Dust and Domesticity: Maintenance and Toronto's Reform Movements
(1900-1930s)

by
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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Maintenance practices remain an understudied area within architectural discourse. Dusting, sweeping, and mopping—in both the domestic and public spheres—have often been deemed inconsequential to our experience of the built environment. The absence of maintenance within architectural discourse seeks to preserve a facile and autonomous image of capital A architecture. By examining maintenance—specifically what is being maintained—we challenge this idealized version of architecture and instead expose its deeply interconnected social relations and systems of care.

This thesis uses dust as a lens to evaluate maintenance practices within Toronto's 19th-century reform movement. Centered on Toronto's first immigrant neighborhood, the Ward, this thesis traces the discourse on housework in relation to concerns over nation-building within Toronto's larger settler-colonial landscape. It contrasts two approaches to housework practices within the Ward, highlighting the tension between the institutional presence of public health and that of grassroots organizations. As dust frames the gendered, social, and material dimensions of this investigation, this thesis finds that domestic maintenance practices became deeply intertwined with questions of citizenship, belonging, and agency.

Specifically, this thesis analyzes the use of sanitary inspectors, municipal housekeepers, and publications such as The Little Blue Book Series by public health to enforce a standardized ideal of housework on Toronto's growing immigrant working class. In contrast, grassroots organizations such as Visiting Housekeepers and Settlement Houses, which operated intimately within the Ward, recognized situated domestic conditions and cultural differences and sought to use housework as a tool of empowerment.

In its transgression and destabilization of spatial borders, dust defies conventions of architectural order. By examining the overlooked narratives of dust, this paper highlights the resistance of immigrant communities and challenges dominant narratives of urban reform.

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Introduction

1.1 Getting Dusty

> "Dust always was and always will be everywhere. In the beginning, the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground; after the Fall, the Lord God said, 'For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.' The good housewife and her assistants are continuously endeavoring to get rid of dust, while the men folk frequently bring as much dust as possible into the house, and scatter it round most assiduously."[1]
>
> - Adam H. Wright, Chairman of the Ontario Board of Health, 1912

Despite being a fundamental part of dwelling, maintenance practices—specifically housework, sweeping, dusting, and cleaning—are so often neglected within architectural discourse. As pointed out by Elke Krasny, the historical separation of maintenance from architecture seeks to preserve a facile image of the profession.[2] As form of care, housework is fundamental in the upkeep of both architecture and ourselves, yet as pointed out by Krasny, popular theories such as Martin Heidegger's reflections on dwelling continue to privilege the building, not the maintenance, as central in habitation.[3]

Dust and dirt, particularly, undo this idealized vision of architecture. While architects might regard dust as merely disruptive, it rather reveals the fragility of notions such as order, form, and permanence. Maintenance practices through their habitual nature deal with the fluctuation and instability of architecture. As such, when we use maintenance of abjects as a lens of exploration, we inevitably find ourselves examining often-ignored spaces, practices, and narratives of marginalized peoples typically excluded from architectural discourse. This is evident when looking at Toronto's reform movement.

1 Adam H. Wright, "Dust in the House and On the Street," The Public Health Journal 3, no. 11 (1912): 628–30. http://www.jstor.org/stable/45245977.
2 Elke Krasny, "Architecture and Care" in *Critical Care,* ed. Fitz, Angelika, Architekturzentrum Wien, and Elke Krasny (MIT Press, 2019) 9.
3 Krasny, "Architecture and Care," 9.



Fig. 1.1
Aerial photo of St. John's Ward. Circa 1920

1.2 Defining Reform

The concept of dust as a household nuisance coincides with the rise of urban industry in the twentieth century, where dust's spatial, health, and social implications became more closely scrutinized. In Toronto specifically, dust had permeated all facets of industrial life, from streets, factories, roads, and markets, becoming both a marker for progress and decay of urban life. As the city underwent immense growth, nearly tripling in population from 30,000 in the 1870s to 86,000 in the 1920s, the lack of the necessary infrastructure would lead to the city becoming denser, dirtier, and dustier than ever before.[4] While dust settles indiscriminately, its maintenance became a point of contention in Toronto's growing working class neighbourhoods.

The perceived need to manage dust within working class neighbourhoods was intertwined with broader concerns about disorderly domestic conditions. Many of these neighborhoods were characterized in public discourse as overcrowded, with inadequate sanitation and substandard housing. Due to a lack of housing stock and high rents, it was common for multiple families to share a single home and even to construct ad hoc additions at the rear of properties to accommodate the influx of newcomers. Dirty yards, piles of debris and household refuse, as well as dusty, poorly ventilated rooms were commonly documented in municipal sanitary inspections, newspaper reports, and surveys.[5] Alongside the escalation of disease, these environments were erroneously attributed to immorality, often being understood as the cause of crime, prostitution, and other vices, contributing to the social decay of the city.[6]

Following the United States and Britain, many Canadian officials believed that intervention was required to address these perceived material and moral concerns. As Paul Rutherford argues, the movement itself wasn't specific to Canada, but was a common approach at that time in addressing urban problems.[7] The urban bourgeoisie, in particular, initiated philanthropic projects targeting specifically the working class and new immigrants to cities.[8] While this concern would prompt many urban infrastructural interventions such as garbage collection, sewage management, and street sweeping, it also would lead to increasing scrutiny of the domestic maintenance amongst Toronto's growing immigrant working class communities.

4 Heather Anne MacDougall, *Activists and Advocates: Toronto's Health Department, 1883–1983* (Dundurn Press, 1991), 10.
5 MacDougall, *Activists and Advocates,* 72-73.
6 MacDougall, *Activists and Advocates,* 10.
7 Paul Rutherford, "Tomorrow's Metropolis: The Urban Reform Movement in Canada," *Historical Papers* 6, no.1 (1971): 203-224.
8 Mariana Valverde, T*he Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (University of Toronto Press, 2019) 15-16, https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442689268.

Within Toronto, there were two largely competing approaches to reforming working-class immigrant neighborhoods. The most dominant voice, approaching reform from an institutional perspective, was Toronto's growing public health department. Public health reformers largely modeled their approach on the British doctrine of the sanitary ideal. In seeking to improve the city's living environment, public health reformers sought to impose stricter sanitary regulations through by-laws, inspections, and enforcement measures.[9] The emerging scientific consensus would justify medical leadership within reform and their critiques over the dusty and dirty conditions of working class homes. However, this often seemed to legitimize prevailing prejudices and biases, thereby perpetuating further harm to working class communities.

Contrary to the top-down approaches led by public health reformers, another approach to reform was rooted in grassroots activism, largely taken by the growing network of impromptu social services within urban areas. The maternal feminist movement, for example, would see the rise of various womenled organizations, who found an unusual authority in addressing social and moral concerns of the domestic realm. A major distinction between the approach to reform taken by these women-led social organizations from the public health officials was that the former maintained proximity to the working class communities they served.[10] Many 'public housekeeping' organizations lived among the working-class, participating and understanding the challenges of housework within these homes. In some cases, they actively tried to dispel harmful narratives about working class immigrants.

1.3 Thesis Investigation

This thesis examines diverging housework practices in Toronto's twentieth century reform movement by examining dust as both a material focus and a lens for analysis. Focusing specifically on 'The Ward,' known as Toronto's first immigrant neighbourhood and most notorious so-called slum, this thesis traces the discourse on housework in relation to concerns over nation building within Toronto's larger settler-colonial landscape**.** Informed by theorists, such as Mary Douglas, I understand dust as a material that transformed housework beyond superficial questions of hygiene, instead becoming a prompt leading to the upkeep of social systems, whether grassroots or institutional. In dust's ability to transgress and destabilize spatial borders, it reveals tensions at the boundary of domesticity prompting larger questions concerning the intersection of gender, class, and race. Competing approaches to reform led to different understandings

9 Rutherford, "Tomorrow's Metropolis": 203-224.
10 Tara Bissett, "Conflicts of Care: Contesting Visions of Urban Reform in Toronto," *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada* 47, no. 1 (2022): https://doi.org/10.7202/1095165ar.

of the domestic, facilitating divergent engagements with working class homes. Through housework and the control of dust, public health sought to regulate and define domesticity within Canada's broader nation building discourse. Whereas grassroots organizations aimed to use maintenance practices to preserve and strengthen existing community relations as well as to rebut pejorative representations of immigrant communities.

1.4 The Ward

Historically, The Ward uniquely stands out as Toronto's first immigrant neighborhood that mirrors the city's rich diversity today. Throughout the 1800s to 1930s, The Ward saw fluctuations of immigrants from various backgrounds, creating a multicultural enclave in the city of Toronto. In the mid-19th century, The Ward was a predominantly Black neighbourhood, with Black immigrants coming to Toronto while fleeing slavery.[11] Closer to the end of the nineteenth century, The Ward would see an influx of Italian, Eastern European, and Chinese immigrants, who were attracted to the area's various faith-based institutions and strong social support networks.[12]

Many of the first homes in The Ward could be classified as worker cottages. Worker cottages (such as fig 1.3 and 1.4), were developed by a series of reformers and architects, an effort inspired by Britain, to respond to the growing unsanitary conditions of industrial cities.[13] The worker cottage typology was popularized in 1851 when it was showcased at the Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace in London's Hyde Park, organized by Prince Albert.[14] Afterward, designs of the cottages were published in British pattern books that were sent overseas and used to construct many modest residential buildings throughout Toronto.

According to historic Ward Fire Maps, many of these original workers' cottages in The Ward were no larger than four to five metres wide and were built predominantly as wooden frames covered with rough plaster (Fig. 1.2). Many nearby factories offered employment to newcomers. As a central, accessible, and relatively inexpensive spot for new immigrants, landlords were known to subdivide lots to generate more rent; additionally, it wasn't uncommon for ad hoc houses to be built in rears and yards to accommodate the influx of newcomers, making the neighbourhood increasingly dense.[15] The gradual decay of these homes was due in large part to their poor construction, as many lacked plumbing and other modern

11 John Lorinc, Michael McClelland and Tatum Taylor, *The Ward: The Life and Loss of Toronto's First Immigrant Neighbourhood* (Coach House Books, 2015), 12-13.
12 Lorinc, *The Ward,* 13-14.
13 Don Loucks and Leslie Valpy, *Modest Hopes: Homes and Stories of Toronto's Workers from the 1820s to the 1920s* (Dundurn Press, 2021), 3-4.
14 Loucks, *Modest Hopes,* 3-4.
15 Loucks, *Modest Hopes,* 103.

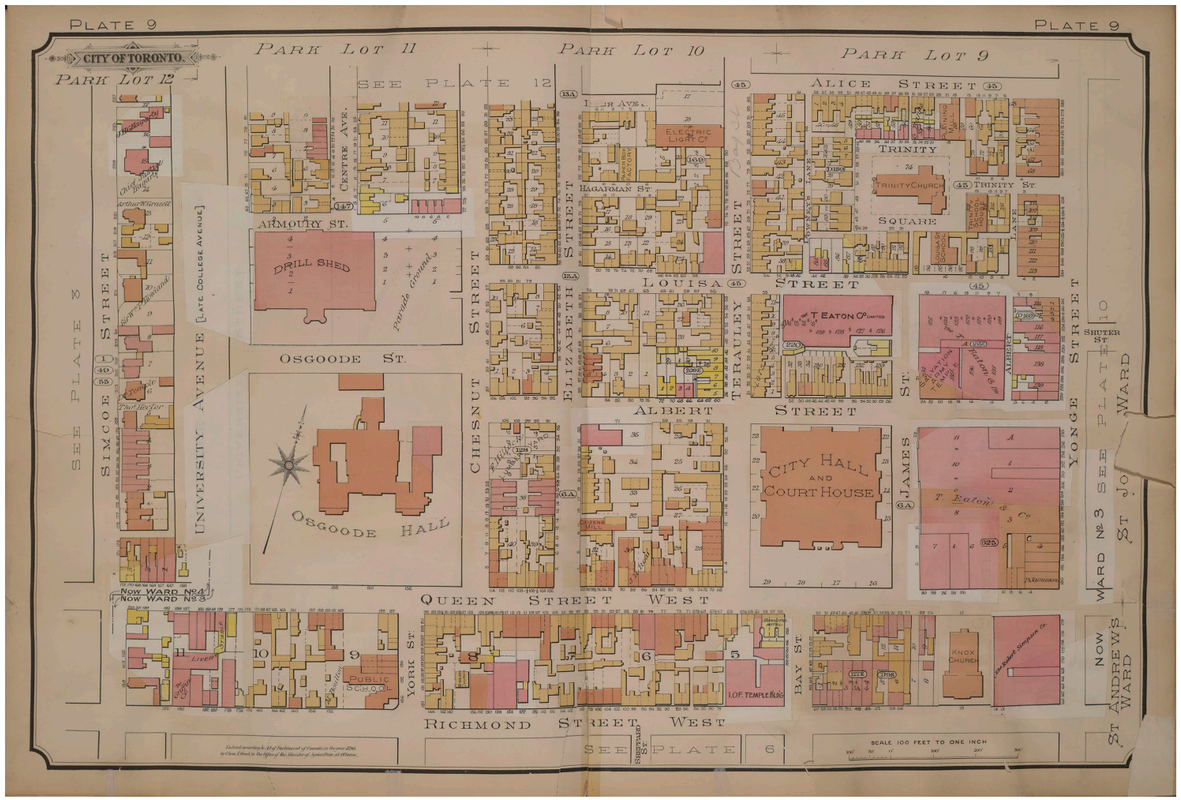

Fig. 1.2
Goad's Atlas Of The City Of Toronto Depicting The Ward Neighbourhood,1903

conveniences. Additionally, the houses were extremely congested, often accommodating multiple families at once.

Toronto's growing public health department would play a central role in the dispersion of the idea that The Ward was a slum. The Ward would be targeted particularly by Dr. Charles Hastings, Toronto's medical officer from 1910 to 1929; he would focus much of his career on urban reform. Hastings condemned the informal urbanism and congested conditions of The Ward, where he would also vilify the immigrant community and assert that dusty and dirty conditions would physically and morally contaminate the rest of the city.

The association between the concepts of the slum and the immigrant would center reform on addressing domestic conditions and habit. For public health officials, the concern was that immigrant habits were not compatible with imported British ideals. This perception was perpetuated through narratives about the slums, as captured in an article from *The Globe*:

> [the homes of The Ward] were once occupied by residents of struggling little Toronto, but when the city, like a growing child, became larger and larger every year, these houses deteriorated until at the present time they are occupied by immigrants from Europe and Asia, many who have persisted in keeping to their homeland manners and customs to a great extent, and consequently The Ward is very dirty- so dirty that in some streets one has to hold ones breath to avoid the odor of decayed fruits, vegetables and hundred of unwashed men, women and children.[16]

By the 1930s, many visions of redevelopment and land speculation would slowly begin to encroach on The Ward and similar immigrant neighborhoods. One influential report from the mid-1930s, written by Lieutenant Governor General Herbert Bruce, details the unsanitary conditions of working class neighborhoods and proposes the intensive redevelopment of public housing projects. This report would lead to the demolition of many working class homes, and the construction of Regent Park social housing in Toronto. SickKids hospital was another major development plan following a 1946 council decision authorizing the clearance of the Lower Ward, which had long been home to Toronto's first Chinatown.[17] After 1950, many institutional buildings, such as City Hall and other adjacent buildings, like the Toronto General Hospital and SickKids hospital, would come to redefine the neighbourhood, which had once been homes, laundries, butchers,

16 "Toronto's Foreign Quarter." 1923, Jan 06 *The Globe (1844-1936)*, 18. https://proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/torontos-foreign-quarter/docview/1366189617/se-2.

17 Lorinc, *The Ward,* 22.





Fig. 1.3 (Top) & Fig. 1.4 (Bottom)
Images of homes in The Ward

synagogues, and churches. Beyond a few renovated homes, little remains of the original Ward in the city today.

