CHAPTER 3

Municipal Housekeepers and the High Cost of Living

The Establishment of Gardening Programs and Farmers Markets by Grand Rapids Women's Clubs in the Early Twentieth Century

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On March 21, 1917, Eva McCall Hamilton was quoted on the front page of the *Grand Rapids Herald*: "The retail market will become an institution in Grand Rapids. The turning over of vacant city lots to householders is also a splendid idea. These things show the spirit of Grand Rapids." Hamilton, who would go on to be the first female senator in Michigan, was reveling in her victory won the previous evening at Grand Rapids City Hall. That night she had used her influence as a member of the mayor-appointed High Cost of Living Commission to overcome a filibuster blocking a $2,000 appropriation for the development of the first public retail market in Grand Rapids, Michigan.[1] At the same meeting, she helped push through a resolution that gave the city comptroller power to distribute over three hundred vacant lots in the city to individuals, families, or other groups of community members wanting to grow their own food (*Grand Rapids Press* [*GRP*], 20 March 1917, 5).

Public retail markets, which are what we would now consider "farmers markets," became an institution in Grand Rapids through the work of wealthy,

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upper- and middle-class women concerned with the living conditions of the working classes. By 1922, civic work had led to three city-operated markets located in working-class, immigrant neighborhoods. These markets were public services that alleviated the high cost of living caused by massive inflation, stagnant wages, and ultimately the war in Europe.[2] They were not warmly received by local grocers, however. Retail and wholesale grocers fought the idea of retail farmers markets for at least twenty years in Grand Rapids, protecting their near monopoly of fresh produce, which was supported through municipal ordinances.

Prominent Grand Rapids women like Hamilton were able to overcome the domination of grocers when they were given official space in local politics as consultants for issues of social welfare. Their interest in retail markets and public gardening programs stemmed from a general concern for "municipal housekeeping," an idea heavily promoted across the country by progressive female reformers such as Reverend Caroline Bartlett Crane of Kalamazoo, Michigan (Davis 2006; Rynbrandt 1997). She and other educated female leaders urged all women to actively work with local governments to promote health, cleanliness, and all things domestic. In Grand Rapids, one of their first and most successful campaigns was a school and home gardening program among children.

Gardening programs in Grand Rapids were widely supported through public and private collaborations, forging strong relationships between local business owners and politicians and groups such as the Ladies Literary Club. These associations led to female appointments on official working groups in the local government that ultimately influenced the establishment of the first retail farmers markets in Grand Rapids. Their endeavors are an early example of work around food production that reinforced the female social role while also politically empowering women. Such food-based social movements still tend to be gendered (Delind and Ferguson 1999), and, as Nevin Cohen and Katinka Wijsman have shown in chapter 13 with New York community gardens, female political empowerment is still an important ancillary to the explicit benefits of urban agriculture.

Unlike public gardening programs that enjoyed universal support, the public retail markets of Grand Rapids were contested public services whereby politically active women placed responsibility for feeding the city solely on

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the local government. City officials were reluctant to appropriate funds for a public service that was considered a detriment to local business owners. Nevertheless, the special interests of grocers were eventually eclipsed when club women were appointed by the mayor to the city's High Cost of Living Commission. Drawing from the momentum created through their garden programs and backed by reports from other cities, these women argued that Grand Rapids should operate retail markets as a way to contribute to wartime food production and fight the high cost of living. After an experimental period of a few years, the city purchased and developed permanent sites for the markets and hired a city employee to manage them.

This chapter explores the relationship between early public gardening programs and farmers markets in Grand Rapids during the first quarter of the twentieth century and also contributes to the literature on the work done by early-twentieth-century women's clubs. It begins with a description of fresh produce retailing at the turn of the twentieth century in Grand Rapids and describes how sales by farmers were eventually consolidated at a city-owned wholesale market that was inconvenient for residents wanting to purchase directly from farmers. The second section follows the work of women's clubs in their pursuit of improving the city through gardening. Their work resulted in city-wide school gardening clubs that were supported financially through partnerships with local, regional, state, and federal public institutions and local business organizations. The third section explains how the same women's organizations dealt with local grocers and gained the support of housewives to leverage appropriate funding for an experimental farmers market. The chapter ends with a personal experience with the last remaining original Grand Rapids farmers market and uncovers a disconnect between the market "experts" and the local reality, namely, their vision of the farmers market beyond its historical role of simply providing a public service for the people of Grand Rapids.

