

OMSSA 60th Anniversary

The Historical Lead up.....

John Stapleton

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Agenda

- The Lead up to World War II: (1930-1939)
- The War Years (1939-1945)
- Post War Reconstruction (1945 onward)
- The Great Debate (1947)
- The Birth of OMSSA (1950)

The Lead up to WWII

- *"But it was the Great Depression that forced the municipalities into the forefront as the source of relief for large segments of the population. A permanent change had been effected in that local governments had come to accept that at least some welfare services were their responsibility, and most had taken delivery into their own hands. The old system where out-of-door relief was farmed out by the city or town to a house of industry or some such private charity was seen no more. "*
 - Dr. Cliff Williams:1984 (picture: p.4; September 13, 2005)



The lead up to OMSSA

The Lead up to WWII

- In 1935, bankrupt or distressed municipalities paid cash assistance for the first time. The decision was made by **Liberal Minister David Croll**
- The cash paid was heavily subsidized by the province
- All municipalities continued providing their systems of vouchers, clothes and food hampers, seeds and bag of coal and coke for fuel.

The lead up to WWII

- Caseloads across Ontario moved towards 400,000 beneficiaries at a time when Ontario's population stood at 3,000,000.
- Almost 16% of Ontario's population received direct relief in 1935 while many others received "indirect relief" that required work in return for relief.
- Municipal relief administrations were stretched 'beyond the breaking point' .

The lead up to WWII

- But tensions were growing....On July 31, 1935, Hepburn famously outlined his feelings about municipalities asking for cost sharing to pay for relief rolls.
- *"There's a growing impression among the taxpayers of this province that they are being drained of their money to provide a living for idlers... We will pay the municipalities a lump sum each month ... In other words, we will say to them: 'Here's the alimony, you raise the children.'"*

The lead up to WWII

- Throughout the 1935-1939 period, municipalities tinkered with relief rates that were then called "Campbell rates" first recommended in an Ontario-based Royal Commission from 1932 headed by Wallace Campbell, general manager of the Ford Motor Company of Canada.
- "Campbell + 5" , 10, 15, 20, 25 or 39 became a part of the common lexicon

The lead up to WWII

The 1938 Rate Cut :

“A 15 per cent rate decrease was greeted with howls of derision and scorn by social activists but the stronger voices came from municipalities that looked at the province's move as more symbolic, clearly meddling in the municipal view, where they did not belong. In the summer of 1939, great plans were conceived to fight the government at every turn.”

The lead up to WWII

- However, this is one skirmish that did not get a chance to play itself out. On September 10, 1939, Canada declared war on Germany.

The War Years

- *Between 1939 and 1941, Ontario's monthly average number of relief recipients dropped from 133,971 or 9.8% of the population to 27,713 or 1.9%*
- *By the end of 1943, only 15,216 Ontarians were still on (and)...88% % (of them) were sick."*

The War Years

- Throughout the early 1940's, various groups in Toronto deputed to the Public Welfare Committee (in Toronto) that the Campbell Report rates should be scrapped in favour of rates that reflected proper scientific dietary standards.
- two main debate questions:
 - **were relief rates sufficient? and**
 - **if mothers would only cook and prepare food properly, would they have enough money to prepare nutritious meals based on what they received?**

The War Years

- *"More important was the changing context of the war itself. **War heightened the consciousness of Canadians about questions of diet and nutrition**, whether they examined
 - the inadequate health of army recruits,
 - the standards of support necessary for the families of those fighting overseas, or
 - their own ration books.War also raised concerns about reconstructing society ."*

Post-war Reconstruction: 1945-50

- Following WWII, there was widespread fear that the economy would revert into Depression
- Canada began to experiment with the view of the state as supporting markets and the economy through government programs and infrastructure
- Nutrition, medicines and vaccines were promising paths out of poverty for all.

Post-war Reconstruction: 1945-50

- Two broad elements:
 - The first was the Ontario Government's decision in 1946 to revamp residential care for the elderly impinging greatly on municipal (and charitable) houses of refuge.
 - The second was the very real tug of war between who should run social services
 - a cadre of centrally administered professional social workers free from the interference of all governments; or
 - the incumbent municipal structure that had increased its hold on service delivery during the war

The Great Debate

- In 1944, Charlotte Whitton, an original member of the Royal Commission that created the Department of Public Welfare in 1930 and later to become the mayor of Ottawa, conducted a massive survey called 'The Administration of Welfare Services in Ontario'
- She recommended a complete overhaul of services placing trained social workers in charge of the new system. Whitton had support from the new Minister and Deputy as well as the University of Toronto School of Social Work.

The Great Debate

- Whittton's recommendations lined up with
 - Leonard Marsh's Report on Social Security for Canada which called for large scale income security for all Canadians and
 - the federal **Dominion Green Books** on the structure of programs for the postwar era. The **Green Books** called for income security to be provided to all at the federal level in exchange for taxing powers that would be given up by the provinces in exchange for the federal programs.

The Great Debate

- In 1946, the Dominion-Provincial conference on Reconstruction collapsed .
- Neither:
 - Quebec's Premier Duplessis nor
 - Ontario's Premier Drew
- would accept a handover of taxing power without specific controls over federal programs that Prime Minister King was not prepared to give up.

The Great Debate

- With the federal government out of the game, the debate over centralization and professionalization took on a new life.
- Powerful proponents of local municipal delivery
 - William Goodfellow, the new Minister of Public Welfare and
 - Leslie Frost, Treasurer of the province and later, premier in 1949

The Great Debate

- "During the summer of 1947 these conflicting visions of welfare reform clashed head-on at the Ontario Conference of Social Welfare, a major gathering of provincial and federal politicians, social workers and municipal representatives of the Community Welfare Council of Ontario to debate the future of social assistance in the province."

The Great Debate

- Harry Cassidy from the University of Toronto spoke first:
- ... *“local politicians talk about money all the time when they discuss welfare questions and appear to many of us to be oblivious to the issues of human well-being that are involved.”*

The Great Debate

- Grant Crawford, President of AMO then took the lectern:
- *“Municipal councils in general have a healthy scepticism of experts and promises.” (They need) “to satisfy the elected representatives with factual evidence that the proposals advanced will meet the need and that there is some reasonable limit to the apparently limitless expansion of welfare services. The primary responsibility of the elected representatives is to those whom they represent and not to the underprivileged or those in need of assistance.”*

The Great Debate

- Enticed by 50% cost sharing, Toronto, Hamilton and Windsor formed Welfare Units in anticipation of the new legislation which was to have come out of the 1947 conference.
- The Progressive Conservative government, in the end, finally (by 1949) refused to proclaim it .

The Emergence of OMSSA

- But the three new self-proclaimed welfare unit administrations did not necessarily accept the deep divisions between:
 - left and right,
 - academics vs. politicians, or
 - certified professionals vs. administrators.
- Many administrators thought the administration of welfare needed to be separated from partisan politics at all levels and required at least some professional social workers working alongside them.
- They saw the great postwar debate as opening needless fault lines that were counterproductive to moving forward.

The Emergence of OMSSA

- To these ends, a group of administrators, some who had attended the 1947 conference, began talking about forming a professional association and got down to business in 1949. They were encouraged by provincial welfare director James S. Band
- In 1950, forty people attended the first annual conference of the Ontario Welfare Officers Association (OWOA), the forerunner of the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association.