1.5 Methodology

As this thesis relies heavily on archival information, it draws on Carolyn Steedman's *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, as a methodological framework.[18] Steedman's approach builds on Jacques Derrida's writing of *archive fever*, interrogating both why and what we archive, as well as the question of the power of the archive itself. Derrida describes the exhilaration of *archive fever* as:

> "It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive, right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive, even if there's too much of it, right where something in it an archive itself. It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement."[19]

As Derrida traces the relation between the physical archive and the mind in his Freudian analysis, he finds that, the archive isn't an objective retracing of history. Rather searching the archives is similar to recalling memories, in which the way records are stored and understood can result in various interpretations. There is a desire to chase and recover moments, especially in trying to find the 'beginning' of a story; archive fever occurs.

Archive Fever demonstrates the limits to archival research: in the exhilaration of such research, it becomes evident that no understanding of a topic will ever be deemed complete. While much of this absence is caused by the vastness and interconnectedness of history, it is also due to the archives as an institution. While the archive provides recordings and traces, with every record there is also an absence. As Steedman follows up, the archives-like that of dust- do not have a point of beginning or end, rather the archive exists of "stories caught halfway through."[20]

This becomes especially evident when examining histories of housework, a widely ignored and under-documented practice. Using dust as a lens, this thesis seeks to navigate existing archival material through imaginative and interpretive means. By examining sanitary reports, journal articles, newspapers, institutional records, and photographs—where concerns about dust take on multiple dimensions —I expansively apply these

18 Caroyln Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, (Rutgers University Press, 2002).
19 Jacques Derrida, Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 91.
20 Steedman, *Dust,*45.

insights to understand how housework comes to inflect different visions of homeplace.

1.6 Positionality Statement

In looking at maintenance discourse in The Ward, I reflect on my own experience growing up as a first-generation Canadian within Regent Park. Similar to The Ward, Regent Park, prior to revitalization, was a working class neighborhood in which many immigrant communities in Toronto dwelled. In 2005, the neighborhood began its revitalization process, a proposal which would require the relocation of many residents, including my family, to various other social housing complexes throughout the city. While the right to return was promised, to this day residents face barriers in securing a new unit within the development, resulting in permanent dislocation. Importantly, the lack of maintenance was a strong justification given to residents for the revitalizations. The new development promised better care for both the tenants and the building itself, as it focused on the economic and social development of the community.

When navigating the archives and looking through the discourse on The Ward, I recognize a similar absence of the voices of the people who dwelled within this neighborhood. As institutional voices are favored in the telling of the history of Regent Park, they fail to capture the lively, diverse peoples who lived and contributed to the character of the neighborhood and the city. While newspapers and reports depicted Regent Park as a neighborhood in need, residents such as myself remember the neighborhood as full of vibrancy and resilience, with a strong community ethos and civic organization.

1.7 Thesis Outline

This thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter Two of this thesis presents a literature review used to inform the themes and frameworks within the thesis. Chapter Three explores the growing discourse on dust within industrial cities as a spatial phenomenon. By analyzing the perspectives of prominent reformers, doctors, and architects, the chapter traces the material and moral concerns surrounding dust. Additionally, it also looks at these concerns in The Ward, where dust and dirty conditions were growingly perceived as a threat to the broader settler landscape of Toronto.

The fourth and fifth chapters presents case studies of different engagements with housework in Toronto's reform movement. These chapters compare the dissemination of maintenance practices by public health through the use of sanitary inspectors, municipal housekeepers, and the *Little Blue Book Series*. These efforts sought to use housework as a means of nation building through the standardization of the domestic and housework. Whereas settlement and visiting housekeepers, used collaborative

maintenance efforts which aimed to preserve existing community ties and sought to instill agency.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Introduction

In evaluating how our everyday activities, such as housework, entangle with our surrounding larger social systems, there has been growing scholarship engaging maintenance and dust as a lens. Archaeologist Jarl Nordbladh provides the general four categories in which dust as been engaged within academic literature.[21] Dust has received increasing amount of attention in various fields and disciplines but particularly in the study of environmental medicine, cosmology, the commercial industry, and lastly-- as explored in this thesis--the discourse on dust within the 19th century emerged which at the same time as the industrial revolution.

Through an architectural lens, this resulted in focusing on the control of the environment as a means of controlling disease transmission. Most prudent to this engagement is the discovery and rapid scientific advancement of bacteriology. As housework managed the newly discovered microbial properties of dust, it became intertwined with its spatial, temporal and relational properties. This literature review evaluates the questions of the boundaries, connections, and divisions drawn by dust within current literature on maintenance practices. It seeks to inform the analysis of the maintenance practices within the neighbourhood of The Ward focusing on the contrasting efforts of public health and grassroots organizations.

In drawing on sociologists Gary L. Fine and Tim Hallett's "sociological miniaturist" lens, this study looks at dust and its intersection with gender, political economy, and the fraught act of nation-making. Central to the thesis, these intersections examine the significance of dust in both everyday life and social structures.[22] While Merriam-Webster dictionary defines dust as "a fine, powdery particles of matter (such as earth) or the particles into which something disintegrates," Hallett's analysis draws on "dust" as a collective noun, not as a singular thing or a set of things.[23] This definition

21 Jarl Nordbladh "Dust to Dust," in *Small Things – Wide Horizons: Studies in Honour of Birgitta Hårdh*, ed. Larsson, Lars, Fredrik Ekengren, Bertil Helgesson, and Bengt Söderberg, (Archaeopress, 2015), 297.

22 Gary Alan Fine Tim Hallett, "Dust: A Study in Sociological Miniaturism," *The Sociological Quarterly* 44 no.1 (2003): 1–15. doi:10.1111/j.1533-8525.2003.tb02388.x.

23 Merriam-Webster, s.v. "dust," April 28, 2026. https://www.merriam-webster.com/

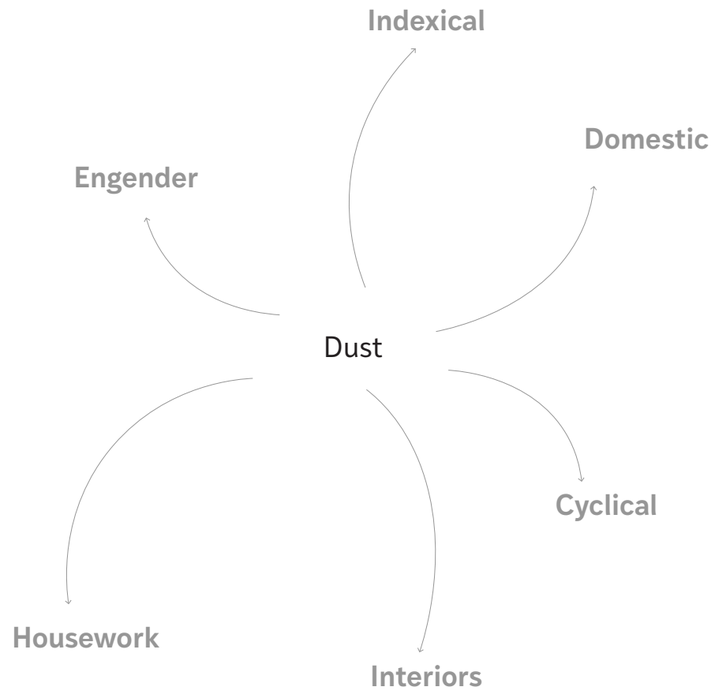

Fig. 2.1
Thematic Mind Map
By Author

draws on the properties of dust—visibility, invisibility, form, formlessness, ubiquity, and scarcity—as it invests these properties with social meaning.

Fundamental to this concept and referenced in some capacity in all studies within this literature review is Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. Douglas' analysis of our spatial relationship to dust and dirt questions both physical and social boundaries within society. Douglas compares the dirt-avoidance tendency of the 20th century informed by advancements in bacteriology and the dirt-avoidant tendency of pre-industrial societies. Douglas infers that, while advancements in our understanding of disease and germ transmission suggest that dirt avoidance is driven by hygienic concerns, social groups from as far back as antiquity exhibited similar avoidance behaviors, indicating that this impulse is ultimately driven by social and cultural factors. Douglas states:

> If we can abstract pathogenicity and hygiene from our notion of dirt, we are left with the old definition of dirt as matter out of place. This is a very suggestive approach. It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. This idea of dirt takes us straight into the field of symbolism and promises a link-up with more obviously symbolic systems of purity.[24]

As such, dust as a lens can be used to evaluate questions of boundaries, defined by proximity, distance and relationship to dirt.

2.2 Dust and Gender[25]

Halletts and other scholars analyzing dust and gender build on the foundational understanding that dirt and dust were repositories of germs. The role of women—or the homemaker—was essentially tied to protection from germs within the domestic sphere as a material and moral concern. Housework was at the core of this care, and the act of controlling dust is crucial in analyzing the complex gender dynamics found within the 19th century. As dust turns the domestic sphere into a site of social reform, women's agency, identity, and autonomy were largely questioned.

As Ann Oakley highlights in her analysis of the British reform movement, there was an attempt to adapt science into the everyday world through

dictionary/dust

24 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (Routledge, 2002), 36-37.

25 The sectioning of this literature review follows and builds on the format of Gary L. Fine and Tim Hallett paper.

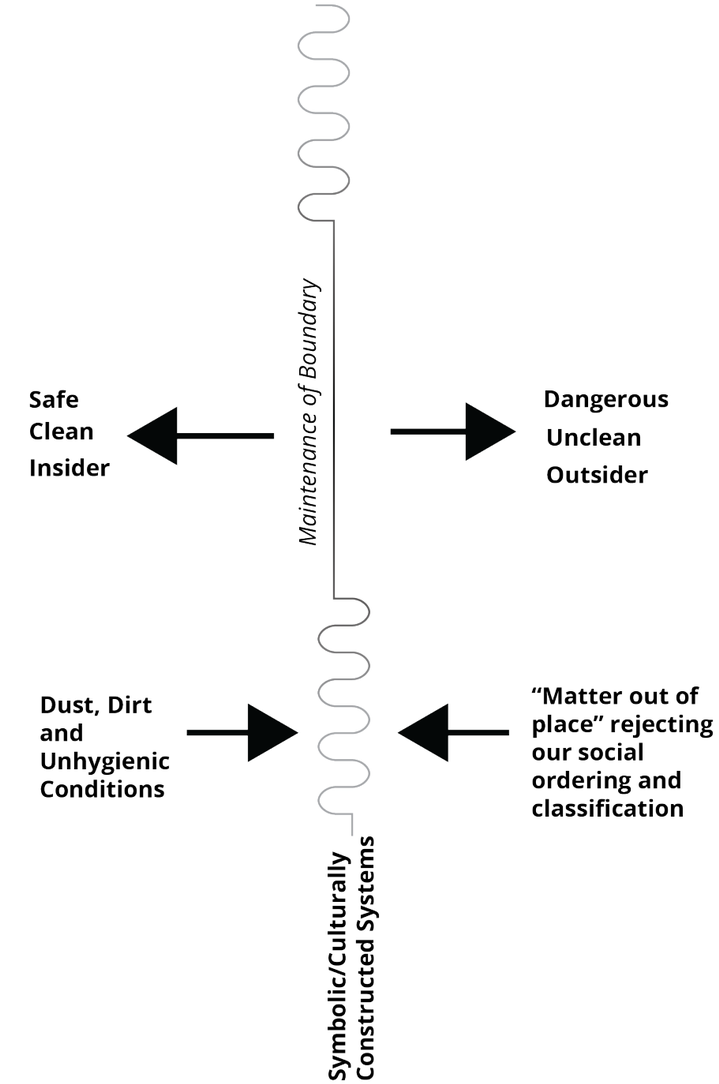

Fig. 2.2
Diagram showing how dust challenges fragility of social boundaries based on Mary Douglas
By Author

systemization and standardization.[26] It was exclusively the elite within public who influenced the scientific adaption of systems such as food production, transportation, fashion and art. As the adaption of science brought on a new secular authority the use of observing, experiments, quantification and measurement became central in standardizing reform. In analysing the standardization, Oakley looks at the imagery of dust within this period and the implications on the domestic.

The discord on microbes led to a powerful image; the housewife formed a parallel to that of the scientist in the laboratory. The visual of dust itself was a part of this narrative. Looking specifically at Sophronia Maria Elliott's *Household Bacteriology* (1905), Oakley analyzes how the visualization of dust became an important tool in understanding and addressing household dirt. Oakley highlights Elliott's use of the creation of a 'dust-garden,' a sort of home experiment to demonstrate the cultivation and dangers of dust.[27] In a lengthy process, Elliott instructed housewives how to grow dust using cultures from common household foods. Elliott would ask housewives to observe the color, smell, and even how different environmental conditions affected the dust garden. This visualization solidifies the concerns but also the role of the homemaker in protecting against this invisible but ever-present threat, as Elliott states, "The next time you are tempted to leave a piece of meat exposed remember the dust-garden and cover the meat with a cloth to keep out dust."[28]

Another theme explored in the literature is the intersection of identity, domesticity, and the maintenance of dust. As Hallett points out the naturalization of women into the role of domestic caregiver, tied women's identity to cleanliness, order, and virtue. Kathleen Anne McHugh adds to this in her analysis of the protagonist in the film *Central Character* (1997) in which she argues housekeeping's symbolic function becomes maintaining the liminal space of the home. Within this maintenance, women agent of semitic operation, as they navigate the boundary defying properties of dust and dirt. McHugh states:

> In the film, an amorphous protagonist – initially a housewife – is transformed as her voice and persona move from the emphatically organized environment of the kitchen to the organic profusion of the woods. The film sets up an ambiguous relation between its central character, her activities, and the locations through which she moves.[29]

26 Ann Oakley, *The Science of Housework*, 1st ed. (Policy Press, 2024), 44- 64.
27 Oakley, *The Science of Housework*, 52-53.
28 Oakley, *The Science of Housework*, 52.
29 Kathleen Anne McHugh, "The Metaphysics of Housework: Patricia Gruben's The Central Character," in *What is Architecture?* Ed. Andrew Ballantyne, (Routledge, 2003).

As McHughs observes, housework seeks to both preserve boundaries and distinctions, yet also equally suggests their fragility. Additionally, in drawing from Douglas, McHughs analyzes the dangerous position women are in, as to keep clean and separate from the dirt, the housewife herself risks getting dirty. This instability extends to the construction of the female gender and sexuality. McHughs states:

> Historically and culturally relegated to perform tasks that establish the distinctions between the natural and the cultural, women, generalized in the "feminine," come to represent extremes of both. "The feminine" therefore signifies conflicting polarities that articulate not an opposition to a male other but an enclosure, a parenthesis in which "he" figures as norm/neutral/neither.[30]

As Hallett concludes, questions of morality and cleanliness define the gendered engagement with dust. The presence and absence of dust carry questions of efficiency, hygiene, and femininity. As dust challenges the understanding of the domestic boundary, reform efforts such as domestic science publications begin to transform the home into a site of reform. The home becomes imbued with the new understandings of the germ and the gendered implications. In controlling the tiny specks of dust seen and unseen, women find themselves both in and out, dirty and clean, and constantly treading these dangerous in-betweens.

2.3 Dust and the Political Economy

In analyzing dust's presence within the political economy, current scholarship draws our attention to the labouring class. The association between the labouring class and the "dirty work," both in the informal and formal economy, fundamentally shapes many systemic inequalities seen today. Geographically speaking, dust as an analytical lens follows the labouring class within the political economy. The associations with dust and dirt are not singularly defined; rather, they arise from proximity within factories, homes, landscapes, and ecologies. Within the multifaceted context, we find that dust's migratory, visible, invisible, and other properties are central to the analysis.

Hallett looks at the agricultural industry and other industrial sectors which grew in the 19th century and the association between these classes and the presence of dust. He notes how this association contributed to the imagery and stigma of the 1930s phenomenon of "dust bowl refugees," a term used to describe mass migration caused by the collapse of the agricultural industry.[31] However, as he notes, this blanket term was dramatized in use

30 McHugh, "The Metaphysics of Housework: Patricia Gruben's The Central Character," 105.
31 Fine and Hallett, "Dust: A Study in Sociological Miniaturism," 7.

as a political tool to gain sympathy from Americans outside the region. The imagery of dust, as Hallett describes, was quite powerful and resulted in a body of scholarship that mischaracterized and maligned migrants and Indigenous cultures who were not destitute farmers or refugees.