THE END OF DIRECT MARKETING IN GRAND RAPIDS

Similar to Duluth, Minnesota, described by Randel Hanson in the preceding chapter, Grand Rapids grew rapidly toward the end of the nineteenth century. It expanded from a town of about 3,000 people in 1850 to a city of over 110,000

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by 1910, making it the forty-fourth largest city in the United States (US Census Bureau 1913, 899). This growth was stimulated through manufacturing, most notably by innovations in the office furniture market. The furniture industry and other manufacturing companies employed about twenty thousand wage laborers who were mostly Dutch and Polish immigrants living in congested ethnic enclaves (Kleiman 2006). As was the case in many other rapidly growing cites, purchasing food could be laborious and was usually placed on the shoulders of women (Deutsch 2010).

There were three main options for acquiring fresh produce in Grand Rapids: corner grocers, hucksters, and the early-morning downtown market. Of course, one could grow one's own vegetables. Indeed, Grand Rapids was unique in that home ownership was high. Many families had spaces and were encouraged to garden free from many of the prohibitory regulations on gardening found in some cities during the same period (Fitzgerald and Ely 1921; Horst, Brinkley, and Martin in this volume). However, families worked long hours to be able to afford home mortgages, and most did not have a refrigerator to store perishables or the resources and time to can. Therefore, households relied on the grocers and hucksters for their daily food supply, or they woke up early to catch a streetcar downtown to buy from surrounding farmers.

Unlike early-twentieth-century Duluth, Grand Rapids was well served by its agricultural surroundings, and a fairly efficient distribution system was already well established by the turn of the twentieth century. Scores of farmers descended on the downtown streets as early as midnight and congregated at Porter Block, directly in the center of Grand Rapids (*GRP* 23 September 1893, 1; 21 May 1921, 10). Most sales were made to the many jobbing and commission buyers whose grocery wholesaling business eclipsed that of Detroit (Grand Rapids Board of Trade 1888). These buyers were interested mainly in peaches and other high-dollar fruits that could be sold to distant markets. Vegetable growers, who were mainly small-scale Dutch immigrant farmers, were eventually segregated from the wealthier fruit growers to make it easier for the commission buyers and wholesalers to purchase fruits, and they were forced into less-desirable spaces through police coercion (*GRP* 31 August 1895, 4). Grocers and hucksters worked their way through these fruit and vegetable sections early and found the best deals, while householders shopped during the last couple of hours of the market.

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By the mid-1890s, this market had spread over most of downtown, and the city government began looking for better locations at the urging of downtown business owners and fruit growers. A site was agreed on in 1896, and the market was moved to one of the islands in the Grand River in the spring of the next year. Although the purchase was decided through a popular vote, turnout was low in working-class neighborhoods and an appeal was made by aldermen, arguing that voters were not given a clear understanding that the market would be on the island (*Grand Rapids Common Council Proceedings* [GRCCP] 12 January 1891, 4 September 1894, 25 February 1895; *City of Grand Rapids Annual Report* 1897; *GRP* 6 October 1896, 4). Streetcar lines did not run to the new market and retailing was actively discouraged. Small-scale fruit farmers had petitioned for a retail market but were summarily ignored. The new market benefited large fruit growers as it was near the commission houses, and prime market stalls could be purchased for higher rents, as opposed to the first-come, first-served stall designations of the previous marketing arrangement (*Michigan Tradesman* [MT] 11 August 1896, 5; *GRCCP* 22 May 1893; *GRP* 18 April 1899, 3).

In addition to the new wholesale market, laws were put in place whereby farmers would be arrested if they sold on downtown streets. These laws were the result of pressure by downtown business owners, grocers, and wholesale merchants. Farmers were now forced to either sell at the wholesale market or bring their products directly to homes or retailers (*GRCCP* 22 May 1893; *GRP* 18 April 1899). They could not stop their wagon in the street to sell. This arrangement gave the city's three hundred retail grocers and sixty-plus hucksters a near monopoly over fresh produce sales in Grand Rapids neighborhoods (Polk 1893). Grocers had an advantage over the hucksters. They were able to influence how many of these licenses could be given to the mostly Dutch and Jewish food peddlers (*Grand Rapids Herald* [GRH] 30 July 1899, 8).

