, chili sauce and catsup

Figure 3.2: Form required to receive War Ration Book. “Here’s Form You’ll File To Get Ration Book No. 2,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, February 21, 1943.

In April of 1943, *The Wilmington Star-News* ran a political cartoon titled “How Many Horns Has a Dilemma, Anyhow?” As depicted in figure 3.3, the cartoon showed a bull, which represented the food problem, with horns named ‘price control,’ ‘rationing,’ ‘distribution,’ and ‘farm manpower.’ The bull is striking a man representing the food administration. This cartoon illustrated some of the problems Wilmington, and the rest of the country, faced during the war concerning food. Food rationing, as well as the sudden influx in population, affected local restaurants, cafeterias, and families that opened their homes to soldiers.



Figure 3.3: Political Cartoon that describes the Food Problem. “How Many Horns Has a Dilemma, Anyhow?, *The Wilmington Star-News*, April 11, 1943.

A December 1942 article from *The Wilmington Star-News* described that Wilmington had to figure out a way to “dodge actual hunger unless something is done quickly to replenish the dwindling supplies of food.”⁹ Rationing affected all cities in America, but not all had to deal with a dramatic increase in population like Wilmington. In his work, *A Sentimental Journey*, Wilbur Jones noted that “the federal government allocated food and other civilian consumables, rationed or not, on *the basis of the area’s 1941 population*, rather than on its swollen numbers of people arriving to support the war effort.”¹⁰ This created a food crisis for the city since its population jumped from 33,407 in 1941 to well over 55,000 by 1944. With the city only

⁹ “Dwindling Food Supply,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, December 13, 1942.

¹⁰ Wilbur Jones, *A Sentimental Journey: Memoirs of a Wartime Boomtown* (Shippensburg, PA: Maine Books, 2005), 117.

receiving enough food to meet the area's population in 1941, Wilmington struggled to keep locals, war workers, and soldiers fed throughout the war.

Cafeterias and restaurants were two areas greatly affected by food rationing and the rapid growth in population. A 1943 memorandum from the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company highlighted one of the many challenges Wilmington faced because of the lack of food:

The shipyard cafeteria for our employees has had great difficulty in obtaining sufficient ration points to enable it to serve a satisfactory variety of meats. As a matter of fact, for the past two months they have only been able to serve non-rationed meats, such as chicken, turkey, fish, and shrimp.¹¹

Towards the end of the war, the shipyard built another cafeteria to feed its war workers, but it continued to face the problems associated with rationing. In *Journey Through Chaos*, Agnes Meyer described one of her experiences in Wilmington during the war: "Washington thinks it knows something about standing in line for meals, but the ordeal of three days' experience in Wilmington makes Washington look like the land of milk and honey." She also explained that the three main cafeterias and two restaurants had used up all their April ration points by April 19, leaving eleven days before they could obtain more food items. Meyer ended by waiting in line for twenty minutes for her morning coffee and then went without dinner because the food being served was not worth the wait. Wilmington petitioned Washington for more ration points based on the rapid change in population, but Washington did not grant the points.¹²

By 1943, feeding war workers was not Wilmington's only problem as soldiers from Camp Davis and Camp Lejeune flooded Wilmington. Meyer wrote, "In addition to supporting a huge influx of war workers on an inadequate food supply, thousands of soldiers descend upon it

¹¹ North Carolina Shipbuilding Collection (#62.4b: North Carolina Shipbuilding Company Memorandum), East Carolina Manuscript Collection.

¹² North Carolina Shipbuilding Collection (#62.4j: *Journey Through Chaos*), East Carolina Manuscript Collection.

[Wilmington] every weekend like a flock of locusts and eat the town out of house and home.”¹³

As with the housing problem, newspapers urged Wilmington citizens to help with the inadequate food supply. *The Wilmington Star-News* pleaded with locals to eat at home in the name of patriotism: “All that may be done is to accept a bad situation at its low value and perform a patriotic duty by eating at home, not only at lunch time but at dinner time as well, and leave the restaurants for workers who must depend on them.”¹⁴ This put added stress on local homemakers who had to cook more meals and learn to make meals with what they could.

Although Wilmington homemakers struggled with rationing, many still managed to feed not only their families, but also soldiers that were desperate for food. The United Service Organizations (U.S.O.) located in Wilmington had volunteers that prepared meals for service members during the war, but they could not provide enough for every man that needed it. Claude Howell, a worker for the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad during the war, remembered that “families would call the U.S.O. and order as many soldiers as you had food for. Everyone in town did that...I don’t even remember a weekend we didn’t have six or eight people for meals that we’d never seen before.”¹⁵ In addition to running boarding houses and cooking for many soldiers and war workers in their homes, many Wilmington women also cooked lunches for workers. Peggy Longmire, who was twelve when the war ended in 1945, remembered that her mom opened up their five-bedroom home for workers, soldiers, and their families. Longmire recalled that, “In addition to feeding everyone at home, my mother would sometimes prepare hot

¹³ North Carolina Shipbuilding Collection (#62.4j: *Journey Through Chaos*), East Carolina Manuscript Collection.

¹⁴ “Eat At Home,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, April 9, 1943.

¹⁵ World War II Wartime Wilmington Series (World War II Folder #2: “Time to lighten up! Soldiers were offered hospitality and good times”), New Hanover County Public Library North Carolina Collection, New Hanover County Public Library, Wilmington, North Carolina.

lunches and drive out to the sites where my father and his men were working.”¹⁶ This not only shows the challenges Wilmington citizens and soldiers faced, but it also highlights the efforts Wilmingtonians put forth in the name of patriotism.

Wilmington children learned to cope with rationing as well. Wilbur Jones even recalled reaching out to German prisoners for food items that children could no longer get. During the war, Wilmington was home to three different German Prisoner of War camps, including one located within the city limits. Jones remembered that it was impossible to get bubble gum and candy at the ‘mom and pop’ stores because of sugar rationing. In exchange for paper to write letters home, German prisoners would give Wilmington children candy.¹⁷ Local restaurants and families in Wilmington had many difficulties learning to live with wartime rationing. The bulk of food problems Wilmington faced fell disproportionately on women, whose traditional gender roles of finding and preparing food became reinforced during the war.