In his geographical analysis, Hallett considers dusts' production and distribution spatially. As he points out, workplaces within the 19th century were believed to be susceptible to disease and illness as well as contribute to the surrounding decay of the environment. The degradation within this period was understood as the byproduct of industrialization. This association between the labourers and the polluted environment, Hallett argues, had systemic consequences still seen today. When examining studies on environmental racism, lower-income neighborhoods receive fewer protections from pollutants.[32] As "dust becomes the visual vocabulary for poverty," the presence of dust becomes tied to market values of homes, gentrification, and displacement.[33] As a result of the lack of protection, Hispanic and African-American neighborhoods find themselves dispositional adjacent to dumping grounds of dirt, dust, and other contaminants, and often require the need for community activism in addressing these conditions.

Another important aspect of the political economy evaluated through dust is the daily labour of brown and black women, migrants and refugees. Françoise Vergès analyzes the intersection of gender, waste and decolonization, looking at how the bodies of women of color serve an "racial capitalism" that rests upon a "economy of exhaustion".[34] Drawing parallels to dust's material properties, these women navigate and participate both formally and informally within the city they exist within and without, between private and public spaces, visible and invisible. Additionally, Vergès points out the way existing systems built on colonialism, capitalism and slavery contribute to the dirtiness and obstruct access to clean water, homes and food.

Within these various case studies, dust within the political economy distinctly calls the focus to the labouring class made up largely of Black, Brown, and immigrant women. It focuses not only on the association with dirt by virtue of the work but also on how this association has contributed to long-term harm. In these cases, dust is examined through its migratory properties, tracing the places it settles and showing how informal systems of labour also reproduce it. Dirt and dusty conditions in this way are not merely a byproduct but part of the structural fabric.

32 Fine and Hallett, "Dust: A Study in Sociological Miniaturism," 8.
33 Fine and Hallett, "Dust: A Study in Sociological Miniaturism," 8.
34 Françoise Vergès, "Capitalocene, waste, race, and gender," *e-flux journal* 100, (2019): 1-13.

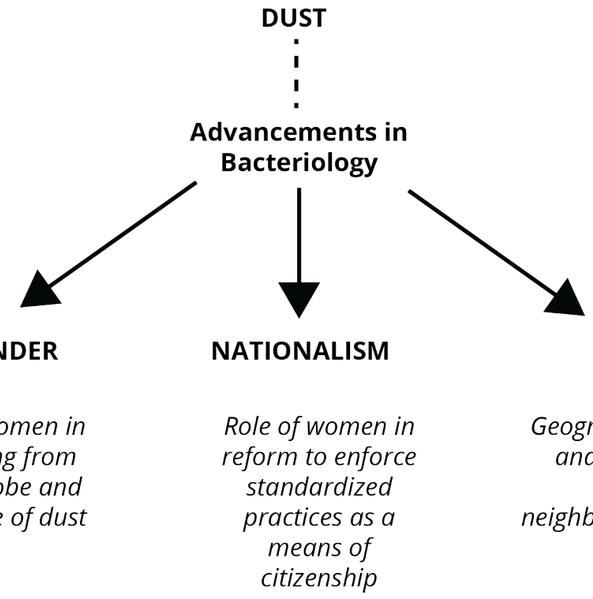

Fig. 2.3
Literature Review Summary
By Author

2.4 Dust and Nationalism

Intertwined with the analysis of the political economy, scholarship connecting nationalism shows that dust linked individuals with hygiene. This analysis links directly to the questions of immigrant and cleanliness within 19th century industrial cities in Canada and America. As Hallett points out many of the first accounts of this come from both secular and non-secular European documentation of North American cities which contrasted their standards. These European notions of cleanliness heavily influenced urban reform movements within North America.

Particularly, Hallett points to these values within the puritan and Protestant traditions of America the coincide with the rise of the middle-class. Cleanliness became intrinsically intertwined with citizenship. Accordingly, there was a rise of social work that sought to instruct and teach cleanliness. Importantly, as Hallett points out, while reformers often cited health-concerns as a means of intervention, there was a clear aesthetic aspect to the movement. The aesthetic of cleanliness and homogeneity becomes evident when looking at the rise in counter cultures within America and their embrace of dirt.

In the enforcement of cleanliness Oakley looks to the way in which women participated within the sanitary reform movement furthering nationalist values. The role of women within domestic upkeep stemmed from the belief that women were better suited to deal with microbes within the home, rather than men who sanitary inspection work focused more on urban spaces. Importantly this set the dynamic in which educated middle-class white women worked to enforce domestic sanitation within the working-class. Their vast influence can be seen in their participation in conferences and various publications.[35]

This can be seen in Oakley's analysis of American reformer Ellen Richards. Educated as a chemist, Richards was the first women student and then proceeded to be the first female staff of MIT. While she focused her career on teaching woman science, this intersected with problematic notion of euthenics and the home. This can be seen in her 1910 publication *Euthenics: The Science of Controllable Environment*. As she describes "euthenics means, the betterment of living conditions, through conscious endeavor, for the purpose of securing efficient human beings."[36] Euthenics essentially became a means of betterment through hygiene, targeting the growing immigrant population.

35 Ann Oakley, *The Science of Housework,* 1st ed. (Policy Press, 2024), 63.
36 Ann Oakley, *The Science of Housework*, 1st ed. (Policy Press, 2024), 63.

2.5 Reflection and Conclusion

In examining how the concept and construct of dust came to be entangled in notions of gender, political economy, and nation building, we see writers drawing on the properties, characteristics, and implications of dust in different ways. As demonstrated in the selected text, the development of bacteriology exacerbated the need to control dust as a means of protecting the domestic boundary. This is reflected in the standardization of approaches to microbial control that extended into housework practices. Housework not only protects the domestic sphere from dust but also shields it from notions of disorder, contamination, and deviance that threaten social order.

This literature review provides a conceptual framework informing the approach to dust as a lens in this thesis. Firstly, the literature demonstrates a need to analyze the spatial environment when interacting with dust. As seen in the analysis of the political economy, scholars consider the geographical implication and migration of dust and its connection to the labouring class. We see the accumulation of dust and dirt within certain neighborhoods is not an act of negligence by residents but rather suggest systemic inequalities. Additionally, Oakley's analysis of euthenics demonstrates how the control of specifically domestic environments was tied into larger notions of identity and nationalism. However, another avenue explored in this thesis through the analysis of grassroots engagement is how this deviation from standardization and hierarchy within reform lends itself to new approaches to maintenance within neighborhoods such as The Ward.

Another key insight informed by this literature review is the analysis of the imagery of dust. As demonstrated by Oakley's analysis of 'dust-gardens' and Hallett's analysis of 'dust-bowl refugees', the image of dust and its properties -visible, invisible, and cyclical nature- all inform housework practices. This thesis will continue to explore how these properties inform the standardization of housework within Toronto's reform movement, particularly when looking at sanitary police and municipal housekeepers who found that keeping up with the unhygienic conditions of The Ward required frequent visitation. Another consideration is how this image of dust was fended off by grassroots organizations and, rather, a more nuanced representation of the working class was presented.

Lastly, another facet of this thesis informed by the literature review is the gendered dynamics within reform. As Oakley demonstrates, women found agency as voices of authority in addressing domestic concerns of dust and dirt. This led to the dynamic of white middle-class women within cities in US and Canada entering the medical and scientific fields to enforce domestic standards onto mainly working class immigrant women. Through this pathway, cleanliness was used as a tool to instill nation building ideologies targeting the home specifically.

Chapter 3
The In(dust)rial City and Reform

3.1 Chapter Introduction

Dust's presence throughout humanity's existence has imbued it with rich cultural and metaphysical significance. In the Medieval era, dust was a macrocosm for Christian notions of divinity reflecting on the cosmos and the heavens. Similarly, the symbolism of dust was embraced by great thinkers throughout the Renaissance, such as Shakespeare, George Herbert and John Donne who explored its paradoxical qualities in their philosophical and literary works.[37] However, following the Industrial Revolution, dust becomes contentious; as questions of hygiene and urbanization reshaped cities, humanity entered a new relationship with dust.

The industrialization of urban centres diminished the previously romanticized sentiments surrounding dust and shifted the focus to its spatial ubiquity in daily life. As factories burned coal and produced goods, unprecedented amounts of dust entered the atmosphere, settling into every corner, nook, and cranny. In response, reformers began to question humanity's spatial relationship with dust and other unsanitary conditions. Driven by growing concerns over disease, medical theories began to inform engagements with dust and environmental health. These efforts sparked a rethinking of the spatial boundaries that dust persistently challenged and defied.

This chapter traces the rhetoric of dust within Toronto's reform movement and the broader Western industrial reform context, looking at how the evolution of medical theories shaped the understanding and treatment of dust. These theories contributed to the spatialized understanding of dust and dirt within urban reform. Additionally, these theories were used by reformers to link materiality with morality, contributing to the larger anxieties surrounding the growing immigrant presence in Toronto. Through the analysis of medical journals, reports, and newspapers, this chapter considers the evolving spatialized understanding of dust in both the urban and domestic realms as medical authority shaped urban reform.

37 Clare Neanon, "The Matter of Dust in Renaissance Literature" (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2020), 53.



Fig. 3.1
Toronto's skyline int he early 20th century

3.2 Contemporary Medical Theories on the Microbe

"The streets must be cleaned; the dust and dirt have become unbearable," declared an article published by *The Globe* in the summer of 1900, capturing the growing frustration with conditions in Toronto.[38] As the Western world entered an era of industrialization, cities became dirtier and dustier than ever before. One of the largest contributing factors was the rapid densification of cities, as the demand for labourers resulted in large-scale migration to urban centres.[39] Additionally, the establishment of industries such as textiles, breweries, and foundries further intensified these conditions. With the lack of adequate housing and sanitary infrastructure, open sewage, filth, and garbage became increasingly common in working class homes, leading to the spread of disease.[40] In response to these concerns, legislation was passed in virtually every industrial city, assigning governments—including medical reformers—the responsibility of managing urban sanitation and public health. Policies and initiatives undertaken by reformers sought to address the proximity of domestic spaces to disease-causing agents spread through dust, dirt, and other unsanitary conditions.

The growing emphasis on the microbe during this period resulted from significant scientific progress in understanding disease transmission.[41] Two main medical theories- miasma and germ theory- would be central in shaping reforms approach to the microbe.[42] Miasma theory developed from the Greek belief that "bad airs" or vapors could cause pestilences and fatal epidemics. As such, diseases were believed to stem from miasmas, such as stagnant water, decaying waste, rotting vegetation or molds, and invisible dust particles. Whereas, germ theory, developed by Robert Koch and Louis Pasteur in the late 1800s, identified specific bacteria, viruses, fungi, and protozoa as the actual causes of illness.

As previous scholars have pointed out, it's facile to try to differentiate the influence of miasma or germ theory on reform.[43] More importantly both contributed to the rise of medical figures within reform as well as

38 "Streets Must be Cleaned: The Dust and Dirt are Becoming Unbearable Where is the Blame?" *The Globe (1844-1936)*, June 27,1900. https://proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/streets-must-be-cleaned/docview/1354070334/se-2.

39 Simon Szreter, "Industrialization and Health," *British Medical Bulletin* 69 (2004): 75–86, https://doi.org/10.1093/bmb/ldh005

40 Sylvia N. Tesh, "Miasma and 'Social Factors' In Disease Causality: Lessons from the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* 20 (1995): 1001–24, https://doi.org/10.1215/03616878-20-4-1001.

41 Tesh, "Miasma and 'Social Factors' In Disease Causality: Lessons from the Nineteenth Century," 1005.

42 W. F Bynum and Roy Porter, *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine* (Routledge, 1993), chap.16, Perlego.

43 Nancy Tomes, "The Private Side of Public Health: Sanitary Science, Domestic Hygiene and the Germ Theory, 1870-1900," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 64, no.4 (1990): 509–39.

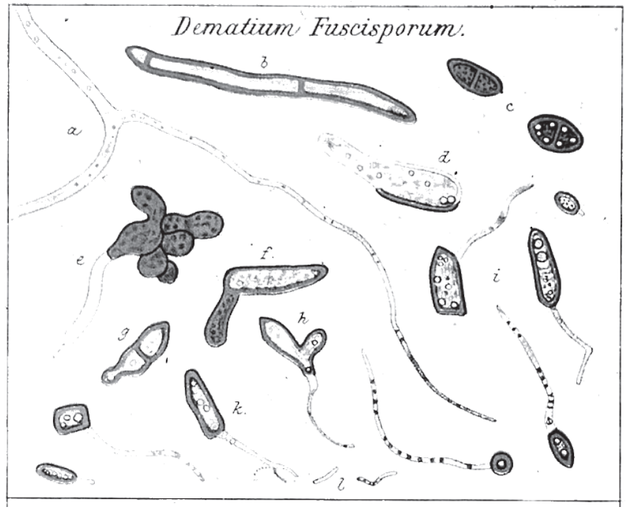

Fig. 3.2
Excerpt from Joseph Lister's A further contribution to the natural history of bacteria and the germ theory of fermentative changes
Drawing of viruses, fungi, and protozoa at the microscopic scale

established a relationship between the individual, environment and agency in disease control. As reformers incorporated medical and scientific advancements, disease prevention measures vacillated between cleaning these environmental dangers and focusing on protecting the individual from these hazards.[44] Both these approaches were largely focused on the domestic working class, in which unhygienic conditions seemed to be exacerbated, causing higher levels of disease than other parts of the city.

The concerns about dust for reformers were not limited to disease but extended to moral well-being. Early British reformers believed in the concept of "moral environmentalism," in which urban and spatial arrangements played a crucial part in the moral inclinations of individuals.[45] While seemingly contradictory, Mariana Valverde argues that these two practices were conceived together, in which the medical authority gave social reformers work credibility as they emphasized the role of moral regeneration in public health and urban reform.[46] This is captured in the work of British reformer Edwin Chadwick, known for his *Report on the Labouring Population in Britain* in 1842, which significantly transformed

44 Tesh, "Miasma and 'Social Factors' In Disease Causality: Lessons from the Nineteenth Century," 1005.

45 Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water*, 44-46.

46 Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water*, 44-46.

urban sanitation and public health practices.

Chadwick's work focused on documenting and investigating Britain's working class, presenting the correlation between poor living and working conditions with disease and morality. Chadwick highlighted the concern of the adverse environmental conditions to the working class. He observed the general unpaved and dirty streets which dust, smells and germs transfer to into the homes. Additionally, he noted that the working class partook largely in the "dusty trades" which exposed them to unsanitary conditions for long durations of the day. These conditions, particularly in the domestic sphere, along with disease, were believed to contribute to the moral decline of the working class. Chadwick states:

> But it became evident, in the progress of the inquiry, that several separate circumstances had each its separate moral as well as physical influence. Thus, tenements of inferior construction had manifestly an injurious operation on the moral as well as on the sanitary condition, independently of any overcrowding. For example, it appears to be matter of common observation, in the instance of migrant families of workpeople who are obliged to occupy inferior tenements, that their habits soon become "of a piece"' with the dwelling. [47]

Lack of morality constituted a variety of concerns posed by reformers, particularly tied to questions of individual character as a social threat.

As reform efforts centered on housing, reformers sought to strengthen the domestic boundary against dust and disease. Annmarie Adams provides an illustrative example of this in her analysis of Pidgin Teale's *Dangers to Health: A Pictorial Guide to Domestic Sanitary Defect*, where she links the development of architectural infrastructure such as plumbing, ventilation systems. and drainage systems to medical interventions that expel pollutants and protect the domestic sphere from urban miasmas.[48] An example of this novel and infrastructural approach in approaching dust is seen in fig. 3.2. Within middle-class Victorian houses, it became common to use various upholstery materials, remove elaborate decoration, and install tile around the house to help prevent the accumulation of dust in the home.[49]

Architecturally, the use of towers to literally separate the domestic from the dust of the city was widely promoted. For example, in his lecture 'Low-, medium-, or high-rise?' at the International Congress of Modern

47 Edwin Chadwick, *On an Inquiry into the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (W. Clowes and Sons, Stamford Street,1842), 127.
48 AnnMarie Adams, "Miasmatical fears," in Domesticity Under Siege: Threatened Spaces of the Modern Home, ed. Mark Taylor , Georgina Downey and Terry Meade (Bloomsbury, 2022),19. http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350166141.ch-1.
49 Adams, "Miasmatical fears," 27.