When food prices rose dramatically during the second decade of the twentieth century, national public discourse began questioning the honesty of middlemen and food retailers, and accusations of high markups and speculation were rampant. The "high cost of living" became *the* buzzword in Grand Rapids newspapers beginning around 1910, and many citizens started to question local purveyors of meat, milk, and fresh produce. The first prominent, vocal critic of the produce marketing system in Grand Rapids was Charles H. Leonard.

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Leonard saw the establishment of the wholesale market as a direct attempt to monopolize retail produce sales. He stated in a letter to the City Council in 1911, "When the ground was originally purchased it was supposed that when it was improved the people would have access to it, and be able to trade directly with the farmers, but through some influence or other no steps have been taken to carry out the original plan. On the contrary the business has fallen into the hands of a lot of Jobbers who buy up the farmers' produce and then sell to the hucksters who divide up the city to rob the people" (Leonard 1911).

Leonard owned the massive Leonard Crockery Company, which was the sole manufacturer of cleanable, enamel-lined iceboxes, and he promoted retail markets as a way his workers could find reasonably priced food in Grand Rapids. He presented a plan for an official time set aside for retail sales at the wholesale market. "Pennies are so all fired scarce among the laboring men that I am convinced they will be glad to make the market trip even if they save but a single dime," he stated (*GRP* 17 May 1912, 21). His plan was popular among labor unions and in local editorials, but bitterly opposed by grocers and ridiculed in trade publications (Peters 1911; Zuller 1911; *MT* 29 May 1912, 8).

The city granted him the chance to set up an experimental retail market between 6:30 and 9:00 a.m. at the wholesale market site, complete with streetcar access from the neighborhoods. Unlike the successful start of the Duluth Farmers Market that same year, Leonard's experiment was a miserable failure. The grocers easily dismantled the retail market experiment by boycotting farmers choosing to sell to housewives (*GRP* 9 May 1912, 1). These boycotts continued for at least another five years, making it difficult for small growers to make a living selling produce in Grand Rapids. A small farmer commented on the state of the Grand Rapids wholesale market in 1916, "One of the greatest reasons the present market is a failure to the consumer is because if the farmer or gardener sells in small lots to the consumer who comes on the market to buy household supplies the grocers and hucksters will not patronize him. Often one would sell in small amounts but must refuse or a boycott would soon follow. This is the unwritten law of the present market system. Let the large grower or farmer sell to commission men, hucksters, and grocers, but give the small man a chance at a retail market" (*GRP* 8 December 1916, 6).

The first public retail farmers market was opened a year after this farmer's observation. However, it was not established explicitly as a benefit to small

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farmers. It was part of a larger movement that improved living conditions for working-class families by bringing the production and distribution of food closer to Grand Rapids residents, and it was spearheaded by women's clubs that had positioned themselves as the city's housekeepers.

MUNICIPAL HOUSEKEEPING AND PUBLIC GARDENING PROGRAMS

Heavily influenced by the City Beautiful campaign that was sweeping the country, Grand Rapids club women saw themselves as the housekeepers of the city, which was, as one writer of the time claimed, "of natural interest to women" (Haskins 1912, 4). The Grand Rapids Ladies Literary Club led the way, appointing a Civic Health and Beauty Committee in 1903, which supported various initiatives such as a small park system, beautification of streets, protection of current parks, and school-based gardens (*Grand Rapids Ladies Literary Club Minutes* [GRLLCM] 1903–1904). Beautifying the city was serious business, and these first-wave feminists were experimenting with novel ideas, most notably in the public and parochial schools. For example, a real issue in Grand Rapids was the amount of fresh air children breathed. Inside air was considered unhealthy, as evidenced by the experimental "open-air" classrooms in Grand Rapids, which kept the windows open even in the dead of winter (Michigan Association for the Prevention and Relief of Tuberculosis 1909). Gardens, too, were a way that students could get out into the fresh air.

