

NAME	pg.	PLACE	pg.	DATE	pg.
Depression Early work	1	7* Victoria	1		
		7* Coquitlam	18	1920	1
			8*	1930s	1
10* Depression			8	1943	1
WWI Return to work			8*	1945	1
12* Boys' Industrial School	1				
WWII Union War + Unionization	5*	7* Victoria (B.C.)	1		
	5*	7* New Westminster	1		
WWII Unionism					
WWII Unionism	1*	B.C. Government Employees Assoc.	1		
	5*	GEMS	1		
	5*	B.C. Medical Plan	1		
Postwar Situation Post WWII			8*	1930s	1
Post WWII Control Over Work Envir.		7* Victoria	1		
Post WWII Union Structures	4*	Essondale	1		
Post WWII Union		7* Saskatchewan	1		
	5*	Provincial Secretary (B.C.)	2		
	12*	Boys Industrial School	2		
	5*	(B.C.) Attorney-General Dept	2		
Post WWII ^{Mont} & work					
	14*	Essondale	1		
	13*	B.C. Institute of Tech.	2		
	4*	Essondale	3		
Post WWII PA Interest in Union					
	0*	Madelaine Johnston	1	7*	Victoria
	0*	Claire Scott	1		
	0*	Jean Gower	1		
	0*	Bessie Doile	1		
	0*	Ann Romeo	1		
	0*	Turn Hawkins	1		

	NAME	pg.	PLACE	pg.	DATE	pg.
Post WWII 9+ Union Com+	* Kay Murray	1				
	* Margaret Mackie	1				
Post WWII Family Attitudes						
To Union + WWII Involvement	(BC Government Em- ployees'	2 7*	Vancouver Island	1		
	Association	2	Brannon Lake	1		
	1* Essondale	2				
Post WWII Affiliation BUFL	* BC Federation of Labour	1				
	* Canadian Congress of Labour	1				
	* BC Government Employees Assoc.	1				
	* BCFL	1				
	* CU	1				
	* BUFL	1				

Anna Arthur 1.1. Depression Early Wrk

My name is Anna Arthur. It was originally Anna Vanderveen. I was born in Victoria to missionary parents. We came to this part of the country, Coquitlam, in 1920. With the exception of six years I have been here ever since.

I was trained as a teacher and taught for awhile in the 1930s and was married in 1935. I had a family and did not work again until 1943. It was exceptionally hard to find work as a teacher during the Depression. So hard that I ended up having a private kindergarten for pre-school. There weren't any kindergartens in the school system at that time. It was quite successful.

It was during the war and we lived not far from what was an industrial school ^{too} and they were in need of teachers at that time. They kept pestering me to ^{go and} teach. I felt that I had a committment at home and I didn't want to do that. I had two children, the oldest of whom was going to school. The smaller one was at home still. However, they kept at me and I finally agreed to go on a part-time basis for half a day for each day. It was fortunate at that time that we shared a house with my mother, so she was able to share the care of the child. I worked part-time until my husband ^{be} became ill in 1945. He was in a sanitorium for nearly a year. So I went to work fulltime.

The Boys' Industrial School was a school for boys who had run afoul of the law, incorrigible boys. At that time there was no place either for emotionally disturbed boys so they were all put in together, packed in together. It was too bad. But it was the best that could be done at the time.

We had all kinds of children. All races and creeds. Children from very disadvantaged backgrounds and it was pretty hard for them to understand sometimes things that most of us take for granted. Certain kinds of conduct were unknown to them and one had to be very patient and loving. It was rather hard to love some of them, but that was what they desperately needed.

The hours of work were long. It wasn't so bad for the teaching staff but for the supervisors and other staff the hours were very long, as much as twelve hour days at one time. This was especially true at the mental hospital, which was a joint boys' industrial school. The working week was long. The wages were not good at all. My husband recently said to me that his pension cheque now, is greater than the salary that he received when he began to work at the provincial mental hospital.

We shared a house with my mother and she cared for my daughter during that period of the day when I was away. Later on we moved from her home and I had to get a girl to come in and look after the younger one. I was fortunate in my work that when they started school their hours were much the same as my hours. We had the same days off together, weekends. We all had school hours.

My husband worked shiftwork, so we could share the time. If something happened that I couldn't get home right after school and he was off on the afternoon, it worked out that he would be around to look after the children. It worked out very well, we were most fortunate.

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The time I think it is most difficult for working mothers is when a child is ill. Then there is a conflict of loyalties. You're loyal to your child and you're loyal to your employer. It's very difficult for a working mother to make arrangements to care adequately for her child.

I've always done my housework alone. I've got good equipment. I've suffered from exhaustion from time to time and the doctor would tell me that I was doing far too much, so rather than try to get help living here, I got good equipment. Sometimes our house wasn't spanking clean, but it was clean enough to be healthy and dirty enough to be happy. (Laughs.)

The kids used to, when they got home from school, prepare vegetables for dinner and there was the usual hassle about keeping their rooms tidy but they eventually did it. They were very good about housework.

It was during the war that we were organizing. There was a strong movement at the latter part of the war. As the organization of the war industries grew we felt that we weren't fighting a lonely battle and it gave us strength and courage.

My husband was one of the original ones, but I came in a little later. We started from about six people. In fact, that six was ~~the~~ six that created Medical Services and they also started a credit union with the money they had in their pocket that night. It's an enormous credit union right now.