The Wartime Kitchen Soldier

When discussing the role women played during World War II, many works focus on women entering the work force because wartime work presaged female liberation. This is an imperative part of the home front story, but it undervalues the role that many women continued to play within the household. Historian Karen Anderson points out that “the tendency of historians to focus on Rosie the Riveter has distorted the analysis of the nature of wartime changes...Rosie was not the typical wartime woman.” Women did not completely leave the

¹⁶ [Series 4: Peggy Longmire Interview, Interviewed by Wilbur Jones, 21 October 1998] Wilbur D. Jones, Jr. Papers, MS204, William Randall Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina Wilmington, Wilmington, North Carolina.

¹⁷ World War II Wartime Wilmington Series (World War II Folder #2: Economic History: Wartime Wilmington”), New Hanover County Public Library North Carolina Collection, New Hanover County Public Library, Wilmington, North Carolina.

home to go to work; instead, the war intensified their role as the kitchen soldier. On top of working paid shift work in factories and shipyards, women continued to do unpaid labor, cooking and providing for their families, inside the home. Although this placed strains on social gender norms, most Americans saw “women’s work as a patriotic necessity during the war and as a means of improving the family standard of living afterward.”¹⁸

World War II was a total war: “Women’s lives and their private sphere of home and kitchen became vital, public components of the war, a front ‘equal’ to the actual battlefronts in Asia and Europe.” This becomes clear when one examines wartime advertisements. As Amy Bentley, author of *Eating for Victory*, stated, “while there was much ambivalence over enlarging traditional roles for women, advertisement and government messages regarding women and their duties as food provider remained clear, consistent, and ultimately domesticated.”¹⁹ In short, the powers that be realized that it could not solve the food crisis without giving women a stronger position in society. Advertisements exemplified this: “Men fight the war with bayonets, long hours at defense jobs... Women fight the war with stewpans, knitting needles, alarms clocks that go off at 4 o’clock in the morning, rudely awakened babies, inelastic budgets, and fast-rising prices.”²⁰ Government advertisements and propaganda, while encouraging women to step up, also kept women in their traditional role in the home by adding new challenges to their everyday life.

¹⁸ Anderson, *Wartime Women*, 8-10.

¹⁹ Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 30-32.

²⁰ Anderson, *Wartime Women*, 87.

The Kitchen Soldier's Importance

Women combatted rationing in the kitchen by avoiding black markets, growing victory gardens, canning, and preserving. America relied upon the kitchen soldier to help fight hunger at home, validating the job of the homemaker. This role of women during the war does not, however, receive the attention it should. Historian Karen Anderson concluded that, “despite her various contributions to the war effort and the continuing importance of her traditional responsibilities, the status of the homemaker seemed to decline, at least in a relative sense, during the war years as more attention and honor were conferred on the soldier and the woman employee in war job.”²¹ The role of the kitchen soldier deserves more attention. The homemaker helped win the war on the home front, and without her, the country may have experienced an even larger food crisis.

In addition to learning the ways women coped with the war, it is imperative to understand the reason the government chose to target women for food campaigns, as well as the various methods it employed. In 1940, the United States government set up the Committee on Food Habits (CFH) to determine a strategy for wartime food campaigns. The government knew rationing could lead to unrest amongst Americans, which is the reason it used advertising to help create patriotism for the war. Headed by a female scientist, Margaret Mead, the CFH performed an advisory role to the War Food Administration. Through its research, the CFH found that “the most effective way to alter Americans’ food habits was to work through women” and that, “in all daily matters of food choices and preparation, women, and particularly mothers and wives, play a or the leading role.” Lewin’s Iowa Food Habits Project (IFPH), an additional study, determined that “since women were responsible for food shopping and meal preparation...they

²¹ Anderson, *Wartime Women*, 90.

were the last channel through which a family's foodstuffs passed before consumption."²² After presenting its finding, the CFH also advised the government on educating the public about proper nutrition. Advice included suggestions on sustaining public morale, as well as the responsibility of following the rationing procedures.

National advertisements regarding food were clear in their focus on women as the wartime kitchen soldiers. Although the government urged women to fill positions in wartime factories, women's "real and most important battlefield was the kitchen. There women could- and should-fight the war and prove their patriotism by cooking and serving the right kinds of foods in the right kinds of ways."²³ These government advertisements used the kitchen to symbolize the role of women as homemakers, which in turn reinforced traditional gender roles. Local columns in *The Wilmington Star-News* echoed government advertisements by connecting kitchen duties to patriotism. Ruth Millett, a columnist that appeared in the Society pages did this in stating, "For even the tough job of running a house-hold in wartime and holding down a full-time job is a snap compared with what our fighting men have to go through."²⁴ National and local advertisements were clear: women's primary role was to remain in the kitchen during the war.

Rationing only intensified women's job as kitchen soldiers. Newspaper articles and advertisements about dealing with rationing became a part of everyday life for homemakers, who were urged to preserve, avoid hoarding, and extend each meal. Articles from *The Wilmington Star-News* revealed the stress that was put on women to stand up to the challenge. They stressed that women at war should "accept philosophically any sacrifices I have to make of commodities

²² Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 24-26.

²³ Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 31.

²⁴ "Glorify Yourself," *The Wilmington Star-News*, March 19, 1942.

the service men need...and spend more time reading informative articles.”²⁵ In another article, “The American Housewife Has Big Opportunity Now,” Raymond Clapper stated, “She (the housewife) can help save the government from the consequences of its lack of foresight by throwing herself fully into the task of mastering the food rationing system and fitting it to her kitchen.”²⁶ Rationing was a completely new concept for women to learn, which made their jobs at home even more stressful and important.

The Wilmington Star-News offered advice for the homemaker, such as budgeting ration points, shopping early in the day to save time, and remaining patient as grocer clerks also had to learn the new process.²⁷ Advertisements depicted charts explaining to women the difference in point values and pricing for each item, as well as the number of points that could be used to purchase certain items. The majority of advertisements used pictures of women shopping or working in the kitchen. These advertisements reveal that the government expected women to take up the challenge and perform their role in the home. Men were not the focus of food advertisements, partly because of deployment, but mainly because females were still seen as homemakers. Women’s role as a housewife became tougher, as *The Wilmington Star-News* suggested: “Thus on the ability of thirty-five million housewives to master the point system and on their cooperation in making it work depends our food security for the time being.”²⁸ American homemakers found themselves under more pressure than ever to fulfill their patriotic duty.

²⁵ “Women at War Should Praise Up This Creed,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, January 18, 1942.