The school gardens ended up being the foundation of the Civic Health and Beauty Committee's work. School gardens were seen as an extension of the classroom where students not only learned how to grow flowers and vegetables but also gained an appreciation for rural life and nature. Unlike the gardening programs in Duluth, which gave priority to food production and agricultural know-how, producing food was secondary to manual training and cooperative self-improvement. This was the case in many other cities establishing public gardening programs during the early part of the twentieth century (Lawson 2005). An added bonus was that the gardens would keep students out of mischief during summer vacation. In fact, gardens as a panacea for the problems of urban youth dominated the early discussions around school gardens in Grand Rapids. For example, one reporter wrote,

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"One of the penalties of urban life is that the younger generation too often becomes removed from that close contact with the soil which makes for sane ideals and high-minded citizenship" (*GRP* 10 September 1910, 4).

The first school garden was an experimental plot started at the Second Avenue School in 1903. The school was located next to the rail lines, not far from the wholesale market. Second Avenue was a working-class school, most likely serving immigrant children. The superintendent of schools, William H. Elson, worked with the teachers and neighbors to have the school grounds plowed and planted with radishes, onions, lettuce, parsley, and potatoes. Gardening was seen as a way Second Avenue students could receive hands-on education while also supplementing their household food (*School Journal* 1 April 1905, 347–50).

A home gardening experiment was started by the Civic Health and Beauty Committee at the same time as the Second Avenue school garden and was inaugurated with a distribution of over three thousand seeds, mostly flowers, to elementary students (*GRLLCM* 1903–1904). Addresses of the students were recorded and inspections made throughout the summer. Prizes were offered for the best displays of flowers, and the Grand River Valley Horticultural Society offered an annual space for the best school garden displays at the West Michigan State Fair. By 1910, twenty schools were participating in seed distributions and school gardens. Local papers would report on the annual entourage of wealthy citizens such as physician Frances A. Rutherford and Eva Hamilton as they toured the city in automobiles, inspecting garden displays at schools and the home gardens of pupils (*GRP* 10 June 1905, 7; *GRH* 15 September 1905, 1; *GRP* 27 September 1905, 2). Letters written to the superintendent by student participants were published in the papers, and reporters were eager to interview participants to show the progress that had been made. Quotes like the following were common:

> At South Division street school one little negro boy proudly displayed a cornstalk ten feet high. He had no good soil in his own yard in which to plant the seeds so he borrowed some from the next-door neighbor. The corn grown under these difficulties was one of the finest stalks seen at any of the schools. . . . Many of the child gardeners worked under discouraging difficulties and were consequently proud of their suc-

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> cess. One boy when asked why he had no flowers or vegetables looked genuinely disappointed and, lapsing from school room English to street jargon, said: "Aw 'taint no use, every time I tried to raise a garden the things just begin to grow and we has to move. I'm awful sorry, lady, but 'taint no use." (*GRP* 9 September 1910, 2)

It is significant that African Americans were included in the report of school gardens, given that they made up less than 1 percent of the Grand Rapids population during this period. Both recent immigrants and African Americans were the topic of much lively debate in Grand Rapids, and their designation as "problems" reflected the racist attitudes of the time. The school gardening experiment initially focused on working-class, minority neighborhoods and the initiative may have been aimed at fixing these "problems." Another reporter commented, "One principal of a building in which are many children of foreign parentage says that while it was difficult to keep the school lawn unmolested the children now take personal pride in its appearance and have even contributed pennies to buy flowers, beside planting and cultivating the seeds and bulbs secured through the committee on civic health and beauty" (*GRP* 3 August 1907, 7).

The paternalistic nature of the work done by these women was explicit and did not go unnoticed. As one woman expressed, after going to a workshop a few years later where Eva Hamilton taught women how to conserve food, "It is almost laughable to hear one who knows nothing about poverty tell the poor how they should save" (*GRP* 17 March 1915, 6). Nevertheless, these women were able to leverage support from a wide variety of sources. The early experimental gardens led to programs in all of the schools under official sanction and funding by the Grand Rapids Board of Education and were also funded by multiple business and land owners. One school in particular became a model for Grand Rapids schools, gaining national attention.

Oakdale School was located in a mostly second-generation Dutch enclave and had a ninety-by-ninety-foot garden plot dug into the school grounds during the summer of 1913. This lot was prepared through a partnership between Principal Frances Van Buren and the Association of Commerce (precursor to the Chamber of Commerce). Half was a community garden where neighbors grew flowers that the Oakdale Mothers Club delivered to the local hospital. The

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other half was split into garden plots for individual students. About a quarter of the students were also cultivating home gardens. Many of the vegetables were canned with the help of the Oakdale Mothers Club, and the surplus was donated to the neighborhood children's home (*GRP* 1 October 1912, 9; 7 July 1914, 1; 8 July 1914, 6; Van Buren 1913).