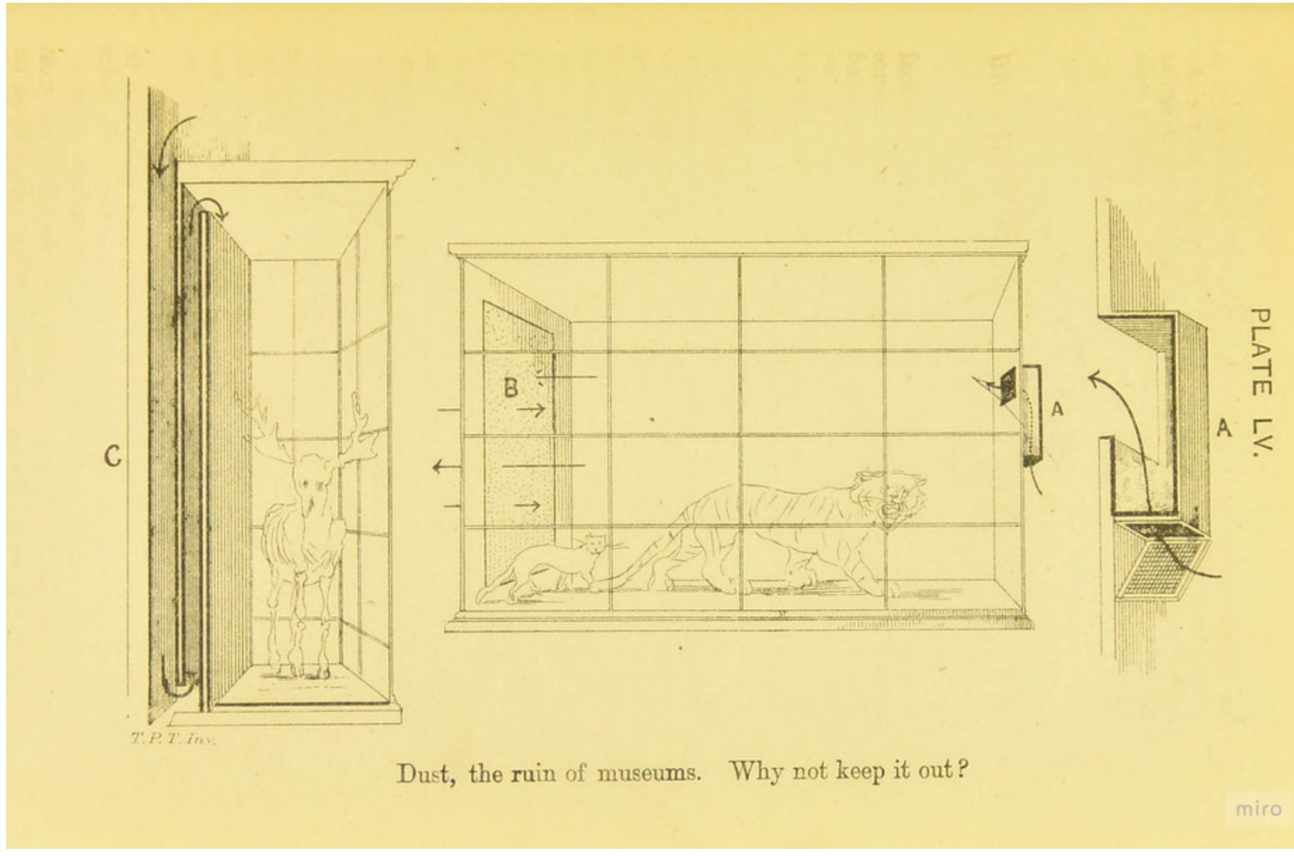

Fig. 3.3
Excerpt from Pidgin Teale's Dangers to Health: A Pictorial Guide to Domestic Sanitary Defect

Architecture, Walter Gropius raised doubt as to whether or not single family homes adequately provided the hygienic conditions of light, and clean air.[50] He believed skyscrapers provided a more optimal arrangement, creating distance from unpaved roads which he observed as a source of dust.[51] Le Corbusier would share in this vision as depicted in his writings in *Towards a New Architecture* where he contrasts his Paris proposal to that of industrial cities. He presents in section how the towers are more spatially efficient, providing space in cities and literally elevating the domestic from "dust, smells, and noises" that he depicts to engulf the low-rise dense fabric of working class neighbourhoods.[52]

3.3 Dust in The Ward

Like other Western cities, The Ward's dusty conditions were scrutinized by reformers. In recognizing similar health concerns, Toronto would rely on medical professionals to spearhead reform efforts. Toronto's first four medical officers—Dr. William Canniff, Norman Allen, Charles Sheard, and Charles Hastings—emerged as key leaders, combining their medical knowledge with broader social reform efforts throughout the city's development.[53] Notably, all four of the medical officers completed their post-graduate studies in London and were well connected to the reform efforts of their British counterparts.[54]

In addressing the growing unsanitary conditions in Toronto, both Caniff and Hastings, would draw from the British understanding of miasmas and attempt to distance the domestic boundary from pollutants.[55] For example, under Caniff, the city extensively surveyed the domestic conditions of various residents' across Toronto looking at water sources, drainage arrangements and waste disposal practices.[56] He would proceed to use these findings to persuade members of the local board of health and other citizens to support improvements in Toronto's water supply, sewage and garbage collection systems.[57] Another example was Hasting's advocacy of residential towers to distance the domestic from dust and even suggested specific by-laws. He argued for a ratio that allows for towers to both effectively protect the interior from dust, but also not block sunlight and air from the streets as "sunlight on the dust and dirt of the street, [which] is invaluable in destroying disease-producing germs.[58]" Another common

50 Anselm Wagner, "The Bauhuas and the Vacuum Cleaner," in Dust and Data" in *Traces of the Bauhaus Across 100 Years,* ed. Ines Weizman (Spector Books, 2020), 44-45.
51 Wagner, "The Bauhuas and the Vacuum Cleaner,"44-45.
52 Le Corbusier and Frederick Etchells, Towards a New Architecture: From the French by Frederick Etchells (Architectural Press, 1946), 56.
53 MacDougall, *Activists and Advocates,* 11.
54 MacDougall, *Activists and Advocates,*11.
55 MacDougall, *Activists and Advocates,*11.
56 MacDougall, *Activists and Advocates,* 71.
57 MacDougall, *Activists and Advocates,* 71.
58 "Skyscrapers Help the Disease Germs." 1912., Jan 05*The Globe (1844-1936)*, 7.

practice that sought to control urban dust was street watering, street sweeping, and on occasion boarding of school fields and construction sites to prevent dust from entering the atmosphere.

While dust operates indiscriminately, reformers believed that certain conditions of housing in The Ward particularly exacerbated its accumulation within domestic spaces. The Report of the Lieutenant-Governor Committee on Housing Conditions in Toronto observed that the adjacency of working class neighborhoods as industrial activities would create a visibly dusty and smoke-filled environment within the neighborhood.[59] Caniff recognized the "dusty trades" as a significant cause of premature death, advocating for the implementation of ventilation systems and other provisions to improve factory conditions.[60] Similar to Chadwick, there was the concern of the transferring of noxious dust from the workplace to workers' homes, posing severe health risks to their families and communities.

An additional concern was the vulnerability of workers homes, as observed by Hasting in his 1917 report *Investigation of Slum Conditions,* which looked specifically at Cabbagetown and The Ward. In looking at the adjacent streets and backyards (as seen in fig. 3.4) of the houses which were known to accumulate filth, debris, rotten food, and defecation, he raised the concern that dust from the unpaved surroundings would carry these germs into the interior of the homes.[61] The state of disrepair in the majority of homes only intensified these concerns. Another issue that Hastings commented on was the overcrowding in slum neighborhoods, which created the conditions where individuals or even whole families slept in windowless rooms and or make-shift rear-houses. This condition dubbed as dark-rooms were spaces in which fresh-air and sunlight could not be reached.[62] Much of this was fueled by concern that tuberculosis would thrive in the unventilated and dusty conditions commonly found in working class dwellings.

It was not uncommon for reformers to associate the informal urbanism and the unmaintained conditions of working class homes as an indication of immigrant habit. Some reformers believed that these habits were perhaps carried from immigrants' home countries and were incompatible with

https://proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/sky-scrapers-help-disease-germs/docview/1350562535/se-2.
59 Report of the Lieutenant-Governor's Committee on Housing Conditions in Toronto, *1934*, 26.
60 Heather MacDougall, "Public Health in Toronto's Municipal Politics: The Canniff Years, 1883–1890," Bulletin of the History of Medicine 55, no. 2 (1981): 186–202.
61 Hastings, Charles John, *Report of the Medical Health Officer Dealing with the Recent Investigation of Slum Conditions in Toronto, Embodying Recommendations for the Amelioration of the Same*, 1911. Canadiana, https://n2t.net/ark:/69429/m0sq8qb9w46h,
62 Hastings, Charles John, *Report of the Medical Health Officer Dealing with the Recent Investigation of Slum Conditions in Toronto, Embodying Recommendations for the Amelioration of the Same*, 1911. Canadiana, https://n2t.net/ark:/69429/m0sq8qb9w46h,

those of their British counterparts. To Hastings, this would justify the need for intervention as he states:

> ...but their whole environment has been suddenly changed, and their ideas of sanitation are not ours...every effort is being made to familiarize our new citizen with our sanitary standards, and to notify them of our requirements and then see they are reasonably carried out.[63]

Another widely held belief among reformers was that the repetitive exposure to dust and dirty conditions contributed to moral decay of the immigrant working-class. In many cases it was believed these poor housework habits had long-term consequences as captured in the Lieutenant-Governor Committee on Housing Conditions:

> There is a widespread belief that people who are now occupying undesirable dwelling may not at once be suitable tenants of the new dwellings which are to replace them. They may be demoralized it is claimed, by long habitation to dirt and sordid surroundings.[64]

The need to address housework practices in The Ward and, subsequently, the habits of the working class was required as a means of protecting the city from the spread of disease and vices alike.

This fear of the "boiling over" of the conditions of The Ward into more respectable parts of the city was captured in the Bureau of Municipal Research report *What is The Ward Going to Do with Toronto?*[65] Completed with the cooperation of public health and other local services, with the neighborhood, the report was intended to be an intensive study that would illuminate citizens on the often unseen conditions of The Ward. Additionally, it sought to communicate the necessity of preventing the spread of these conditions into other parts of the city. The report features several images and map of The Ward highlighting the locations and conditions of "dirty premises" (as seen in fig. 3.6). The use of maps highlighting the density of feeblemindedness and crime within The Ward underscores concerns not only about physical unsanitary conditions but also about the larger social and moral anxieties of reformers.

3.4 Conclusion

63 Hastings, Charles John, *Report of the Medical Health Officer Dealing with the Recent Investigation of Slum Conditions in Toronto, Embodying Recommendations for the Amelioration of the Same*, 1911. Canadiana, https://n2t.net/ark:/69429/m0sq8qb9w46h,

64 Report of the Lieutenant-Governors Committee on Housing Conditions in Toronto *1934*, 108.

65 *What is "the Ward" going to do with Toronto?: A Report on Undesirable Living Conditions in One Section of the City of Toronto*, Toronto: Bureau of Municipal Research, 1918. Canadiana, https://n2t.net/ark:/69429/m09s1kh0jg6s



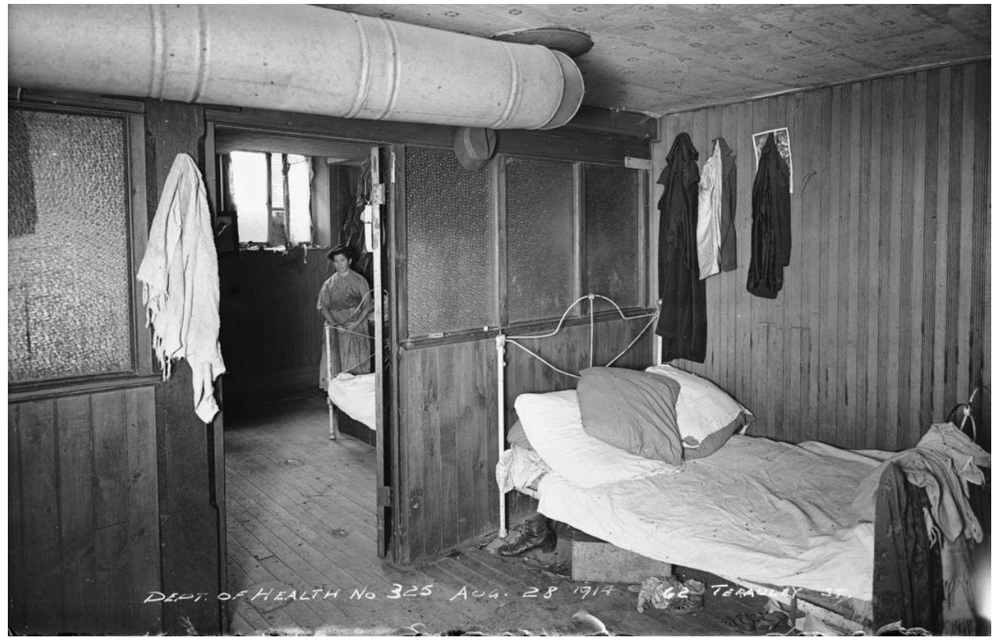

Fig. 3.4(Top) & 3.5(Bottom)
Images of exterior and interior of homes in The Ward

In tracing the evolving rhetoric surrounding dust within Toronto's reform movement, we see how emerging medical theories reshaped the spatial understanding of dust. No longer symbolic of divinity or imbued with metaphorical significance, dust contendingly occupied factories, the air, and the domestic sphere of the immigrant working class. Key public health figures would continually relate the material conditions of immigrants to morality, reflecting wider anxieties about urbanization, immigration, and social order.

The concerns of dust led reformers to observe the fragility of the domestic boundary. From the use of ventilation systems, reducing ornament, selective materiality, and even tower typology, the goal to separate from the dust was evident. The concerns of dust were not merely limited to disease but also to morality, specifically of the working class. Being surrounded by harmful miasmas was believed cause moral degeneracy. Within Toronto, these were perpetuated as an issue of the immigrant habit of observing unsanitary domestic conditions such as dark rooms, rear houses, and other unsanitary conditions. Through surveying, photography, and other methods, reformers furthered the association between immigrant practices and their environment.

Many reformers believed that these conditions were a consequence of a level of ignorance and further perpetuated bias of the immigrant working-class. The inability to meet Canadian standards of hygiene posed a risk to the Anglo-Saxon community of Toronto, fear mongering the spread of diseases and vices alike. Ultimately, dust was more than a mere nuisance or unhygienic conditions; treading between- progress and pollution, order and disorder, inclusion and exclusion- the need to control dust reveals larger tensions in the evolving fabric of Toronto.