²⁶ “The American Housewife Has Big Opportunity Now,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, March 1, 1943.

²⁷ “Housewives Begin Use of Food Stamps Today,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, March 1, 1943.

²⁸ “The American Housewife Has Big Opportunity Now,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, March 1, 1943.

The Kitchen Soldier's Contributions to the War Effort

The food crisis that accompanied the war fell heavily on women and understanding the ways they coped is an important component of American home front history. Throughout the war, *The Wilmington-Star News* published weekly columns in the Society section titled, “Rationing Round-Up” and “Rationing at A Glance” to aid women in understanding the rationing process and update them on OPA changes. Unlike canning foods, preparing meals, and growing victory gardens, rationing was a completely new concept for women. The “Rationing Round-Up” columns, as pictured in figure 3.4, explained which items the OPA rationed and the rationing method that accompanied certain commodities. They also advised citizens on the dates coupons expired, as well as when they could purchase new ones. More importantly, they included unofficial estimates for the start of rationing on other food items, such as meat in figure 3.4.²⁹ This information aided homemakers in planning meals. The “Rationing at a Glance” articles went into more detail than the “Rationing-Roundup” column by explaining the locations to pick up war ration books, as well as the process of ration banking. Local dealers used these columns because they explained different government regulations on the sale of items, as well as which stamps and coupons to look for each month as they were constantly changing.

²⁹“Rationing Round-Up,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, January 10, 1943.

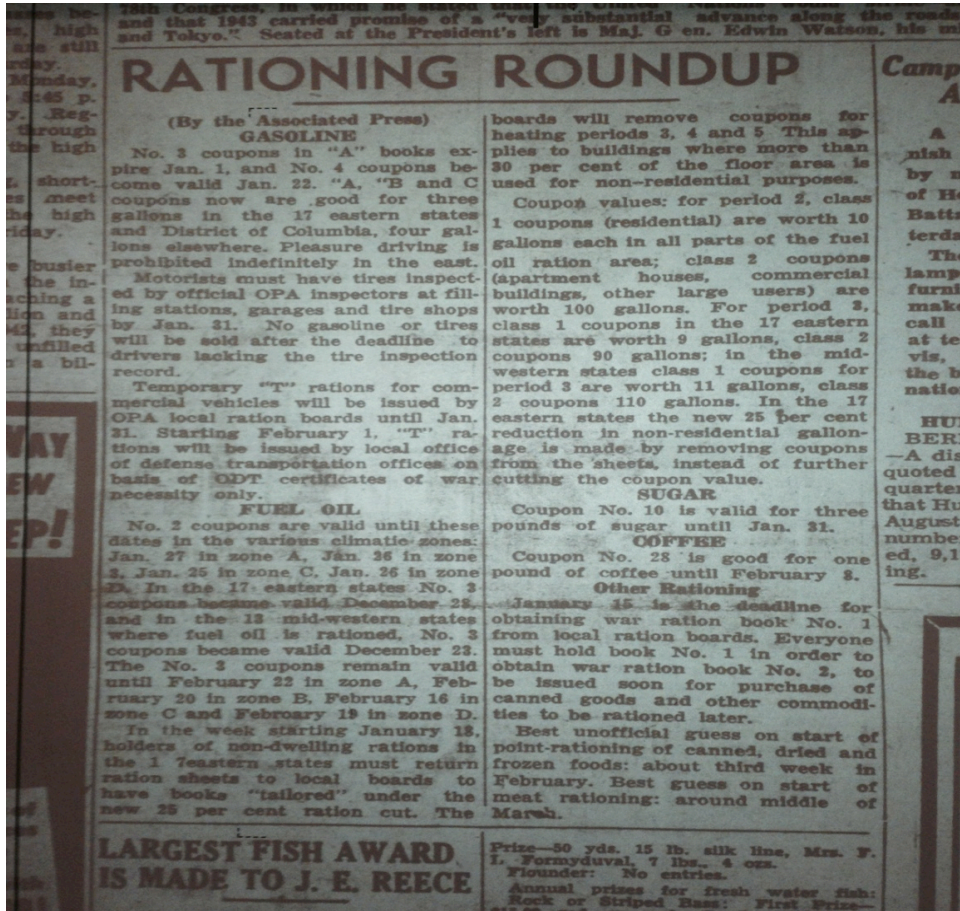


Figure 3.4: Rationing Round-Up Article. "Rationing Round-Up," *The Wilmington Star-News*, March 14, 1943.

In addition to managing rationing, authorities also encouraged women to ignore the black market, grow victory gardens, can foods, and preserve. These demands added stress to women's work, while also validating the stronger position the government allocated to women during the war. Commentators compared hoarding and buying from the black market to treason. An article by Dorothy Thompson in the June 1942 issue of *Ladies' Home Journal* revealed the struggle homemakers faced to fulfill their private and also newly enlarged public roles: "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.”³⁰ This proved difficult because war placed greater strains on women, who had to continue their jobs in the home, as well as take on more public roles, without the help of their male partners. More than ever, the health of the nation depended on the homemaker; this heightened role in society for women was unprecedented. When meat rationing began in 1943, however, American homemakers began to take a second look at the black market. Since meat was a staple of American culture, particularly Southern culture, this rationed item was one many homemakers were willing to be “unpatriotic” to obtain. The government encouraged Wilmington women, as well as women across the nation, to take a home front pledge against buying from the black market and hoarding. This put incredible pressure on American women and added an extra challenge to their already stressful role.

Most Wilmington women interviewed about their wartime life admitted to knowing that illegal black market activity was present in the city, but few confessed to participating in it. Lethia Hankins, a young women in Wilmington during the war, stated “I’m sure there was some (illegal activity), but not within the circles I ran around with.”³¹ Some women did admit to having sympathetic grocers or butchers. For example, Elizabeth Tate, a Wilmington citizen during the war, remembered that, “Mr. Guyton, my butcher, he would look after me. I usually could get something decent with my meat card.”³² Although few women confessed to participating in the black market, there was evidence that a black market, for meat in particular,

³⁰ Bridgett O’Connell Lowery, “The Home Front in the Home: Women’s Domestic Roles in Wilmington, North Carolina, 1941-1945” (Master of Arts Thesis, University of North Carolina at Wilmington, 2003), 50-51.