Van Buren's work gave the Grand Rapids school gardening programs national visibility. She had forged a strong relationship with Louise Klein Miller, curator of school gardens in the Cleveland school system where Superintendent Elson had transferred in 1906 (*School Journal* 1 April 1905, 347–50). Miller promoted school gardens as a tool to fix "defective children," clean up poor sections of the city, and lower the cost of living (*GRP* 7 October 1913, 2). Van Buren's professional connections led to presentations at national conventions and articles written for academic and popular journals reporting on the successes of the Oakdale gardens.

National visibility increased when the Grand Rapids public schools enlisted the help of E. C. Lindeman of the Michigan Agricultural College for school gardens during the summer of 1915. Lindeman published an instructional manual based on a program called the Grand Rapids Home Garden Plan for School Children, which was distributed to city leaders across the country. The Grand Rapids Plan brought together a coalition of multiple actors including the Board of Education, Kent County Farm Bureau, Michigan Agricultural College Extension, US Department of Agriculture, and local bankers (Lindeman 1916; *GRP* 18 September 1916, 21; *Social Service Review* December 1916, 15–17). Other supporters included newly established neighborhood improvement district boards and the Social Welfare Society.[3]

As the United States entered the First World War, Grand Rapids became a leader in urban agriculture. According to some reports, over five thousand acres split into twenty-eight thousand lots were under food production and were being worked by over thirty thousand families in the summer of 1917. The Victory Garden movement had more financial backing, media exposure, and general goodwill than any previous gardening movement in the city. The Board of Education retained a full-time city-wide garden supervisor, and the Old National Bank, with the help of the local Kent County agricultural specialist and the Association of Commerce, secured two agents from the Michigan Agricultural College who initiated canning cooperatives, organized vacant

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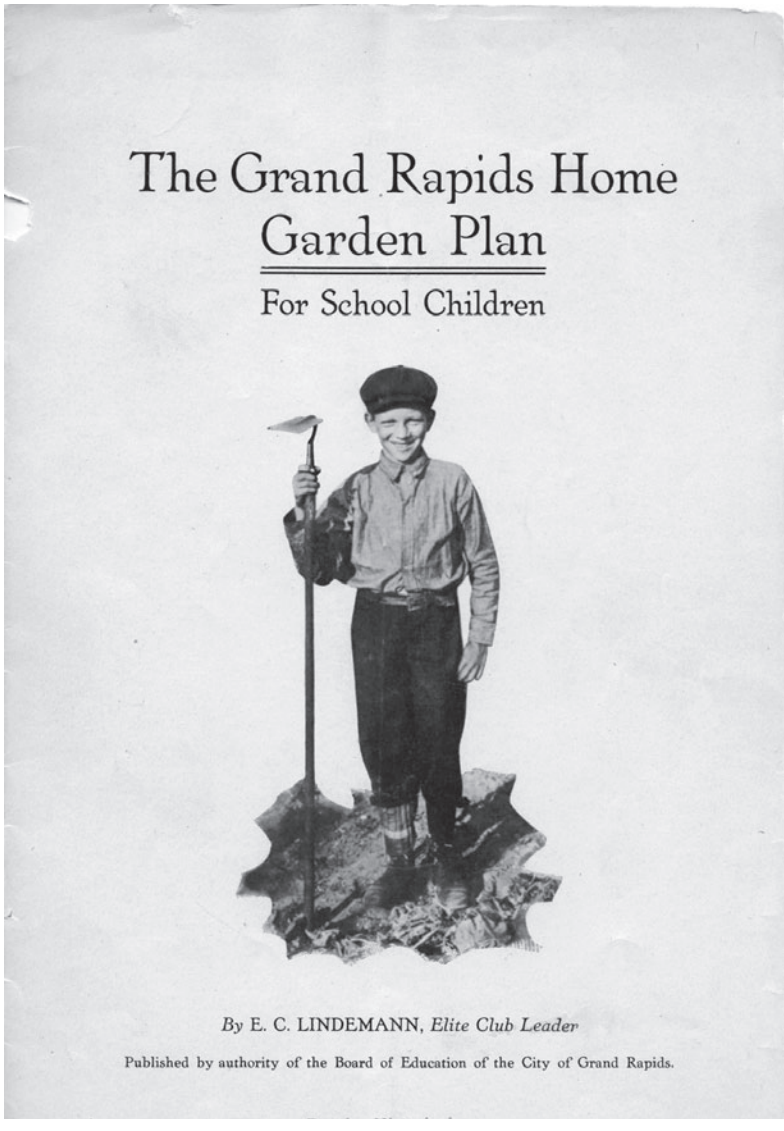


