



Centre for Oral History and Tradition

Snacks: A Canadian Food History



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C-674

The Canadian snack food industry is not a monolithic entity. Historically, it has been comprised of a variety of business models, ranging from thousands of people working in technologically advanced factories, to small, seasonal operations employing a handful of people working on ancient equipment in backyard machine sheds. Some companies have been highly innovative, expanding product lines and establishing additional production facilities in neighbouring provinces. Others produce only one item, and take measures to ensure that their company does not grow beyond its current size.



The products of this industry are both comfort foods and foods eaten in social settings. They are frequently consumed at celebrations, large and small, ranging from family birthday parties to movie nights with friends. They can be little rewards to the self for surviving a tough day at work, or small indulgences to be enjoyed when money is tight. If there is indeed “a certain amount of comfort in a bag of chips or a chocolate bar,” as an Old Dutch employee avers, then we would do well to know more about these products, their makers, and their consumers before we try to take that comfort away. Examining the production and consumption of Canadian snack foods from an historical standpoint, it is hoped, will provide greater understanding of—if not sympathy for—those who take

Janis Thiessen is Associate Professor of History and Associate Director of the Oral History Centre at the University of Winnipeg. She has written three books: *Manufacturing Mennonites* (University of Toronto Press, 2013), *Not Talking Union* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016), and *Snacks* (University of Manitoba Press, 2017). She lives in Winnipeg’s West End with her schnoodle Hobsbawm, and her favourite snack is Old Dutch dill pickle potato chips.

Everyone is welcome; light refreshments to be served