³¹ Bridgett O’Connell Lowery, “The Home Front in the Home: Women’s Domestic Roles in Wilmington, North Carolina, 1941-1945,” 66.

³² “The Patriotic Cook: Rationing Called for Kitchen Creativity,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, December 4, 1991.

existed in Wilmington. OPA officials in March of 1943 divulged to the public that a black market existed on a large scale for meat and that arrest would begin that year. The OPA found evidence of meat being sold above ceiling price around the city beginning in early 1943.³³ This does not come as a surprise because of the sudden influx of population into Wilmington and the importance of meat to southern culture.

Victory gardens also became a part of everyday life for women during World War II and were also a way women coped with rationing. When the government realized rationing was necessary, it implemented a National Victory Garden Program. Victory gardens became an essential aspect of the American war effort as the war progressed because canned foods had to be sent to feed U.S. troops in other nations. The program quickly took stride and, by 1943, “there were nearly twenty million Victory Gardens in America and they produced a third of all vegetables used.”³⁴ Wilmington began its Victory Garden Campaign in 1943 by sending out letters to women’s clubs and agricultural agencies.³⁵ “War Kitchen” articles, written by Gaynor Maddox, provided advice for Wilmington women on growing victory gardens and kept women up-to-date on booklets and pamphlets. Maddox offered recipes using vegetables grown in victory gardens, such as Hot Greens on Toast and Dandelion Greens with Bacon.³⁶ Women were accustomed to having gardens, which made the Victory Garden Campaign one of the easier parts of wartime life. Elizabeth Hughes, employed as a welder at the shipyard during the war, remembered tending a victory garden while being employed full-time. Her victory garden

³³ “Black Market in Meat Here is Disclosed,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, March 5, 1945.

³⁴ Hayes, *Grandma’s Wartime Kitchen*, 54.

³⁵ “First Victory Garden Plans for ’43 Started,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, January 24, 1943.

³⁶ “War Kitchen,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, April 23, 1943.

consisted of peas, beans, corn, okra, and tomatoes.³⁷ This was particularly stressful for women war workers who had to work shift work and then come home to try and tend their gardens. Through these descriptions of jobs women took on during the war, it is clear that women “had been delegated a disproportionate share of the burden of coping with civilian deprivation while public officials and the private groups did little to alleviate the situation.”³⁸

Canning foods, on the other hand, added extra work to women’s traditional job in the home and proved to be more difficult than victory gardens. Government advertisements urged citizens to preserve their victory gardens and extend their foods by canning. Wartime pamphlets, such as the *Ball Blue Book: Guide to Home Canning, Freezing, and Dehydration*, suggested two processing methods for the home canning of foods. The first, the boiling water method, was used for acid foods in which the foods were placed in a boiling-water canner. The second and most common, the steam-pressure method, was used for low-acid foods. The foods were placed in a steam-pressure canner in order to destroy all bacteria.³⁹ The canning process in Wilmington created difficulties for many homemakers because equipment became scarce. One Wilmington woman, Fay T. Coleman, met the challenge by lending homemakers six steam-pressure cookers for the use of canning starting in mid-1943. Home demonstration clubs in Wilmington also created classes in order to teach women the way to properly preserve their food. These classes began in 1943 and continued until the end of the war.⁴⁰ Canning took time and added more pressure on the kitchen soldier. Although it was stressful, homemakers used canning as a way to cope with rationing.

³⁷ “The Patriotic Cook: Rationing called for kitchen creativity,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, December 4, 1991.

³⁸ Anderson, *Wartime Women*, 87.

³⁹ Hayes, *Grandma’s Wartime Kitchen*, 52.

⁴⁰ “Canning Methods Under Discussion: System of Teaching Procedure to Housewives is Asked,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, June 18, 1943.

Conserving and preserving were also new roles women were challenged to uphold. Gas was a major commodity the government encouraged women to preserve for the war effort. When people think about gas rationing during World War II, it is most often associated with the pleasure-driving ban and with the struggles it posed for war workers trying to get to work. The way gas rationing affected women in the kitchen is all too often forgotten. Gas powered stovetops were the most popular type of stoves at the time. In the Society section, *The Wilmington Star-News* ran small columns throughout the war titled “Wife Preserves,” which demonstrated ways homemakers could preserve materials. As with other government advertisements regarding the kitchen, women appeared above each column of “preserving” advice. Many “Wife Preserves” columns focused on gas; for example, one column advised that, “If your broiler is below your oven and you plan to bake part of a meal, use the broiler for cooking the meat, so making one burner do the work of cooking a whole meal.”⁴¹ Other columns stressed the importance of maintaining kitchen supplies since materials were hard to come by in wartime life. Women were to fight the war in the kitchen. By appealing to women in these advertisements, the government gave homemakers a stronger position in society and made them a part of the plan for victory. Women were able to show their creativity in coping with rationing and prove the imperative role they held in society. This also, however, kept women in the home, which reinforced traditional gender roles.

Many Wilmington companies, such as the Tide Water Power Company, also took to the newspapers to stress to homemakers the importance of preserving gas. Figure 3.5 is an excellent example of one of these articles, as well as a concrete demonstration of the wartime kitchen soldier. The woman depicted in the advertisement is wearing a soldier’s hat, holding a war

⁴¹ “Wife Preserves,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, May 24, 1942.

ration book, and is surrounded by menu planning books and kitchen supplies. This image represents the counterpart to the well-known “Rosie the Riveter” image; it is an image that does not receive enough attention in history books. The advertisement, titled “Pool Your Cooking...and Save Gas,” suggested that women use “sectional pots so that as few burners as possible may be used for each meal.” It also recommended roasting meats and potatoes at the same time as baking pies to conserve gas. The pressure put on women to meet this task was clear in the advertisement’s final sentence: “Each unlit burner on our stoves is a Victory winner.”⁴² Preserving gas proved to be another part of the home front war effort that fell on women.



Figure 3.5: The Kitchen Soldier. “Pool Your Cooking...And Save Gas,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, May 18, 1943.

⁴² “Pool Your Cooking...and Save Gas,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, May 18, 1943.