Figure 2. The Grand Rapids Home Garden Plan for School Children was a collaborative effort by public and private organizations focusing on school and backyard food production. It was the culmination of a decade of work by women's clubs to get children in Grand Rapids interested in gardening. This pamphlet, published in 1916, gives an overview of the 1915 growing season and was distributed to city leaders and gardening advocates across the country. Image courtesy of the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan, with special thanks to Lindsay Smith.

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lot gardening, and worked with neighborhoods on community gardens (*GRH* 22 July 1917, 4).

The city government was also busy streamlining connections between landowners and potential gardeners. Mayor George P. Tilma had a plan written whereby a record would be kept of "all worthy citizens in humble circumstances, particularly city dependents, those receiving aid from churches, benevolent and charitable societies and all others who may be worthy, though not strictly dependent, to classify same, but under no circumstances whatever to divulge their identity" (Tilma 1917). The council felt that Tilma's plan would waste time finding "indigents" that "don't care a rap" about growing food. Instead, they approved an ordinance whereby the comptroller's office would simply answer calls from an advertisement in the *Grand Rapids Herald* asking for "worthy people." Over three hundred lots were apportioned on the first day (*GRH* 26 March 1917, 3, 20 March 1917, 1; *GRP* 27 March 1917, 9).

Mayor Tilma was in office for only one year on account of a rewriting of the City Charter, which put a manager-commissioner system in place and ultimately shifted electoral power from working-class neighborhoods (Kleiman 2006). However, his interest in improving the well-being of working families in Grand Rapids led to lasting changes. Six months prior to the vacant-lot gardening program, he had been working with the home economics department of the Grand Rapids Federation of Women's Clubs (GRFWC) to find ways to lower the cost of living in Grand Rapids. The GRFWC was a strong supporter of domestic sciences in the local schools and was made up of many of the same women from the Ladies Literary Club. Their meetings resulted in the mayor-appointed High Cost of Living Commission, which was responsible for the creation of the three public retail farmers markets.

TILMA'S HIGH COST OF LIVING COMMISSION AND FARMERS MARKETS

The High Cost of Living Commission, which was formed in 1916, had four females among its eleven inaugural members. At least two of these women were also part of the Civic Health and Beauty Committee of the Ladies Literary Club. It should be noted that these women were appointed to the High Cost

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of Living Commission prior to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. It is very possible that this was the first time women were part of a mayor-appointed commission in Grand Rapids. Gaining a female perspective, however, was earning favor across the United States. As the Nobel Prize–winning suffragist Jane Addams had claimed a decade earlier, "City housekeeping has failed partly because women, the traditional housekeepers, have not been consulted as to its multiform activities" (Addams 1978). The commission's job was to investigate the price of milk and the feasibility of a retail market in Grand Rapids, filling in the gaps left after the Grand Rapids Federation of Women's Clubs had conducted its own local food inquiry.

While women's clubs in larger cities like New York, Chicago, and Pittsburgh promoted city-wide boycotts of food retailers who were accused of unnecessarily high prices, the GRFWC visited with grocers and food dealers to uncover causes of high food prices (*Augusta Chronicle* 29 November 1916, 2; *GRH* 7 December 1916, 1). Their inquiry did not find blame among the local grocers for high prices; rather, the grocers convinced them that middlemen were liable. In fact, club women invited all women in the city to a meeting where they publicly absolved the grocers and wholesale dealers, but not the milk dealers, who were not willing to share their books with the women. Mayor Tilma had met privately with the federation's Home Economics Committee prior to the public meeting to discuss the high cost of living and mentioned his support for public retail farmers markets (*GRH* 13 December 1916, 1; Grand Rapids Federation of Women's Clubs 1916). After a couple of mass meetings where all of Grand Rapids was invited to discuss high prices, the mayor put his new commission to work. The first action by this commission was to find a space for a retail farmers market.