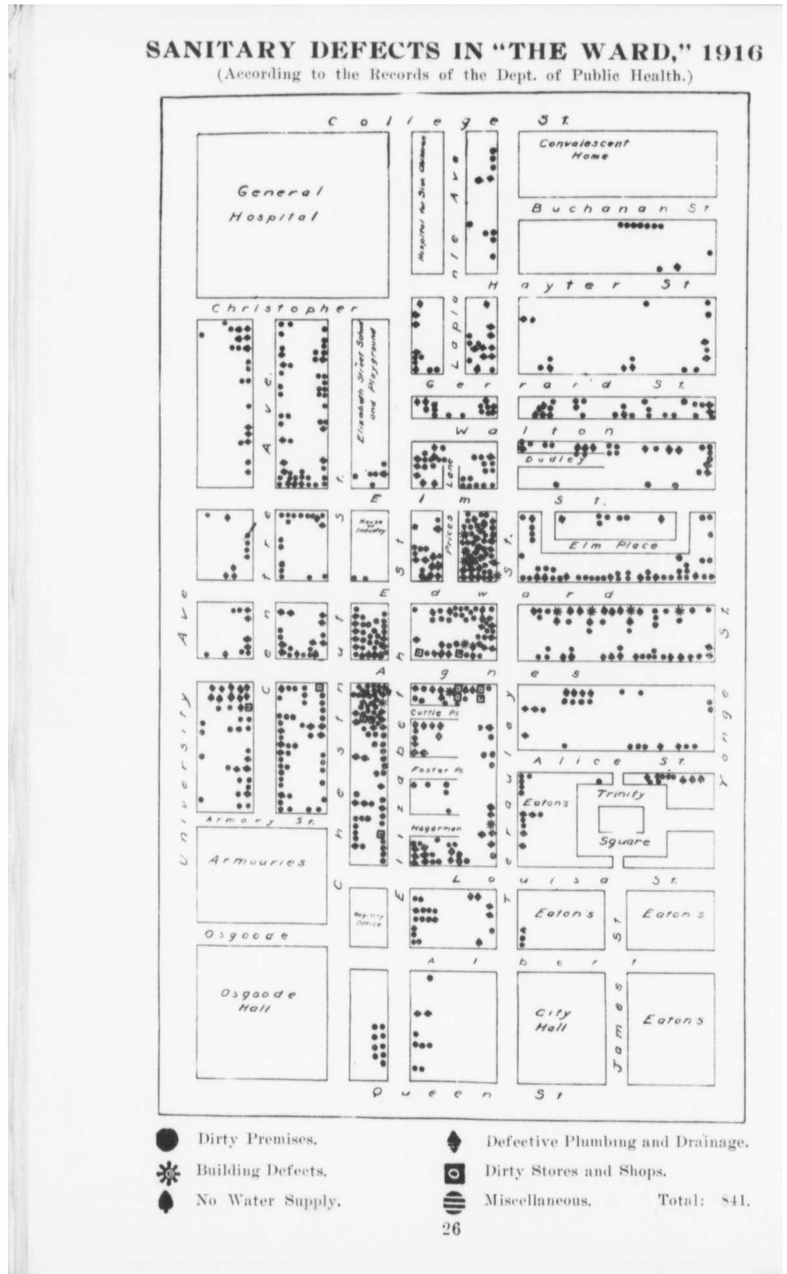

Fig. 3.6
Excerpt from What is "the Ward" going to do with Toronto?: A Report on Undesirable Living Conditions in One Section of the City of Toronto

Chapter 4
Public Health: Nation Building and Housework

4.1 Chapter Introduction

In addressing the dusty, dirty, and unsanitary conditions of homes in The Ward, public health undertook efforts to promote housekeeping standards through leaflets, bulletins and home visits. However, this advice was far from neutral; rather, it was closely tied to Canada's broader settler-colonial goals. For the immigrant residents of The Ward, increasing knowledge of domestic science became part of their assimilation and path to citizenship. While domestic science encompasses domestic tasks beyond just housework and elimination of dust—such as childcare, sewing, and nutrition—its engagement with dust, when analyzed in the context of reform, reveals how domestic interiors were mean to lead to reform through their associations with habit, gender and class.

In engaging with the cyclical and inevitable nature of dust, domestic science texts began to introduce standardized housekeeping methods. In standardizing housework, reformers sought to instill "Canadian" standards of cleanliness and hygiene. By imposing these standards, public health reformers undermined the agency and expertise of immigrant women regarding their domestic practices. They also neglected the larger structural issues contributing to the housing crisis by focusing on blaming the individual. By prescribing daily schedules for tasks like sweeping, dusting, and mopping, and by issuing detailed housekeeping instructions, reform organizations increasingly scrutinized conditions such as dark rooms, poor ventilation, and other non-standard domestic arrangements—using these as grounds to challenge the citizenship and belonging of immigrant residents and Indigenous populations.

This chapter explores the dissemination of domestic science practices by public health authorities targeting The Ward and other immigrant communities in Toronto. Looking specifically at the work of the sanitary inspectors, municipal housekeepers and the publication of the *Little Blue Book Series*, this chapter explores their significance in nation building and citizenship. As maintenance of the home and dust became conflated with maintenance of the individual, housework becomes a means of citizen building. This chapter specifically examines how standardization embodied broader nation building values such as efficiency, order, and discipline, as

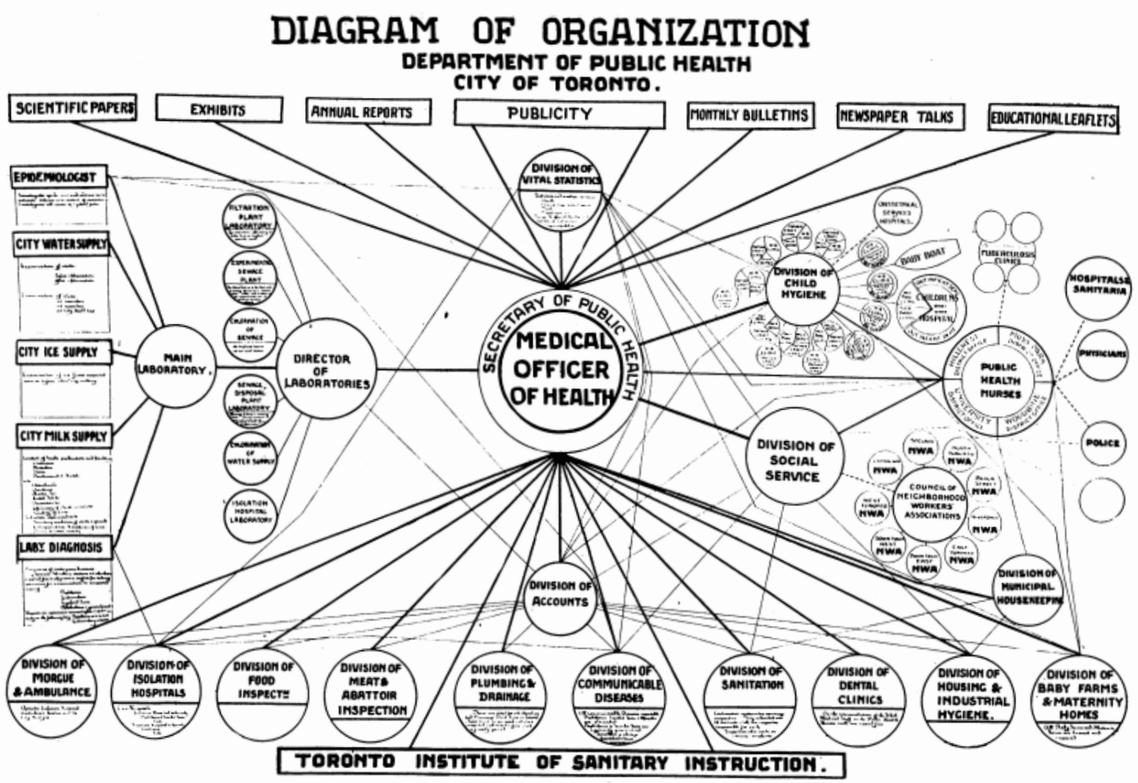

Fig. 4.1
Diagram of Organization of Department of Public Health, City of Toronto

reflected in the rhetoric of dust management found both in the *Little Blue Book Series* and the wider domestic science discourse.

4.2 Nation building vs. the Slum

While the initial concern over poor housing conditions in industrial cities were prompted by the intensification of disease, this concern evolved beyond the spread of immorality, questions of poverty and threats to the integrity of Toronto's new settler landscape vision. As such public health scope in housing reform evolved to address the growing concerns over citizenship in immigrant communities. As Sean Purdy points out, much of the development of housing policies within this period attempted to imbed national building values to transform the immigrant and indigenous population into Canadian 'citizens' or 'Canadinize' them.[66] Rehabilitation efforts sought to instill values of efficiency, discipline, and conformity to gender roles, with the ultimate aim of molding immigrants and Indigenous peoples into productive, reliable labourers who could contribute to the emerging capitalist economy.

This expanded agenda was conceptualized by Charles Hastings in a speech addressed to the American Public Health Association in March 1919. Hastings, reflecting on the notion of democracy within the context of World War I, states that true democracy is premised on "the development and maintenance of a sound mind in a sound body" for every citizen.[67] He extended the role of public health beyond disease prevention stating:

> However, even if all preventable diseases were controlled, and their control will require much more intensive work than has been done in the past, we would then be doing but a fraction of the work of Public Health Administration as we now see it, inasmuch as it means the development of a fitter race, the conservation of manpower. Therefore, Departments of Public Health are essentially nation building .[68]

In moving past preventative medicine, Hastings defines public health's role as a nationalist discourse in terms of the development and maintenance of healthy, able-bodied, and minded citizens. Within the context of World War I, the development of citizenship was a means of protecting Western sovereignty as well as playing a larger role within the industrial economy.

The Ward's unhygienic domestic conditions stood as the antithesis of

66 Sean Purdy, "Building Homes, Building Citizens: Housing Reform and Nation Formation in Canada, 1900–20," The Canadian Historical Review 79, no. 3 (1998): 492–523, https://doi.org/10.3138/CHR.79.3.492.

67 Charles J. Hastings, "Democracy and Public Health Administration," The Public Health Journal 10, no. 3 (1919): 97–112, http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/stable/41975703.

68 Hastings, "Democracy and Public Health Administration," 97.





Fig. 4.2 (Top) & Fig. 4.3 (Bottom)
Images of inside homes of The Ward

a ‘Canadian home’ and were seen to translate into the production of individuals unfit for citizenship. Concerns over the informal urbanism and the congestion of immigrants within Toronto’s inner city raised fears of civil unrest—even the possibility of a Bolshevik uprising.[69] Moreover, reformers believed pervasive exposure to unhygienic conditions would breed deviant behavior and ultimately undermine the working class’s ability to contribute productively and reliably to the economy.[70] Hastings’ colleague, J. S Schoales, the Chief of the Division of Housing and Industrial Hygiene, Department of Public Health who was involved in various initiatives in The Ward, captures the perceived effects of the slums on citizenship stating:

> The slum is the mother of disease. There is in face more pity for the slum child who lived than the slum child who dies. When a baby dies, the nation loses a prospective citizen, but in every slum child who lives a possible criminal. Crime and disease, defectiveness and delinquency are traced to the slum. The slum is the enemy of the home, and the home is the key to good citizenship.[71]

It was clearly understood by reformers that home was the site of social reproduction and as Hasting states the “retaining of the sacredness and significance of our homes depends on the future of our municipality and our nation.”[72] Untidy homes or those that challenged domestic conventions (fig. 4.2 and 4.3) as well as overcrowding (fig. 4.4 and 4.5) were viewed as threats to the nation. In confronting these poor housing conditions, while reformers advocated for better affordable housing, construction of social housing projects would only begin in the mid 1930s. Prior to that, housework was viewed as the most practical, feasible, and actionable way to address the unmaintained conditions of housing that posed a real threat to the health of the nation.

4.3 The Role of Women in Nation building

In Toronto, middle-class women played an essential role in bringing attention to and addressing the concerns of working class households. Maternal feminism established women as “social housekeepers,” naturally seen as best qualified to address the material and moral concerns of the domestic sphere.[73] Women’s organizations, temperance societies, and female doctors shared intersecting interests in maternal, infant, and child

69 See for example: Fraser, Thomas M., 1919, “Is Bolshevism Brewing in Canada?” Macleans, January 1, p. 1-25.
70 Purdy, “Building Homes, Building Citizens,” 492-523.
71 J. S. Schoales, “Importance of Housing and Lodging-House Inspection,” The Public Health Journal 7, no. 11 (1916): 470–80, http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/stable/41996920.
72 City of Toronto, Minutes of the City Council, Report of the Board of Health 1918, Appendix A, 711. as cited in Purdy, “Building Homes, Building Citizens,” 492-523.
73 Purdy, “Building Homes, Building Citizens,” 492-523.

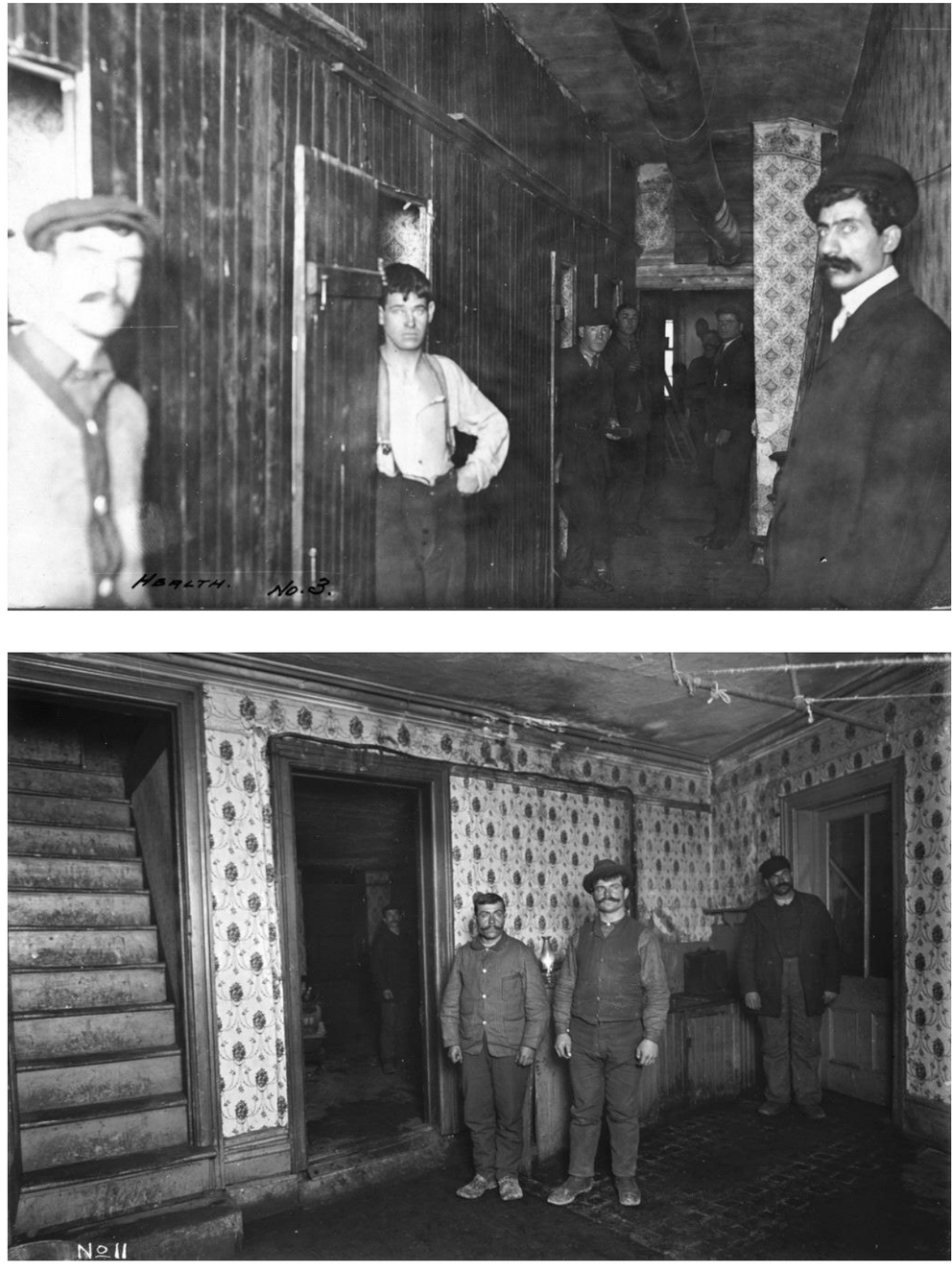

Fig. 4.4 (Top) & Fig. 4.5 (Bottom)
Images of inside homes of The Ward

welfare. As the home was understood to be a site of social reproduction, these groups often focused their efforts on educating immigrant women.