Preserving cooking fats became another job women took on during the war. A *Betty Crocker* publication titled *Your Share* urged citizens to “Be Patriotic, return any leftover fats to your butcher for war use!” Defense industries used the leftover grease to make bombs. Mae Pigford, who was eighteen in Wilmington when the war broke out, remembered that “there would be a truck that would come around, a big army truck, and you saved all your fish grease and any other grease you put in a clean coffee can.”⁴³ The advertisement depicted in figure 3.6 provided tricks on saving used fats, and as with most wartime advertisements dealing with food, has a woman “fighting the war” in the kitchen. Saving grease for wartime made cooking more difficult for many Wilmingtonians who used grease when cooking other meals. It was also a time consuming task the government expected women to complete.

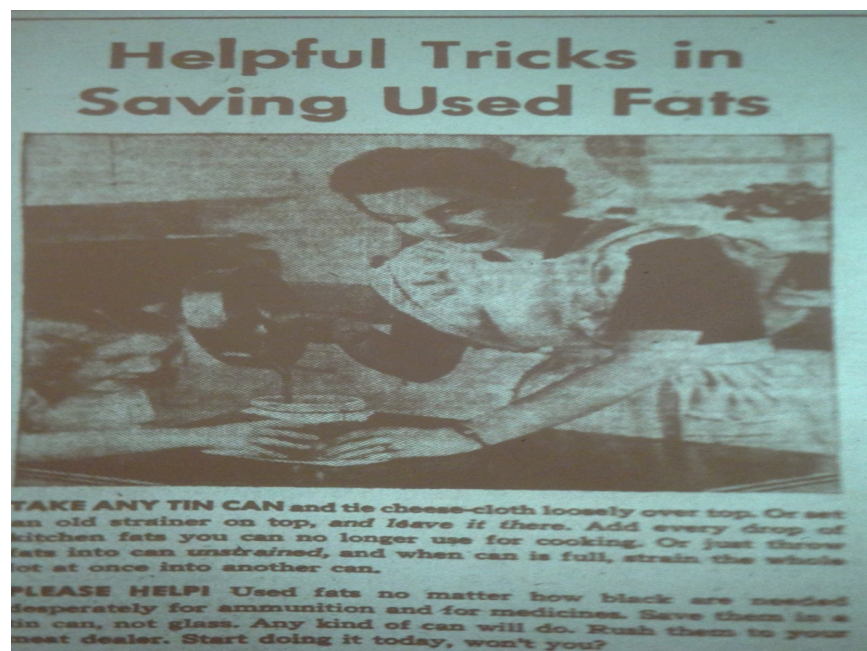


Figure 3.6: Advertisement depicting a woman doing her part for the War Effort in the Kitchen. “Helpful Tricks in Saving Used Fats,” *The Wilmington-Star-News*, November 17, 1943.

⁴³ “During war, Americans recycled out of patriotism,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, December 5, 1991.

The Role of the Kitchen Soldier in Protecting the Health of the Nation

Nutrition was the focus of one of the first major food campaigns directed at women. It was a chief concern with food shortages and the implementation of rationing because many of the rationed items helped to create a healthy diet. The government worried that if war workers were malnourished, they would not be able to do their jobs effectively. The kitchen became the first line of defense in the battle to create a healthy nation and the ‘soldiers in house dresses’ were the leaders. The “Wartime Homemaker” was told that one of her wartime jobs was to “guard the family health by ensuring that their families receive satisfying and nutritious foods.”⁴⁴ In 1942, the government advertised “Uncle Sam’s Food Rules,” as pictured in figure 3.7, which was the national nutrition program implemented by the Office of Defense Health and Welfare Services. By 1943, the eight rules changed to the “Daily Seven” food groups that citizens were to eat daily; these groups are still used today. These included green and yellow vegetables; oranges, tomatoes, grapefruit; potatoes; milk and milk products; meat, fish, poultry, eggs; bread, flour, cereals; and butter and fortified margarine.⁴⁵ Government nutrition programs depended on the kitchen soldier, making her role in the war effort extremely important.

⁴⁴ Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 31.

⁴⁵ Hayes, *Grandma’s Wartime Kitchen*, 28.

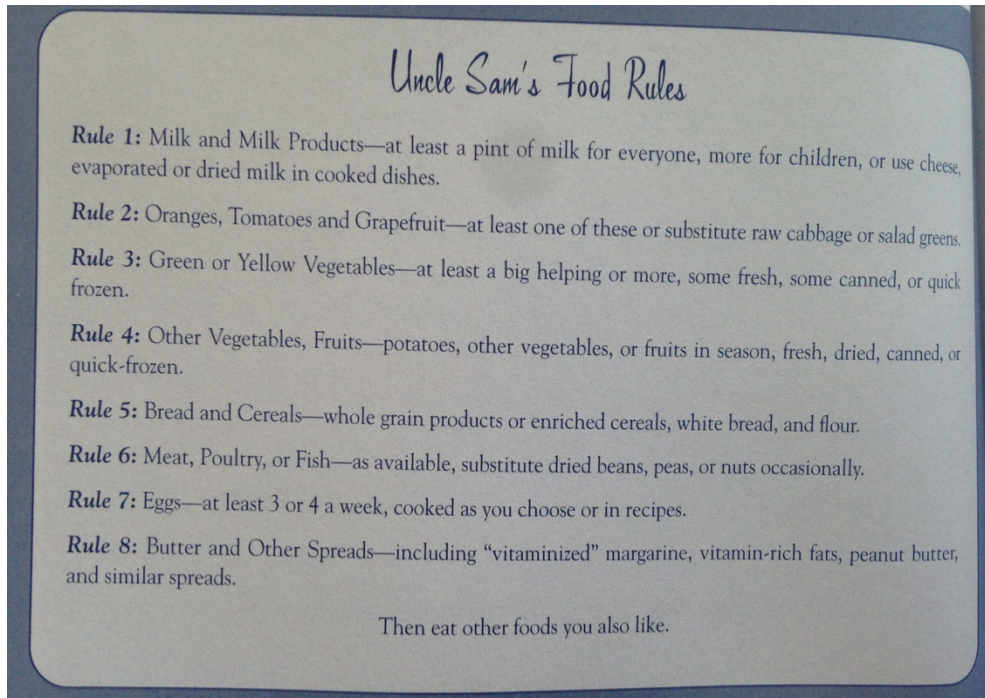


Figure 3.7: Uncle Sam’s Food Rules. Hayes, *Grandma’s Wartime Kitchen*, 26.