Eva Hamilton was appointed chairperson for the High Cost of Living Commission's Market Site Committee. Hamilton researched the success of markets in similar-sized cities and used this information to overcome resistance to retail markets in the City Council. She brokered a deal with the owner of land on the west side of the river, gaining rent-free access for the first experimental season (Hamilton 1917). The Leonard Market opened on July 7, 1917, with a speech by newly elected mayor Philo C. Fuller, who voiced his full support for the market and asked all citizens to cooperate in any way to fight the high cost of living (*Grand Rapids News* 7 July 1917).

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Figure 3. The Leonard Street Farmers Market was the first successful public retail market in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Pictured here in 1927, it opened in the summer of 1917 and was improved and expanded over the next decade. Located in a Polish and Lithuanian neighborhood, it was the result of work by women's organizations looking to lower living costs for working families. Photo courtesy of the Grand Rapids City Archives, with special thanks to William Cunningham.

Fuller was the first Grand Rapids mayor under a new manager-commission political structure that greatly weakened the voting power of the west-side neighborhoods of Grand Rapids. The Leonard Street Market was placed in a Polish, Lithuanian, and Dutch west-side neighborhood sharply opposed to the new charter. Indeed, this neighborhood housed the participants of the furniture strike in 1911, which was the impetus for government restructuring. The two other markets, the South Side Market and East Side Market (renamed the Fulton Street Market in 1923), were also placed in immigrant neighborhoods, which were hostile to the charter change. Like the first school gardens, the markets were explicitly focused on providing food for working-class

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families. However, the newly organized city commission's support for the market may indicate an attempt to pacify ill feelings toward the government structure. More research would be needed to uncover hidden motivations for the location of these markets.

One of the other original members of the High Cost of Living Commission, Emily Chamberlin, continued the crusade for retail markets as Hamilton refocused her efforts toward suffrage and state politics. Chamberlin sent letters to the council as chairperson of both the Food Production and Marketing Committee of the Women's Committee of the Council of National Defense and the Civics Committee of the General Federation of Women's Clubs. Her letters were accompanied by petitions signed by hundreds of housewives in the south end of the city (Chamberlin 1918). This led to the opening of the South Side Market in 1918. The Fulton Street Market opened in 1922 following a similar petition drive.

An amendment was made to the city charter through a popular vote, which gave the city of Grand Rapids authorization for purchasing retail market sites through the Public Service Department, and the Leonard Street Market site was officially purchased for $15,000. The South Side Market and the Fulton Street Market sites were also purchased by the city, improved through municipal funding, and managed by city employees. By 1923, the markets had a combined average of almost ten thousand people each day of operation, with a total attendance of over six hundred thousand between May and December (Grand Rapids Public Service Department 1924). According to reports on the markets, customers could find better prices and fresher food at the markets if they were willing to cultivate relationships with the farmers, and the smaller farmers were getting a better return on their products. Also, an observed unintended effect of the market was lower prices at the surrounding grocers (*GRP* 10 August 1917, 8; *GRP* 8 August 1921, 17; *GRP* 17 September 1921, 13).

Still, prices were sometimes higher at the retail markets during peak season on account of demand for the freshest fruits and vegetables, suggesting that the markets were becoming public spaces that did more than simply provide cheap food. All three markets operated for over fifty years under the direction of city employees. The Fulton Street Market is still in operation and stands as a testament to the work of female leaders in Grand Rapids and as a socially embedded public service and space.

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REIMAGINING FARMERS MARKETS AND URBAN AGRICULTURE AS PUBLIC SERVICES

The Fulton Street Farmers Market is the last original public retail market in Grand Rapids that operates in its primary location. Its designation as a public service, however, has become less clear through its transition to its own nonprofit organization. The market has a new organizational structure following a multimillion-dollar facelift realized primarily through private funds that were leveraged through a feasibility study that proved the economic benefits of the market. This paradigm shift from public service to economic engine may threaten the sustainability and civic nature of food system activities that have improved urban food biomes of the United States. It tends to be relatively simple, for example, to leverage private financial support for an upscale marketplace in a downtown area that will be the anchor of revitalization, or to find funding for a young entrepreneur looking to cultivate empty lots to supply restaurateurs. Nevertheless, support for markets and gardening programs that simply provide healthy food for people in underserved neighborhoods can be difficult. I believe this is in part because of the ignorance of the historical role such programs have played in our cities.