Importantly, medical theories such as miasma and germ theory labeled women as the protectors against disease—especially from invisible germs found in dust, dirt, and filth. The growing authority of the medical profession believed that behavioral changes were needed to better address these conditions, changes which immigrants seemed either unable or unwilling to make. For many of these women's groups, there was a perceived need for state intervention within these homes to protect both the child and the nation. Increasingly, positions for nurses and other female-specific roles were created to lend this authority over immigrant women, who were believed to need instruction in proper domestic practices in order to better protect the home.

4.4 Sanitary Inspector and Municipal Housekeepers

One of the best examples of the use of housework as a tool for nation building within Toronto's reform movement was the employment of sanitary inspectors and municipal housekeepers. By the end of the nineteenth century, virtually all industrial cities public health offices employed sanitary inspectors or police to investigate and abate sanitary nuisances. During visitations to homes, shops, farms, milk depots, and butchers, sanitary inspectors informed owners or tenants of the complaints made against them and made them aware of their individual responsibility in protecting public health.[74] Within Toronto the educational function of the inspectors was enforced by the relevant sections of the provincial Public Health Act or city by-laws.[75]

In 1883, William Caniff became the first Medical Officer of Health to implement the use of sanitary police in which the role was extended to the surveying and understanding Toronto's sanitation issues holistically. Following the inspection of 5,181 premises, Caniff documented that sanitary police found 1,207 lacked drainage systems, 3,374 had privies, 145 had "no water in use," 655 depended on wells, and 842 used cisterns.[76] His observations would be used to better advocate for improvements to Torontos water supply and sewerage systems.

While Hastings continued the use of sanitary police to address complaints from Toronto's residents—now more commonly termed sanitary inspectors under his administration—he also began setting routes and schedules making inspections a regular occurrence in working class neighbourhoods. In the development of his 1911, *Report on Slum Conditions in Toronto*, Hastings began increasing the presence of inspectors within The

74 MacDougall, Activists and Advocates, 70.
75 MacDougall, Activists and Advocates, 70.
76 MacDougall, Activists and Advocates, 71.



Fig. 4.6
Image of Woman Public Health Employee Conducting Home Visit

Ward and other working class neighborhoods in which the unmaintained conditions were increasingly observed. As detailed in an article from *The Globe* titled "Health Officer Starts Cleaning-up Campaign," Hastings increased his staff to twenty-five inspectors who focused on the "densely populated portions" of the city inspecting of "backyards, alleyways, debris, refuse, garbage and all filth" that was present in these homes.[77] Notably, there was persistent follow up by inspectors as an attempt to rectify these sanitary concerns, which was seen as essential in the upkeeping of the dusty, dirty and neglected conditions. Hasting states:

> In order to keep these districts reasonably clean requires *frequent and thorough re-inspection,* and appropriate for thus purpose will no doubt repay the City many times over, as such actions will materially dimmish disease and remove many breeding places of flies and fever: will protect the City from nuisance and maintenance a better standard of health and comfort.[78]

While initial sanitary inspectors were men, as public health emphasized the need for better housekeeping practices, there was growing advocacy for the employment of women inspectors. Ethel Hurlbatt, known for promoting the professionalization of women, saw this as an opportunity and detailed the suitability of women for sanitary inspector roles in her article *Work for Women as Sanitary Inspectors*. Hurlbatt argued that the absence of women inspectors undermined sanitary enforcement, since information would be more effectively received when delivered by a woman, sharing the testimony "If we must 'ave somebody a-ferreting in our dustbins and backyards we'd rather 'ave a lady and her a nice young lady, too!"[79] This sentiment was mirrored by middleclass women's organizations, which actively petitioned for stronger enforcement of sanitary bylaws in The Ward, viewing immigrant women's ignorance of housekeeping practices as the primary cause of unmaintained conditions.[80]

Hastings seemed to agree with the opinion of these women. Following the publication of his 1911 report on slum conditions, he created the new role of municipal housekeeper within the Division of Housing and

77 "Health Officer Starts Clean-Up Campaign: Twenty-Five Inspectors to Start an Investigation this Week." 1911., Apr 17*The Globe (1844-1936)*, 7. https://proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/health-officer-starts-oleaning-up-campaign/docview/1351573695/se-2.

78 Hastings, Charles John, *Report of the Medical Health Officer Dealing with the Recent Investigation of Slum Conditions in Toronto, Embodying Recommendations for the Amelioration of the Same*, 1911, pg. 18 Canadiana, https://n2t.net/ark:/69429/m0sq8qb9w46h,

79 Ethel Hurlbatt, "Work for Women as Sanitary Inspectors," The Public Health Journal 3, no. 4 (1912): 172–75, http://www.jstor.org/stable/45245951.

80 "Women Urge Need for Action." 1909., Dec 01*The Globe (1844-1936)*, 8. https://proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/women-urge-need-action/docview/1354297781/se-2.

Industrial Hygiene. Municipal housekeepers were women inspectors who would specifically visit immigrant women of The Ward and other working class neighborhoods to teach "Canadian" notions of housework and maintenance. The was a clear emphasis on the educational aspect of a municipal housekeeper's role as Hastings describes them as "sanitary instructors instead of inspectors."[81] Hasting originally hired only two women as municipal housekeepers, but after observing the need for more assistance and growing success, he increased the number to four by 1914.[82]

Reports of municipal housekeepers and sanitary inspectors reinforced misconception that immigrants' poor domestic habits were to blame for unsanitary conditions. These associations solidify the belief that reform of domestic habits to 'Canadian' standards was essential, as Hasting states:

> It is questionable if the placing of these people in new clean homes would materially decrease our death rates, or improve social conditions, unless their method of living were changed, as I am afraid 'that the sow that was washed; would soon return to her wallowing in the mire. Thus, essential is the work of the municipal housekeeper.[83]

With such concerns over the habits of immigrants, municipal housekeepers' inspection of homes was fittingly intrusive, reaching into the most private aspects of daily domestic life.

Some insights to the nature of these inspections are provided by municipal housekeeper Edith Hoban, who shares her experience in a series of articles in the Globe. In walking through The Ward, Hoban highlights her over ten years' experience of conducting daily visits in The Ward remarking the general improvements throughout the years. In entering and accessing the interiors cleanliness Hoban details her observations of private and culturally distinct practices they encountered in immigrant households.[84] For example, she enters a Chinese home, observes the preparation of bean cakes, and passes similar remarks while watching two Jewish women defeather chickens prepared by a Rabbi. Haban does not fail to pass some level of judgment as she tells The Globe about the extensive overcrowding of Chinese dwellings and the filthy conditions of the yard after a previous chicken slaughter.

81 Report of Medical Officer 1914 pg. 11

82 Report of Medical Officer 1914 pg. 11

83 Toronto, Department of Public Health, *Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the Month of December 1913,* p. 2.

84 "Hygiene Inspector Sees Novel Sight on Trips to "Ward": Ms. Edith Hoban's Word is Law, and 'Clean-Up' Follows Visits Landlord Get Orders." 1924., May 17,*The Globe (1844-1936)*, 16. https://proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/hygiene-inspector-sees-novel-sights-on-trips-ward/docview/1316191694/se-2.

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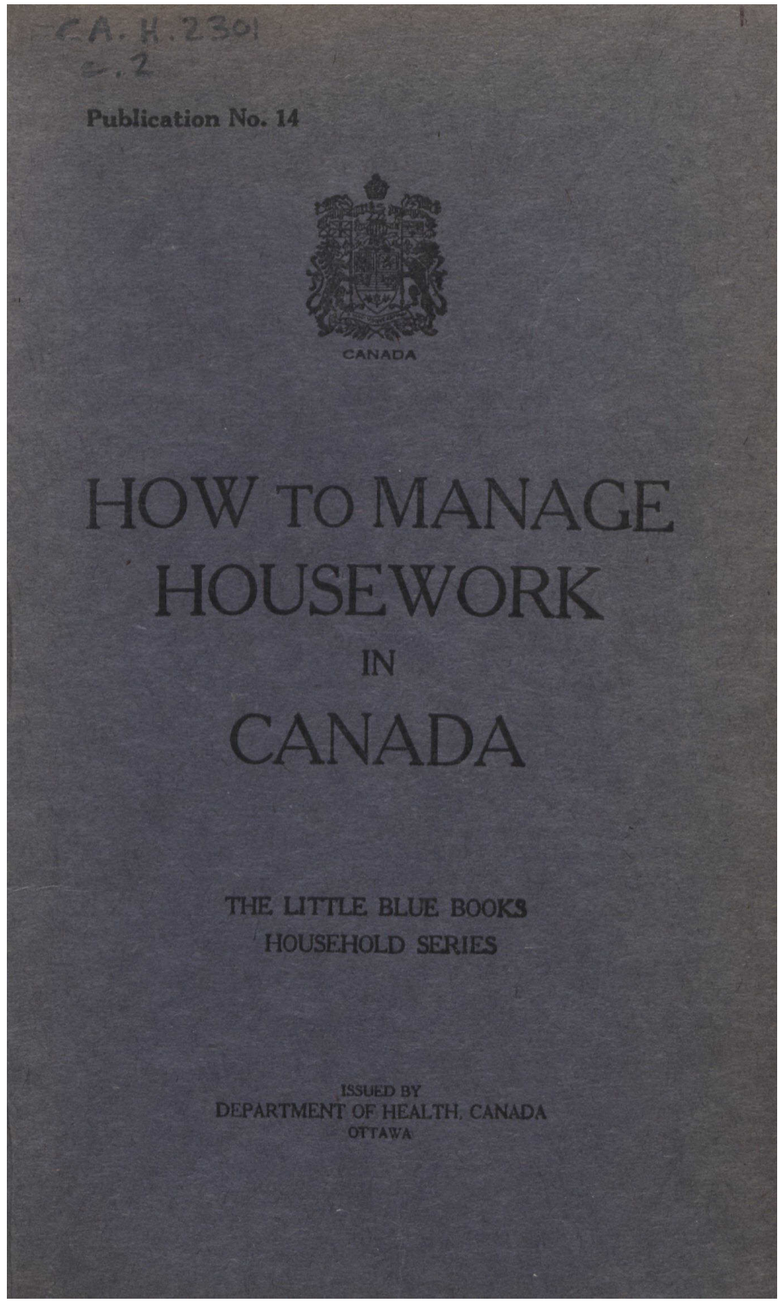

Fig. 4.7
Cover of How to Manage Housework In Canada from the Little Blue Book Series

4.5 MacMurchy and the *Little Blue Book Series*

Another example of the dissemination of domestic science in public health nation building efforts is Dr. Helen MacMurchy's *Little Blue Book Series*. MacMurchy, was a close colleague to Hastings and heavily involved in public health efforts in working class neighborhoods with notable ties to Toronto's Women's Branch of the Immigration and Colonization Department and held various roles such as Inspector of the Feebleminded and Chief of the Child Welfare Division. MacMurchy was far less sympathetic to the social conditions that contributed to the unsanitary environment of working class housing and instead tended to view these conditions as a personal failing, often placing the blame on the mothers for poor domestic maintenance. She translated this sentiment as she popularized discourse on the quasi-medical designation 'feeblemindedness.'

To MacMurchy and other medical professionals, 'feeblemindedness' became an expansive and flexible term embodying the intersections of concerns over changing morality, racial and gendered dynamics in cities during the early twentieth century.[85] As an open eugenicist, MacMurchy's primary concern was the growing presence of individuals, particularly mothers and children who were deemed to be feebleminded and a threat to the 'Canadian' race. Considered an expert in her field, in between 1908-1912 MacMurchy was commissioned to perform several censes of the number of feebleminded individuals in Ontario and subsequently develop a treatment for this "class of people."[86] Within her report she presented numerous case studies in which she evaluates their feeblemindedness based on financial standing, the level of maintenance of the home and moral shortcoming.

By wielding housekeeping as a means of reform, MacMurchy published the *Little Blue Book Series*, which were distributed to women in The Ward and to other immigrant communities in Toronto. The Little Blue Booklets published in 1920 were commissioned by the Dominion Council; these booklets were an original Canadian publication, providing prescriptive guidelines for housekeeping and childcare, reframing maintenance as both a hygienic and moral responsibility. At first glance, the booklets themselves are rudimentary documents, unexceptional in content. While these booklets mirror the rhetoric of other Public Health domestic science publications from the US and the UK, when analyzed in the context of Canada's changing demographic and nationalist goals they are transformed into tools of nation building and colonial documents.

85 Natalie Spagnuolo, "Defining Dependency, Constructing Curability: The Deportation of 'Feebleminded' Patients from the Toronto Asylum, 1920–1925," Histoire sociale / Social History 49 (98): 125–54, https://doi.org/10.1353/his.2016.0018.

86 Hodgins, Frank Egerton, *Report on the care and control of the Mentally Defective and Feeble-minded in Ontario*, 1919, Canadiana, https://n2t.net/ark:/69429/m0m61bk17k8c.

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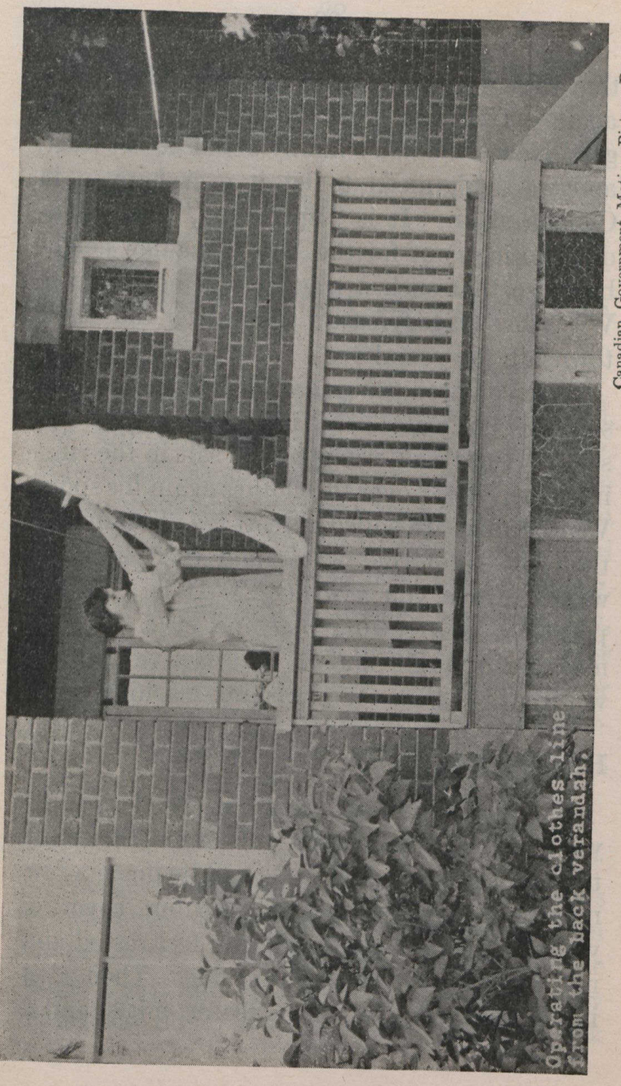

Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau, Ottawa.

Operating the clothes line from the back verandah.



With the cover down the kitchen washtub makes a handy table.

Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau. Ottawa.