These national campaigns trickled down to local campaigns in Wilmington, North Carolina. Beginning in mid-1942, different Wilmington clubs set up nutrition classes to help women learn the ways to feed their families with less. The classes stressed menu planning, as well as the correct procedures for cooking foods to create a well-balanced diet.⁴⁶ Each class included a cooking demonstration and provided recipes that used substitutes for rationed items. Information about these classes appeared in *The Wilmington Star-News* Society section, a section directed primarily at and read by women. Home demonstration clubs in New Hanover County also took part in national nutrition campaigns and created their own local programs. Although the homemaker’s role became more stressful during the war, she was not alone in figuring out the way to maneuver wartime Wilmington. The year of 1942 proved productive for the home demonstration clubs, which consisted of 389 local women, 52 of whom were employed in full-

⁴⁶ “Nutrition Class Set Monday at Tide Water,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, May 10, 1942.

time war work. On top of participating in defense work and volunteering, these clubs spread nutrition information and taught women the ways to cope with rationing. The home demonstration clubs organized a Food for Freedom program in 1942 that sought to fight the food crisis and create victory gardens. For instance, the program taught homemakers that soybeans, originally considered only cattle food, could be used in meal plans and were a good source of nutrition. The program also successfully handed out war recipes to 465 families, studied and found recipes for sugar and meat substitutes, and helped 35 women who had problems feeding their children. Acknowledging the influx of people, the club created a group to assist non-club women with adequate meal preparation for their families.⁴⁷ These programs, as well as the women that participated in them, reveal that women did not completely leave their homemaker lives behind when the war began, but instead embraced them. Local and national food campaigns relied on women to keep America adequately fed. This not only added extra stress to the homemaker, but also gave her the opportunity to step up and show that she was capable handling the crisis. In turn, this also kept many women in the home.

Wilmington also created a “Health for Victory” program in March 1943 as part of a national food campaign. The head of the campaign, Cordelia Foster, stated, “that the year 1942 saw many changes in food and foods which we in the past accepted in a matter of fact way...are no longer being produced.” The program expanded quickly in Wilmington, which was evident based on the number of Meal Planning Guides that were distributed monthly to homemakers. Foster stressed meal planning, shopping with an open mind, using alternate foods, and doing without the ‘fluffs and frills’ normally used when serving meals. According to the club,

⁴⁷ “New Hanover Rural Women Make 1942 Year of Real Accomplishment,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, December 11, 1942.

“There’s no rationing, you know, on appetite appeal and ingenuity.”⁴⁸ Foster encouraged homemakers to be creative with their meals and make new recipes using alternate foods. For example, the Meal Planning Guides suggested using bacon and sausage fat to flavor other foods, using butter alternatives that included vitamin enriched fats, and using honey or molasses for sweetening instead of sugar. Understanding the ways women coped with rationing, and their intensified role during the war, shows the resourcefulness of homemakers and reveals their importance in winning World War II. These programs, along with wartime propaganda, “enhanced the importance of women as citizens and assigned them significant public responsibilities.”⁴⁹ The success of these health programs depended on women embracing their traditional role in society.

In conjunction with the “Health for Victory” clubs, *The Wilmington Star-News* ran articles, titled “War Kitchen,” throughout the week that represented government nutrition plans. These articles, written by Gaynor Maddox, stressed nutrition and sought to help homemakers deal with the stress brought about by working outside the home, managing a family, and rationing. Maddox provided Wilmington women with daily recipes for breakfast, lunch, and dinner that always included the Daily Seven Food Groups. In each meal, she explained which part of the meal went with which food group to show that, by the end of the day, every food group would have been eaten. According to Maddox, waste was treason in the kitchens: “Jellied left-over meat, fowl, or left-over raw or cooked vegetables make substantial luncheon and supper dishes. They present food the second time in a new guise... That is why these recipes are important in the war kitchen where waste is a form of domestic disloyalty.”⁵⁰ Women also could

⁴⁸ “Health Victory Clubs Expanding,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, April 11, 1943.

⁴⁹ Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 21.

⁵⁰ “War Kitchen,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, April 22, 1943.

not rely on scarce commercial canned foods to reduce their preparation time, which is the reason preserving was a vital part of daily life. Meal planning became a key part of the home front war effort and the kitchen soldier was the leader.

These columns helped Wilmington women cope with meat rationing because meat was a staple of Southern food culture. Maddox stressed the importance of finding meat alternatives and other sources of protein to keep workers strong. If homemakers could not keep war workers properly fed, the government feared war production would decrease. Maddox taught women to use peanuts and dried beans as a meat alternate because they were a good source of protein. Two recipes, shown in figure 3.8, included peanut cutlets and dried kidney bean cakes. These recipes may not sound appetizing today, but they reveal the necessary creativity and resilience of women during World War II. Maddox also suggested wholegrain cereals as sources of protein. She stated, “if you extend your rationed wholegrain cereals, you actually add more protein to your meal while you also increase the bulk of the meat dish.”⁵¹ Advice was also provided on extending meat points because the government stressed extending during the war. For example, Maddox instructed homemakers to “extend your 8 points today for one pound of ground round steak by using it in a flavorsome meat loaf.”⁵² The recipe for meat loaf she provided made enough for a dinner for four and lunch the next day.

⁵¹ “War Kitchen,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, May 18, 1943.

⁵² “War Kitchen,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, May 5, 1943.