The feasibility study for the Fulton Street Farmers Market was conducted the season following my three-year tenure as market manager, during which the market had successfully transferred interim management to the Midtown Neighborhood Association. The out-of-town consultants' lack of historical knowledge of a midsized city farmers market was immediately apparent and was reflected in the opening paragraph of their report: "Historically, markets typically evolved over time from open-air to a market shed to a market hall, and perhaps finally, to a market district" (O'Neil et al. 2008). This may have been the case in large cities like Detroit and Cleveland. However, the Fulton Street Farmers Market had ninety years to evolve, and it has not drastically changed since its inception in 1922. Its existence, as shown above, was actually in opposition to the new market district created in 1897 and was not meant to be a destination to attract business outside its neighborhood.

Of course, I am not suggesting that creative urban food systems should not be economically viable. However, I can attest from my own experience as manager of one of the busiest farmers markets in Michigan that turning a

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significant profit would be difficult. The market can sustain itself but is by no means a successful business. The retail markets in Grand Rapids have never been able to recover their development costs without outside help. This is why they have traditionally been public services provided through the municipality.

Only when farmers markets and urban agriculture are once again considered necessary public services will we have vibrant marketplaces and urban gardening programs where they are most needed. A clearer understanding of local history can help facilitate these undertakings, as the origins of our local food organizations can quickly be forgotten. Dory Thrasher found this in her participation with the Brooklyn Community Garden, which amplified already tense racial and economic relations partly because it became disconnected from the history of the community. Knowing where we come from can not only help avoid such mistakes but can also inspire us when we are faced with opposition. Learning about the struggles of historical figures such as Eva Hamilton empowers us to question local policy and influence decisions that will improve the well-being of those who live and eat in the cities of the United States.

NOTES

1. "Public retail market" is the historical term for what we now consider a farmers market. "Farmers market" could apply to the many types of marketplaces in early-twentieth-century cities, including wholesale markets, terminal markets, and municipal markets. I use the terms retail market, public retail market, and farmers market interchangeably to refer to grower-only, retail farmers markets (Brown 2001).
2. Municipal governments were very active in promoting various fresh produce marketing schemes during the early part of the twentieth century. These included street peddling, curb markets, and other alternatives. Existing research has focused primarily on large cities such as Chicago and New York (Morales 2000; Donofrio 2007).
3. The Social Welfare Society attempted a vacant lot gardening program in 1894 based on the "potato patch" model followed by Mayor Hazen Pingree in Detroit to help alleviate the problems of unemployment

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after the Scare of 1893. Only a handful of articles and scattered meeting minutes could be found on this movement in Grand Rapids.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What factors were behind the forcing of vegetable farmers from the wealthier and higher-priced fruit vendors? Why may the desire for separation be so severe as to request "police coercion"?
2. Otto offers many criticisms of the moving of the market in 1897. Might there have been a legitimate market reason for moving the market? How democratic was the initial decision on the market move?
3. Consider various food vendors today. Do we see anything resembling the conflict between commercial and small-scale food vendors in Grand Rapids at the turn of the century?
4. The author raised the issue that the school gardens in Grand Rapids served more of a moral and educational purpose than a nutritional one. Was the Health and Beauty Committee's contest in the same vein except on a larger scale, or did it ultimately serve a different function?
5. Consider the woman who expressed incredulity toward the wealthy Eva Hamilton "tell[ing] the poor how they should save." Was this the grumbling of one person in Grand Rapids, or does it speak to a larger issue of paternalism in urban agriculture that lingers today?
6. Were individual actors like Eva Hamilton and Mayor Tilma the primary instruments of change, or was it social and economic movements in general?
7. The significant role of women in this case study contributed greatly to the relative success of urban agriculture in Grand Rapids. Do you think opposition to more equitable urban gardening is still tied to gender or race?
9. The Fulton Street Market was a success, as it survives and thrives today. What factors contributed to its survival where other markets have failed?

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