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Fig. 4.8
Collage of Images from How to Manage Housework In Canada

MacMurchy more directly outlines these concerns in relation to the growing unhygienic conditions in Toronto in her series of Infant Mortality Reports. Similar to her colleagues, MacMurchy links the increased infant mortality of neighbourhoods like The Ward to the unhygienic conditions of the home. Her report targets homemakers, placing responsibility for maintaining sanitary environments solely on mothers, stating "The mother is the only one who can save the baby … The mother is always fighting against dirt. Dust and dirt and flies—these are the things that the good housekeeper wages war against."[87]

MacMurchy, throughout the reports, advocates for largely educational campaigns targeting neighborhoods like The Ward, as solidified in her own bias that these conditions were the consequences of ignorance, stating:

> Practically, we expect the ideal mother to know everything by instinct, without giving her any chance to learn. We might much better expect her to read by instinct, for the alphabet can always be found not far away. We teach reading, and we leave parenthood to come by chance.[88]

Between 1920 and 1934, a total of 300,000 booklets were distributed through various means such as district registrars and various social services.[89] In titling books such as *How we Manage Housework in Canada* or *How to Build a Canadian Home,* MacMurchy targets immigrants within this publication. MacMurchy sought the book series to reflect domestic science practices and information from all the provinces of Canada and most other nations in the civilized world.[90] The *Little Blue Book Series* was regularly discussed in women's news columns as a required book for domestic affairs and family management, and it was asserted that "mothers can help greatly in recommending these to new Canadian neighbors."[91] Additionally, the translation of *The Little Blue Book Series* into Cree further highlights the intersection of public health and eugenics.

As outlined by Nancy Tomes, domestic science publications within 19th-century reform typically considered four sets of directives.[92] The first aspect

87 MacMurchy, Helen, *Infant Mortality: Second Report,* Toronto: L.K. Cameron, 1911, Canadiana, https://n2t.net/ark:/69429/m0xg9f47hv3w.

88 MacMurchy, Infant Mortality: Second Report, 1911, Canadiana, https://n2t.net/ark:/69429/m0xg9f47hv3w.

89 Dianne Dodd, "Advice to Parents: The Blue Books, Helen MacMurchy, MD, and the Federal Department of Health, 1920–34," Canadian Bulletin of Medical History 8, no. 2 (1991): 203–230, https://doi.org/10.3138/cbmh.8.2.203.

90 Dodd, "Advice to Parents: The Blue Books, Helen MacMurchy, MD, and the Federal Department of Health, 1920–34," 203.

91 "Correspondence." 1928., Jan 04*The Globe (1844-1936)*, 14. https://proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/correspondence/docview/1366335324/se-2.

92 Nancy Tomes, "The Private Side of Public Health: Sanitary Science, Domestic Hygiene, and the Germ Theory, 1870–1900," Bulletin of the History of Medicine 64, no. 4 (1990): 509–539.

covered in similar educational pamphlets, brought homeowners attention to the surrounding environment of a dwelling, ensuring proper ventilation and sunlight. Another area of focus was the promotion of the installation of plumbing and similarly water purification systems. Additionally, a common topic was information on home nursing and childrearing, which focused on emulating professional or hospital care within the home. Lastly, and most prudent in this analysis, was the dissemination of proper housework practices, which emphasized general cleanliness as a preventive measure against disease.

These prescriptions primarily centered on the abatement of dust and dirt. As Tomes points out in addressing these domestic nuisances, instructions called on behavior changes.[93] With the *Little Blue Book Series* MacMurchy presents a standardized set of housework practices in dealing with dusts, temporal, habitual and ubiquitous nature. As captured in *How to Manage Housework in Canada*, MacMurchy presents an extremely detailed guide on housework practices to combat dust. Mirroring similar literature of the time, the pamphlet focuses on the dusting of virtually every surface, detailing the sweeping of the floor from one side to the other, and presents the "right way" of sweeping a carpet to ensure that dust is effectively cleaned.[94]

Additionally, in the prescription of linoleum and wax polish to control dust, MacMurchy's standardization of housework, reflects modernist values. This is exemplified further by her citing Harrington Emmerison's twelve principles of scientific management. MacMurchy translates Emmerison's twelve principles into a methodology in approaching housework rooted in the growing modernist value of efficiency. Within industrial cities, the value of efficiency grew in its connection to morality and was understood even as a form of ethical superiority.[95] In deterring waste—in all facets of life—efficiency was presented as the ability to control resources, reflecting in economic outcomes and social wellbeing nationally. Domestic efficiency reflected ideals of social reproduction of a stronger, fitter, and racially superior race. MacMurchy as many other reformers associated the working class with waste, unemployment and as such a threatening industrial life. In instilling order in the domestic through the principle of efficiency, MacMurchy seemingly hoped that these values would be instilled within the individual and reflected in public life.

93 Tomes, "The Private Side of Public Health: Sanitary Science, Domestic Hygiene, and the Germ Theory, 1870–1900," 509.

94 MacMurchy, Helen, *The Little Blue Books. Hoousehold Series Publication no. 14. How to Manage Housework in Canada,* Ottawa : F.A. Acland, 1923. Canadiana, https://n2t.net/ark:/69429/m00g3gx45x8c.

95 Suzanne Raitt, "The Rhetoric of Efficiency in Early Modernism." Modernism/modernity 13, no. 1 (2006): 835-851, https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/mod.2006.0016.

4.6 Conclusion

Both the municipal housekeepers and *Little Blue Book Series* demonstrate how public health utilized housework as a means of nation building within Toronto's 20th-century reform movement. Nation building efforts reflected the wider anxieties about the changing settler landscape of Toronto. Poor housing conditions in the city presented themselves as the amalgamation of these concerns, posing both material and moral threats to the broader social fabric of Toronto. Reformers recognized the domestic as a site of social reproduction in which values, identities, and behaviours are cultivated. As such, the betterment of the non-British working class homes became central in nation building .

Women played a critical role both as the agents carrying out reform and the subject of reform itself. As it was believed that women were naturally inclined to deal with dust and dirt within the domestic sphere, women within public health would find authority in housework and hygiene. Doctors such as MacMurchy as well as public health roles like municipal housekeepers distinctly placed the urban bourgeoisie as moral authorities instilling middle-class values into immigrant women. This dynamic not only reinforced existing social hierarchies but also positioned domestic labor as a vital tool for shaping citizenship.

Public health initiatives sought to standardize housework practices as a means of rehabituating the individual. Dust's cyclical and persistent nature guided many of these efforts. With the municipal housekeepers and sanitary inspectors, recurrent inspections were believed to be required to address unsanitary conditions of The Ward and to instill 'Canadian' standards of hygiene. Similarly, MacMurchy's *Little Blue Book Series*, the management of dust is written to ensure dust was dealt with the "right way," condescendingly believing immigrant women were unaware and needed guidance. In regulating the domestic labour of the working class, reformers aimed to reshape everyday habits and reinforce gendered expectations, marking the home as a central site for the reproduction of class distinctions and the cultivation of 'Canadian' citizenship.

Chapter 5
Grassroots and Collective Maintenance Practices: Agency in Reform

5.1 Chapter Introduction

While public health focused on standardizing the domestic as a means of instilling larger nation building values, maintenance practices led by grassroots agencies and the immigrant communities themselves focused on self-governance, and preservation. Contrasting public health's institutional engagement with working class neighborhoods, several social organizations collaborated in the care and maintenance of The Ward. Though medical theories on the microbe would associate individual responsibility and negligence for the condition of an individual's environment, these collective practices recognized larger systemic issues and realities contributing the dusty and dirty conditions of The Ward.

This chapter highlights these collaborative maintenance practices by examining case studies of organizations and communities that operated within The Ward. Unlike public health's municipal housekeepers, public nurses, or sanitary inspectors, who operated through routine visits and sought to enforce the maintenance of dusty and dirty conditions, grassroots organizations such as Visiting Housekeepers and Settlement Houses functioned intimately within these neighborhoods and participated in their maintenance. This drastically shaped their understanding of the communities, their advocacy, as well as their larger role in social reform.

The use of collaborative maintenance within these grassroots organizations sought to dispel harmful narratives and address the structural inequalities contributing to the decay of working class immigrant neighborhoods. Additionally, these efforts sought to preserve existing community networks, preserving social ties that enables communities to advocate for their own needs. Distinct from public health, these organizations were both established and operated at a local level and consisted of social workers. In this collaborative effort, Visiting Housekeepers and Settlement Workers sought to reframe maintenance as a shared practice within the urban network.

5.2 Collective Maintenance vs. Microbe

Miasma theory was largely used to justify public health reformers' sanitary and moral concerns about dust, dirt and unhygienic conditions.



Fig. 5.1
Image of mothers and babies at university settlement

Consequently, this led reformers to focus on the individual, as it seemed that the individual's environment, habits, and constitution all contributed significantly to the transmission of disease.[96] The advancement of germ theory would exacerbate the correlation, as disease prevention was thought to rely on controlling microbes, something that sweeping, dusting, and proper waste disposal would help achieve. To medical reformers like Charles Hastings, this understanding of microbe control reinforced public health education, which he believed should reach "every man on the street and the woman in the humblest home in our city."[97]

While this focus on the individual was reflected in nation building , grassroots collective practices challenged the belief of the need to integrate the growing immigrant population and 'citizenship' training. In undertaking maintenance collectively, grassroots efforts challenged the standardization of the domestic as imposed by municipal housekeepers and the *Little Blue Book Series*. Instead, there was a recognition of the need for nuance in the domestic and the preservation of existing practices that were often rooted in immigrant cultural heritage. This translation of housework from a private practice to a collaborative endeavour is reflected in Melusina Fay Pierce's writings on cooperative housekeeping practices, where her critique of the seclusion of the domestic proposes urban reform to combat the "dusty drudgery of house ordering."[98]

Between 1868 and 1869, Pierce began publishing a series of articles in the Atlantic Monthly critiquing women's exclusion economically within industrial society.[99] She believed that industrialization removed tasks such as tending crops or caring for animals that women could economically contribute to. This resulted in women either entering exploitative factory work or being removed from the workforce to become homemakers. Pierce, throughout her life, criticized the seclusion and solitary nature brought on by domestic labor of "fighting the dirt" through the repetitive acts of sweeping, dusting, and scrubbing.[100]

In order to overcome the confinement of the domestic, women needed to reorganize amongst themselves, becoming economically self sufficient and emotionally independent of men. Seeking to move away from traditional homemaking practices, Pierce conceptualized the Cooperative Housekeeping Association, in which a group of around 50 women would rent a building and collectively perform tasks such as laundry, sewing,

96 Bynum and Porter, *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine,* chap 16.
97 Hastings, Charles J. *The Modern Conception of Public Health Administration and its National Importance.* Toronto: The Canadian Medical Assiocation Journal, 1917. Canadiana, https://n2t.net/ark:/69429/m0wp9t14vs8d
98 Melusina Fay Peirce, C*o-Operative Housekeeping; How Not to Do It and How to Do It. A Study in Sociology* (Boston, J. R. Osgood, 1884), 181.
99 Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities*, (The MIT Press, 1982), 67-89.
100 Peirce, *Co-Operative Housekeeping; How Not to Do It and How to Do It,* 17-18.

and cooking for a wage. Pierce would imagine shared kitchens, apartment layouts, and reimagined shared commons in which women could reclaim for their intellectual pursuits. More so, in sharing the work, Pierce legitimized the struggles of housework and sought cross-collaboration among women of all classes in order to build solidarity and empower themselves collectively. Importantly, Pierce's structure challenges the power structure seen in public health which put middle-class women in authoritative roles, instead of valuing how immigrant women performed their own maintenance practices.

While several other social services emerged at this time, such as the Big Brother Movement or Big Sister Association, the Settlement House Workers and Visiting Housekeepers Association distinguished themselves in their involvement with the people who lived in The Ward and its domestic conditions.[101] These collaborative efforts shaped how the neighbourhoods were understood and guided the development and implementation of various initiatives. Both the Settlement Workers and Visiting Housekeepers were a part of a larger movement of social workers within populating industrial cities. While similar to other female reformers, the growing participation of these middle-class white women were brought on by maternal feminism, however the distinction in their approach was influenced largely by this disconnection to formal institutions. As explored by Mary Deegan, while women were able to receive education on social work there were barriers to women being hired professionally within universities as professors, which were spots reserved for men.[102] This would result in Jane Addams and many other women leaving the institution seeking to use their knowledge within the real world. While their male counter parts would continue exploring social work on a theoretical level, women began adapting and implementing hands-on strategies within their practice.

5.3 Visiting Housekeepers

The Visiting Housekeepers Association was established in Toronto in 1924, through the Branch of the Canadian Red Cross Society, and situated at a modest distance from The Ward on Beverley Street.[103] The initial focus was to assist in the housework in homes during times of illness or emergency and to advance practical means of surveying the home to better the dissemination of home economic education.[104] Similarly influenced by

101 A list of social organizations that were known to operate within the Ward and other working class immigrant neighborhoods is provided in the 1934 Report of the Lieutenant- Governor's Committee on Housing Conditions in Toronto
102 Mary Jo Deegan, *Jane Addams and the Men of the Chicago School, 1892-1918*, (University of Chicago Press, 1988) chap. 3. Perlego.
103 Lexa Denne, "Visiting Housekeepers' Centre—Canadian Red Cross Society, Toronto Branch: Report of Activities- June 1925 to October 1926," *The Public Health Journal* 18, no. 1 (1927): 625–33, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41973579.
104 Marjorie Bell, "Public Health Nursing: The Visiting Housekeepers Association of Toronto," *Canadian Public Health Journal* 24, no. 9 (1933): 446–47, http://www.jstor.

medical reformers the organization stood as response to the changing role of women in the work force and industrial society. Unlike the public health's municipal housekeepers, visiting housekeepers were a voluntary service, and a family could acquire their assistance through an application.[105] For both private and public institutions this service was understood to be essential as there was the misconception that working class women were unable to adequately perform maintenance and upkeep. These women would assist in all aspects of housework from cleaning, cooking and childrearing, typically spending eight to ten hours a day with a family for any required duration.[106]

The visiting housekeepers, however, didn't identify as maids; rather, they saw themselves as social workers who attempted to look at the issues of domestic care holistically. While there was a clear intent to limit the scope of work to housekeeping, by participating in the housework of working class homes, visiting housekeepers seemingly came to understand the families and conditions more intimately than other social services, as captured in the Report for the 1927 Annual Meeting of the Visiting Housekeepers' Centre, Toronto Red Cross:

> Social Workers and Visiting Nurses see the family in a more or less superficial way, but the Housekeeper penetrates into the very heart of the household. She has to keep house in the midst of existing conditions and with the materials available. She knows as no one else can know the real housing and sanitation conditions. She sees social and health problems from a new angle.[107]

In participating in the housework, visiting housekeepers understood the domestic conditions and captured them more in-depth and sympathetically than public health officials.

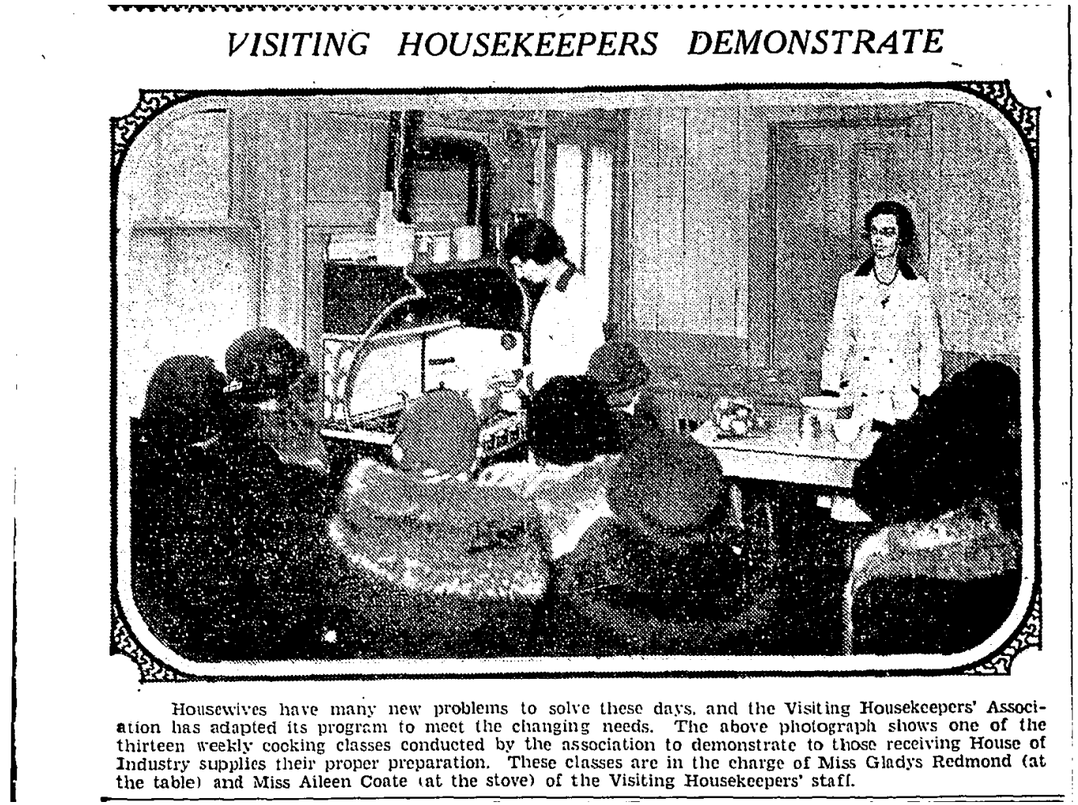
Many accounts of this come from the director Marjorie Bell, between 1935 and 1945, who frequently wrote in the Globe's column *Woman's Point of View*. Her account of the conditions in these homes and the challenge of their maintenance offers a rare glimpse into the reality of working class homes. Like other social workers, she hoped to convince a skeptical public the conditions of the working class were not simply the result of ignorance or negligence. She captures in detail the conditions of not having a functioning sink, the hardship of keeping a single room shared by a whole family clean,

org/stable/41976930.