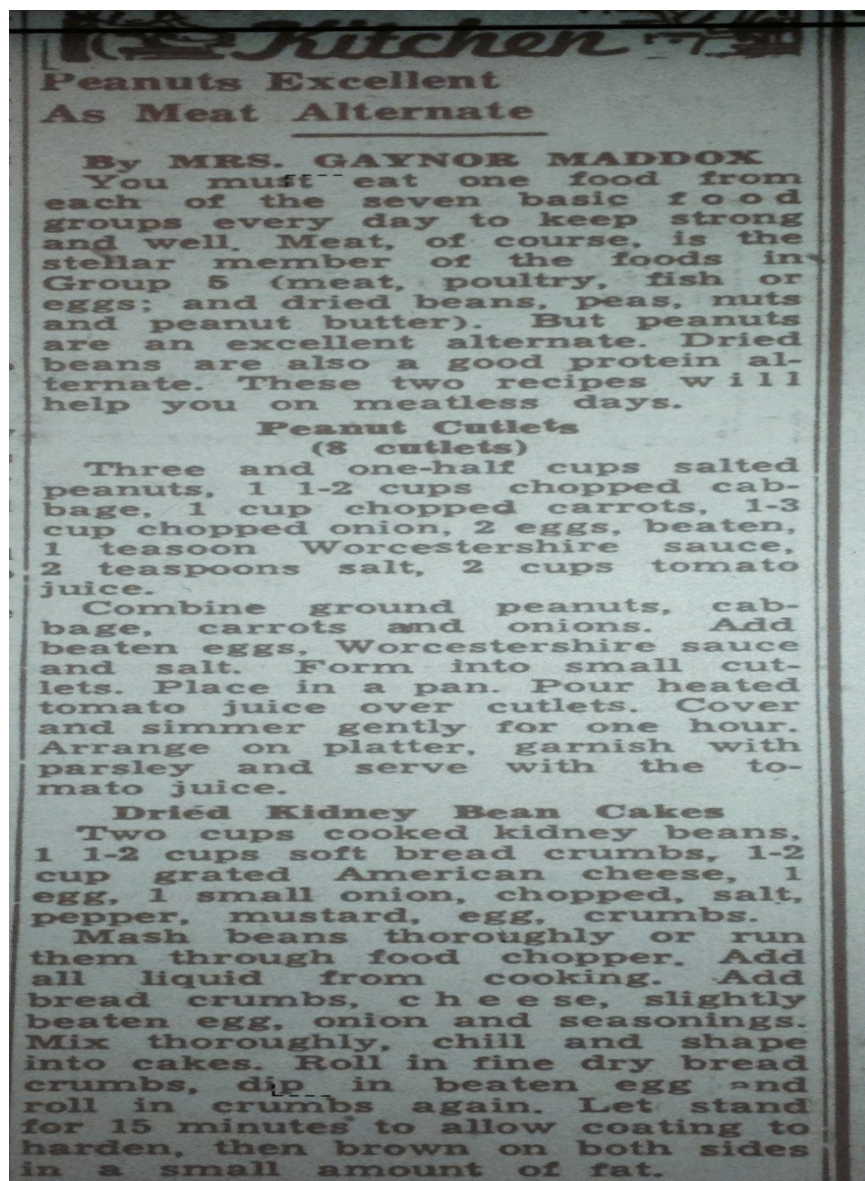


Figure 3.8: War Kitchen Article. “War Kitchen: Peanuts Excellent As Meat Alternate,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, April 27, 1943.

Another Betty Crocker famous recipe created to deal with meat rationing was the “Emergency Steak.” By adding ground beef, milk, Wheaties cereal, salt, pepper, and chopped onion together into a T-bone steak shape, citizens could feel like they were eating a real steak.⁵³ This may seem odd today, but it was a way for homemakers to try and make their home seem

⁵³ “Recipes that Survived War,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, December 4, 1991.

like it was before the war began. This advice proved extremely helpful for Wilmington homemakers because it took some of the pressure off of them to come up with wartime recipes at a time when their jobs were challenged more than ever. Chicken became the mainstay of the local diet for Wilmingtonians, as well as all Americans, because of meat rationing. Wilmington citizens remembered gaining distaste for chicken because it became the main course for the majority of wartime meals.⁵⁴ Maddox called fried chicken the star of the unrationed menu.⁵⁵

Maddox's "War Kitchen" articles also evinced the ways in which the work of a homemaker intensified during the war. Maddox published multiple articles throughout the war that were directed at women who worked at the shipyard. Although women worked outside the home for paid labor, just as the men, they were still required to do the unpaid labor of grocery shopping and meal preparation. Maddox stated, "In a household where the women as well as the men both work in war plants and have late hours, arrangements must be made for the men, arriving home to an empty house, to get balanced meals easily and quickly for themselves."⁵⁶ She suggested that women leave men some quick-frozen vegetables that would only require him to follow the directions on the package. Maddox also recommended that, for top efficiency at work, homemakers should provide between-meal snacks such as a glass of milk, an orange, or a sandwich.⁵⁷ This advice reveals that, although many citizens accepted women taking on a more active role outside the home during the war, the role of the homemaker was still seen as the woman's number one job. The war had a contradictory effect in that it created new opportunities for women, while simultaneously reinforcing traditional roles.

⁵⁴"People in Wilmington coped with Conflict," *The Wilmington Star-News*, December 3, 1991.

⁵⁵ "War Kitchen," *The Wilmington Star-News*, June 18, 1943.

⁵⁶ "War Kitchen," *The Wilmington Star-News*, June 11, 1943.

⁵⁷ "War Kitchen," *The Wilmington Star-News*, June 10, 1943.

The majority of “War Kitchen” articles provided advice and recipes to help women. Some of the most interesting columns were published around the holidays and reveal the ways in which women coped with rationing while entertaining. For Thanksgiving dinners, Maddox offered some recipes that looked good and were easy on the ration points. She argued, “It’s turkey for the ‘boys in arms’ this year and only what’s left has a rightful place on the American home Thanksgiving table.”⁵⁸ The column suggested chicken, goose, or duck as an alternative and provided a Russian recipe known as ‘Duck with Noodles’. For dessert, Maddox recommended Marble Pie, which did not require sugar or eggs to prepare. Marble pie only needed one package prepared chocolate pudding, 1 package prepared vanilla pudding, milk, and a pie shell.⁵⁹ Having part of the recipe already pre-prepared made this a quick and easy dessert for homemakers in wartime. Maddox also provided Wilmington women with Christmas meals that took rationing into account. She recommended serving meat loaves, sausage, assorted cheeses, and egg dishes as alternatives to a fancy meal. On top of her advice for cooking, Maddox also offered advice on arranging holiday meals to make them look attractive. This was important for homemakers when they were entertaining. Homemakers found ways to have plenty of food for their holiday meals, but they were much simpler than traditional holiday foods.

Many Wilmington women, when interviewed, explained the ways they dealt with rationing when it came to holiday meals and desserts. For example, Brenda C. Birmelin remembered that, for Thanksgiving, her family could not feast on a typical holiday meal because of rationing. Instead, they ate oysters and watermelon.⁶⁰ Elizabeth P. Stanfield described

⁵⁸ “War Kitchen,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, November 20, 1943.

⁵⁹ “War Kitchen,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, November 16, 1943 and December 16, 1943.

⁶⁰ North Carolina Research Subject File (World War II Folder #2: “WWII as seen by a child growing up in Wilmington”), New Hanover County Public Library North Carolina Collection.

making butter by using margarine packages and adding food coloring till it turned yellow. She then stated that “you then had yellow margarine which was supposed to look and act and taste and so forth like the butter that you could not...have because it was needed” for the war effort.⁶¹ Emily Ezzwill recalled mixing a white fat called oleo with yellow dye to make her spread butter-colored. She stated that, if done wrong, one would end up with streaks in the spread.⁶² Wilmington women learned to make cakes and pies without eggs, milk, or butter. These stories reveal the creativity of women and show the ways they coped with rationing.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this chapter clearly demonstrates the important role homemakers played throughout the war. They did not completely leave the home as is commonly argued; but, instead, the war burdened women with more responsibilities. Not only did society expect women to fulfill their patriotic duties outside the home, it also expected them to master rationing methods, plan meals, and protect the health of the nation. Although the Office of War Information and corporations gave women a more important role in society, they simultaneously used advertisements and articles portraying women as homemakers to reinforce traditional gender roles. The kitchen soldier fought proudly on the home front for her country and she deserves more attention from historians.

⁶¹ Elizabeth P. Stanfield, Interviewed by Sherman Hayes, 22 April 2004. World War II: Through the Eyes of the Cape Fear Collection Number 083, transcript. University of North Carolina at Wilmington Digital Collection, University of North Carolina at Wilmington, Wilmington, NC.

⁶² “The Patriotic Cook,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, December 4, 1992.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

On September 2, 1945, the United States celebrated Victory over Japan Day, which brought World War II to a close. Two days later, a Ruth Millett article appeared in *The Wilmington Star-News* that stated, “There is one group of Americans who have a reconversion problem facing them in the near future-and perhaps don’t even realize it. The group? America’s housewives.”¹ As indicated throughout this thesis, World War II created new duties for women outside the home, duties that, while liberating, sowed a good deal of concern about what the future held for American society. Amid all these transformations, historian Elaine Tyler May points out, “postwar American society experienced a surge in family life and a reaffirmation of domesticity that rested on distinct roles for women and men.”² There have been a variety of explanations for this paradox, ranging from the strong desire for the return of normality after years of turmoil to the limiting role played by an increasingly conservative culture.³ This thesis sides with the latter argument, finding that culture – as manifested in newspaper columns, advertisements, and government propaganda – was key to the maintenance of conventional gender norms in Wilmington, North Carolina, which provides a revealing case study for “Rosie the Riveters” and “Kitchen Soldiers.” There, this thesis finds, temporary behavior may have changed but not at the expense of long-held beliefs.

¹ “There’s a Reconversion Problem Facing American Housewives Too,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, September 4, 1945.

² Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2008), 9.

³ Historians who discussed this paradox include: William Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972) and May, *Homeward Bound*, 2008.

Millett, in the aforementioned article, also explained that many women who acquired wartime jobs were going back to being full time housewives. She wrote, “now is the right moment for them to look ahead and make up their minds what they want to make of themselves and what they want to do with their lives.”⁴ A *Wilmington Star-News* article from October 1946 indicated that the recent census information revealed that a third of the city’s white adult female population had a job after the war, but the majority of their work was in clerical occupations. The census also divulged that within married couples in the city, “chances are that he works and she keeps home.”⁵ Although Millett believed this was the time for women to change their role in society, this census data showed that most Wilmington women left their jobs in manufacturing and returned to their previous lives. Rather than developing a lifestyle that centered on their newfound independence after the war, women embraced their commitment to their families and traditional gender roles. Prewar values, wartime propaganda, and women’s desire for postwar continuity, shaped their response to wartime changes.

Using advertisements and articles from the 1940s, this thesis found that gender norms remained unchanged by the war. It also concluded that these forms of mass communication helped to shape women’s reactions to wartime changes and remind them that their war work was temporary. As indicated throughout the study, wartime advertisements presented women as “beautiful” workers and as “mothers” doing their part in helping the war effort. This continuous emphasis on femininity, as well as the portrayal of women doing jobs in the home, proved that society still believed women’s place was in the private sphere. It also provided little affirmation

⁴ “There’s a Reconversion Problem Facing American Housewives Too,” *The Wilmington Star-News*, September 4, 1945.

⁵ [Series 4: *Wilmington Star-News Clippings and Thematic Notes*; October 26, 1946] Wilbur D. Jones, Jr. Papers, MS204, William Randall Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina Wilmington, Wilmington, NC.

to females that they could work in traditionally male jobs. This attempt by advertisers to keep conventional gender norms the same continued in the postwar years, where advertisements essentially communicated what women should look like while at work, what they should do in public, and the ways in which they should cope with their new roles.

This study also found that, although Rosie the Riveter received the most attention, she did not represent the average female at the time. Wilmington women did not leave their jobs at home behind when they experienced wartime changes; instead, they took on more occupations. In addition to their prewar household duties, women now had to deal with rationing, strategically plan meals, plant victory gardens, preserve, and extend every meal. As if all of this did not add pressure to their lives, the government placed even more emphasis on their homemaker roles by putting the health of the nation in their hands. Wilmington women coped with all of these new jobs and showed tremendous creativity in the kitchen, proving that the topic of the kitchen soldier is an important part of the home front and deserves more attention. Although government agencies praised women for their work in the home, this thesis revealed that advertisements simultaneously used the image of the kitchen soldier to remind women that their most important job was in the home. Advertisements and articles mostly continued to address postwar women as homemakers, indicating that wartime changes to gender norms were largely superficial.

Almost fourteen years after the war ended, conventional gender roles and society's attitudes about those norms remained largely unaffected by the war. In 1959, Vice President Richard Nixon traveled to the Soviet Union to meet with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. The two men argued over the qualities of various household appliances in what became known as the "kitchen debate." As May pointed out, "For Nixon, American superiority rested on the

ideal of the suburban home, complete with modern appliances and distinct gender roles for family members. He proclaimed that the ‘model’ home, with a male breadwinner and a full-time female homemaker...represented the essence of American freedom.”⁶ Fourteen years after World War II had ended, the traditional gender norms that people feared would disappear during the war still remained standing. In fact, not only did conventional gender roles remain, the government continued to use and highlight them as part of the American dream. World War II created many changes in America and it can be argued that it planted the seeds for the feminist movement; but immediately following the war, as this thesis proved, at the local level, traditional gender norms remained unchanged.

⁶ May, *Homeward Bound*, 16.

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