105 Denne, "Visiting Housekeepers' Centre—Canadian Red Cross Society, Toronto Branch," 625–33.

106 Denne, "Visiting Housekeepers' Centre—Canadian Red Cross Society, Toronto Branch," 625–33.

107 Hannah Mathison, "Report for Annual Meeting of the Visiting Housekeepers' Centre, Toronto Red Cross," *The Public Health Journal* 18, no. 1 (1927): 634–37, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41973580.


VISITING HOUSEKEEPERS DEMONSTRATE

Housewives have many new problems to solve these days, and the Visiting Housekeepers' Association has adapted its program to meet the changing needs. The above photograph shows one of the thirteen weekly cooking classes conducted by the association to demonstrate to those receiving House of Industry supplies their proper preparation. These classes are in the charge of Miss Gladys Redmond (at the table) and Miss Aileen Coate (at the stove) of the Visiting Housekeepers' staff.

Fig. 5.2
Globe and Mail Article, Visiting Housekeeper Demonstrates, 1933
Highlights an example of a program ran by the Visiting Housekeepers which as been adapted specifically to meet the needs of those receiving social assistance.

the difficulty of cleaning when there is no running or hot water in a home, the drying of clothes in whatever corner of the house is available, and even the sharing of cooking utensils, brooms and mops within a neighborhood.[108] Essentially, she captures the unseen structural inequities that lead to the critiqued conditions of working class homes.

Another accomplishment of the collaborative work of the visiting housekeepers was their contribution to the Toronto Welfare Council's 1939 study, *The Cost of Living: A Study of the Cost of a Standard of Living in Toronto Which Should Maintain Health and Self Respect*. The intention of the study was to provide social agencies a standard to adequately study a family's income and how it is being spent, provide a clearer sense of income a given wage provides, and assess the appropriate amount for minimum wage for a man.[109] While many social workers openly stated that the current relief fund was not adequate to meet the needs of working class families, there were hesitations to increase it due to concerns of the working class becoming welfare dependant. This study would largely focus on women as they were understood as responsible for the housing conditions and the overall health of their children and husband.

The study was supervised by visiting housekeepers and collaborated with one hundred and sixteen low-income families for a year.[110] Typically studies of this nature rely on the use of questionnaires.[111] However, due to the focus on nutrition and the adequacy of a diet varying from person to person, a more extensive method was used where visiting housekeepers weighed, recorded and even calculated caloric intake. The visiting housekeepers brought valuable authority and credibility to the study; their participation within the domestic sphere of low-income families reflected a more genuine representation of the domestic lives of the working class. The conclusion showed that a minimum cost for a family of five was $28.35 per week for the bare necessities, with little recreation, no alcohol or tobacco, telephone or pension. The average wage being earned by the families surveyed was $19.64 per week. The concluding remarks of the report sought to try to dispel the narrative that failure to survive on a lower income

108 Examples of this in "Woman's Point of View: Pictures for Happiness." 1937., Apr 30 *The Globe and Mail (1936-)*, 15. https://proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/womans-point-view/docview/14120729 61/se-2.
and "Assistance Given to 692 Families by Housekeepers: Visiting Housekeepers' Association Hears Fine Reports Shortage of Helpers." 1930., Jun 10*The Globe (1844-1936)*, 32. https://proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/assistance-given-692-families-housekeepers/docview/1316279632/se-2.

109 D. C. MacGregor, "Studies of the Cost of Living in Canada," *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science / Revue Canadienne d'Economique et de Science Politique* 7, no. 4 (1941): 545–58, https://doi.org/10.2307/137227

110 Jacquelyn Gale Wills, "Efficiency, Feminism and Cooperative Democracy: Origins of the Toronto Social Planning Council, 1918-1957" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1989), 211, ProQuest (303794411).

111 E. W McHenry, "Nutrition in Toronto." *Canadian Public Health Journal* 30, no. 1 (1939): 4–13. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41977844.

was due to negligence stating:

> The statement is frequently made that some families "get along very well" on a low wage, and that the ability to manage is the most important factor. Those who have detailed knowledge of the situation are convinced that the ability to manage well, while valuable, is not sufficient, and they have constantly before them the evidence of harm resulting from the low standard of living made necessary by inadequate income.[112]

5.4 Settlement Houses

Unlike medical reformers, settlement workers focused on strengthening The Ward's social fabric by providing shared amenities and organizing community advocacy. Between 1910 and 1911 two settlement houses opened adjacent to The Ward: The University Settlement and Central Neighborhood House. These operated true to the vision of Jane Addams who founded the settlement house movement. Addams who operated in Chicago, founded the Hull-house, the first settlement house that sought to address reform through a considerably radical method of its time. She sought to force the issue of poverty and injustice into social consciousness, attempting to transform the way society thought about its most marginalized individuals.[113]

Importantly, Addams developed her vision of the settlement houses in response to industrialization and concerns about morality within the city. However, unlike public health reformers, she argued that concerns about morality could not be addressed through the reform of the individual but required systemic social change. She urged reform to move away from a focus on "individual morality" toward "social morality," understanding ethics and democracy to be built on the interdependent relationships within the city.[114]

> We are learning that a standard of social ethics is not attained by travelling a sequestered byway, but by mixing on the throng and common road where all must turn for on another and at least see the size of one another's burdens. To follow the path of social morality, results, performance in the temper if not the practice of the democratic spirit for it implies that diversified human experience and resultant sympathy which are the foundation and grantee of Democracy.[115]

The Hull-House and other settlement houses in industrial cities alike

112 Wills, ""Efficiency, Feminism and Cooperative Democracy," 212.

113 Karen Shafer Lundblad, "Jane Addams and Social Reform: A Role Model for the 1990s," *Social Work* 41 no. 1, (1995): 661–69, https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/40.5.661.

114 Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (Macmillan,1908), 2-3.

115 Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics,* 6-7.

became a center for research, empirical analysis, study, and debate, as well as a pragmatic center for living in and establishing good relations within the neighborhood. This relationship was reflected in the array of initiatives and advocacy done by settlement workers focusing on issues such as housing, midwifery, tuberculosis, typhoid, and garbage collection.[116]

Like the visiting housekeepers, settlement house workers regularly visited and observed the conditions of The Ward firsthand shaping their understanding of cleanliness and hygiene in a way that was more nuanced than public health. They also were acutely aware of the structural inequities faced by the immigrant community and established several programs aimed at addressing these conditions. An example well-documented initiative ran by settlement houses specifically responding to the condition of The Ward was the summer camps. As captured in several reports, summers in The Ward were known to be smelly, dusty, and oppressive as the dry air carried the stench of rotting food and garbage. These camps sought to provide fresh air and space for children and mothers to connect, play and learn. This naturally reflected in the understanding of the residents of The Ward. As Toronto-based Settlement Worker Elizabeth Neufeld states "The Ward has been maligned. It is not true the 'The Ward' is bad. These people are just as anxious to live decently and honestly as we are, but they are not given the chance."[117]

Central Neighborhood House's Settlement Worker Mary Joplin Clarke would reflect on this relationship in her proposal of social unit plan within The Ward. The social unit plan sought to use democratic organization and self-governance as a means of bettering the social working efforts within a neighborhood, starting with The Ward.[118] Outlined in a 1918 article, Clarke presents her plan in which this participation organizes individuals within the public realm and is facilitated by the settlement houses.[119] Her proposal was modeled after the Social Unit Plan developed by Wilbur Philip, who sought to more effectively facilitate the relationship between the working class and social services, strengthening communities' ties and empowering individuals: "a nation-wide organization of people who have come together for the purpose of finding some way to increase health, happiness, and other good things of the earth, and of helping to do away with poverty, misery, disease, and preventable death."[120] This interrelationship would be facilitated by the Block Worker, who would

116 Lundblad, "Jane Addams and Social Reform: A Role Model for the 1990s," 661–69.
117 "A Central Neighborhood House Annual Meeting." 1913., Oct 08*The Globe (1844-1936)*, 5. https://proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/central-neighborhood-house-annual-meeting/docview/1352022298/se-2
118 Bissett, "*Conflicts of Care,"* 4357.
119 Mary Joplin Clarke, "The Social Unit Plan and Public Health," *The Public Health Journal* 9, no. 3 (1918): 128–31, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41975593.
120 Devine, Edward T., 1919, *The Social Unit: An Appraisal of the Cincinnati Experiment*, Cincinnati, Ohio, National Social Unit Organization Conference.



Fig. 5.3
University Settlement District Office

advocate for her district's needs. The goal of the block worker was to be a voice in determining the course of public services operating in her area and how they would develop. The block worker would reflect the people she represents, both socio-economically and demographically. This sought to combat the existing perception that outside efforts are often understood to "invade the home of the poor."[121]

5.5 Conclusion

In comparing the social work methodologies of the Visiting Housekeepers and the Settlement Workers in The Ward, we see how grassroot networks and organization results in a collaborative interpretation of maintenance practices. In working with and partaking in the maintenance of the homes and working class neighborhoods, these women developed a deeply empathetic understanding of the struggles and systemic barriers resulting in persistent conditions. Unlike their male counterparts, these female social workers who worked in the dust found agency within the informal networks of their work. This understanding was reflected in their work, seeking to center the working class rather than their own authority within reform.

While public health sought to use the home as a site of reform, Visting Housekeepers and Settlement Workers recognized the nuanced functions of the home, identity, belonging and community and integrated it into their work. This can be seen in the Visiting Housekeepers facilitation of The *Cost of Living: A Study of the Cost of a Standard of Living in Toronto Which Should Maintain Health and Self Respect*, which while producing rigorous research simultaneously sought to dispel harmful narratives about the working class and their domestic habits. Similarly, settlement workers within The Ward attempted to use the networks within the neighborhood as the basis of the social unit plan, preserving and strengthening existing community structures.

Ultimately, in analyzing maintenance practices on the grassroot level we reveal a different historical interpretation of domesticity within The Ward. As theorists and practitioners such as Peirce and Addams underscore in their work, through collaborative approaches in fields such as urban reform and maintenance, we uncover different narratives as new opportunities, networks, and forms of agency. As grassroots agencies acted in alternative frameworks to that of public health—recognizing and addressing the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental factors in shaping urban health and well-being.

121 Clarke, "The Social Unit Plan and Public Health," 130 and Bissett, "*Conflicts of Care,*" 57.

Conclusion

Maintenance practices remain an understudied area within architectural discourse. Dusting, sweeping, and mopping—in both the domestic and public sphere—have often been deemed inconsequential to our experience with the built environment. This notion is reflected in scholarship on Toronto's reform movement, where policies and practices engaging with housework in the Ward are dismissed as ineffective interventions that fail to produce meaningful improvements. While valuable, this critique reduces housework's functionality to merely addressing superficial hygienic concerns. However, as demonstrated in this thesis, housework as a concept is actually a rich spatial practice imbued deeply in social relations, extending its scope beyond the domestic boundary and into the public sphere.

These complexities are captured by two competing approaches within the Ward—institutional and grassroots—which employed varying maintenance practices within Toronto's reform movement. In using dust as a lens to frame the exploration of these divergent approaches, we open questions about maintenance practices' connections to gender, class, and quotidian habit. As evolving medical theories of the time connected unsanitary surroundings with larger concerns of morality, attention was brought to working-class neighbourhoods such as the Ward. The need to spatially separate from dusty, dirty, and squalid conditions became a primary focus of reform, controlling both the spread of diseases and amorality within the city.

As highlighted by existing literature, dust as a lens asks us to evaluate current processes, structures, and values in both formal and informal systems. Architecturally, dust in its disorder, ubiquity and persistence highlights the fragility of spatial and symbolic boundaries. As Mary Douglas highlights, in our effort to control dirt, dust and unhygienic conditions, we see how deeply root maintenance practices are embedded in social systems. This becomes particularly evident when looking at the intersections of gender, the political economy, and nationalism within urban reform.

Perhaps most prominent in the discussion of maintenance within reform is dust's association to gender. Within reform, dust links the complex dynamics between female reformers within public health, social workers, and the largely immigrant women of the working class. Maternal feminism justified the growing role of women in reform in dealing with both dust's material and moral implications. However, the practice of maintenance was not monolithic. Reformers like MacMurchy or the municipal housekeepers operating in formal systems viewed dust in technical terms, conforming to standardization fitting that of their male colleagues. Whereas social workers such as the settlement workers found that these formal bureaucratic systems limited their abilities to effect change, taking more informal routes to reform which is reflected in their maintenance practices.

Another important theme within current literature and seen in this thesis is the imagery of dust and the connection to eugenics. Throughout the 1900 to 1930s, the idea of the "dusty trades" or dust in the streets and within the dense fabric of the working-class neighborhood were observed by architects and medical reformers alike. Documents such as "The Report of the Lieutenant-Governor Committee on Housing Conditions in Toronto", and even the proposal of towers by both Le Corbusier and Charles Hastings, associated the imagery of dust beyond health concerns but connected to crime, immorality, and social disorder within urban centres. Addressing the physical presence of dust and its associated properties was tied into nation building efforts of public health.

Public health reformers sought to enforce housework practices within immigrant working-class neighborhoods as a means for nation-building. The dissemination of housework through sanitary inspectors, municipal housekeepers, and within the Little Blue Book Series sought to define and standardize domestic practices as a means of reforming the individual. The imposed standardization of housework practices explicitly targeted immigrant women and undermined agency within the domestic sphere. In regulating the domestic labour of the working class, reformers aimed to reshape everyday habits and reinforce gendered expectations, marking the home as a central site for the reproduction of class distinctions and the cultivation of 'Canadian' citizenship.

In contrast, grassroots organizations, rather than focusing on the individual, used maintenance practices collectively as a tool for empowerment and self-advocacy. As visiting housekeepers and settlement workers lived among and operated within the homes of the immigrant working class, they developed a different perspective on maintenance within these communities, recognizing legitimate challenges that contributed to poor housing conditions. These women-led organizations worked to dispel many of the biased notions about the working class. In their collective approach, they sought to center the voices of immigrants within reform by strengthening existing community ties as well as creating new networks of care within the urban realm.

Within the 20th-century industrial landscape of Toronto, dust stood as both a sign of progress and decay, signifying the tensions of gender, class, and race embedded within reform. While little remains to mark or remember Toronto's first immigrant enclave, its significance in shaping the city today is undeniable. Reflecting on the care of dust, both in the Ward and in our

everyday lives, we are forced to analyze the habitual practices within the spaces we inhabit. Though it might be seen as insignificant, noticing something as small as dust reveals how these practices are central to the formation of spatial narratives and attitudes toward working-class immigrant communities.

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