The union ^{by} grew from that until the time I was president there were twelve hundred members. FINT.
So we had done a lot of organizing.

It became very apparent that unless we did organize we could never improve things. At the provincial mental hospital there were some people who had been brought up in the old country and were accustomed to the union way of life. They were strongly recommending that unionization begin. That's actually how it started.

I have never been one to sit back and let things happen. When there have been things that I have felt were not right I had to speak up strongly about them. I was doing it then and when one has a high profile one gets involved. My husband was interested in it so we had a very supportive role for one another and a sort of common interest and goal. He was a psychiatric nurse at Essondale for many years... The issue of family support was very important for ^mwomen. One can't buck one's employer and one's spouse at the same time. It's just too much to ask.

It was called an association and I expect that's what it was. In a way it was a federation because there were several associations involved. Victoria had a large group, New Westminster had a group, and finally others in smaller places who were employed by the government formed small groups. So in a way, it was a federation. People were afraid of unions, they weren't ready for that at

ANNA ARTHUR WWII 2.2. War and unionization

that time, and we could start by calling it an association and easing people into the union/movement that way. Our employer would not have accepted a union but an association would be more readily accepted.

Unionization W,W,II ANNA ARTHUR Pt. 1.

We were always having membership drives and stirring up interest in the association and talking it up continually. I imagine it got pretty tiresome talking about the Government Employees' Association; We lived ate and breathed that. (Laughs.)

One of the tools in our organizing was a very excellent little association news, which was brought out monthly by a very dedicated handful of people, and that really got around. It was hand delivered to the wards and to the school, the powerhouse, and the workshops and so on. It was a very valuable tool. It would have articles taken from other union newspapers, articles written about concerns and which were really our own. poetry that reflected our needs and our hopes.

Hours of work was certainly an important issue. They were working towards, especially, a medical plan. From that medical plan that evolved from the Government Employees' Association was what used to be called GEMS, and that was a government employees' medical service. It is now evolved into the B.C. Medical Plan. From all the plans that were in existence it was the one that was chosen that was the best.

People never responded as well as we hoped. Sometimes there were some very caustic comments about, "Where do we ever expect to get³" and, "We're knocking our heads against a stone wall," and "Only stupid people would do such a thing" or "Why stir it up? It's not too bad, we're getting by..." On the other hand, it must have been pretty worthwhile because we grew to be a very sizeable organization.

People were very afraid. They did not know what their employer might do to them. I am sure they feared for their jobs. This is something that an organizer who works for an employer has to live with too. As I found out.

People were concerned about lay-offs at the end of the war because many of the jobs were being held for people who'd left them. Many of the people who had been in the services came back to their jobs. That was one thing about the provincial government -- it had saved the jobs for those people who wanted

to return to them. They came back and their time in the service was counted which was very helpful to them when it came pension time.

But the institution had grown and it grew after the war. There were many people who needed mental hospitals so ^{the} staff enlarged. People came in from the war industries to take jobs in government after the war.

During the 1930s it was the depths of the Depression and people felt that the men in the family ought to be working. The head of the family should be working. It was probably the war that got women working because they formed the workforce. After the war was over they were not after that period going to give up that sort of life easily, as a rule. From then on the movement towards women in the workforce grew and grew.

ANNA ARTHUR WORLD WAR II 1.1. Control over Work Environment

I don't think that the employer really realized just how special the skills were. But they were! Special programmes had to be arranged for each individual child and ^{we} were always preparing material to fit the needs of each person.

I took courses whenever I could, whenever courses were available at the university. I spent summers taking courses in Victoria. I never did complete university because I spent so much time specializing in programmes for these children.

There was a sense of solidarity amongst the teaching staff. Most of the staff seemed to recognize that here was a place where there was some discipline and some limits for these people who hadn't had any and were playing out their need for some kinds of limits for their actions.

As long as there was a one way street from administration to staff things went very well, but when the staff started speaking up it was not well received at all. The people who are meeting the public all the time feel that they know best what is affecting the public and this isn't shared by administration. They feel that they know best, having had innumerable courses on the subject. (Laughs.)

We had a very difficult time when there was a real dust-up there [at the school]. They brought in a whole new type of programme, a permissive type of programme, which is just was very difficult for the people who were working with the children all the time to accept. It was a relaxation of placing limits, so the children had no recognition of where certain behavior had to stop. And it was a complete antithesis of what had previously gone on. So it was very difficult for the working staff to accept.

People would come to talk to us about grievances. Something we developed in the Essondale branch was an excellent grievance procedure which became adopted by the entire association. Members who were chosen by the different component groups in the Essondale association formed a committee which acted as a grievance committee. That was excellent because it represented each of the different factions in the association. We had trades people, nurses, clerical staff, medical staff...it made it very difficult to negotiate on behalf of a complete group when there were all these varying interests and conditions.

I suppose they were shop stewards but we didn't call them that. They did finally evolve into a shop steward system. They were the grievance committee at that time. Later on they weren't, and the shop steward would bring the grievance to the grievance committee. The relationship was always good. Members of the grievance committee were in a pretty precarious position sometimes with management. There were several people who got on very shaky ground and still maintained their positions.

There was a monthly meeting of the whole local and there was also a monthly meeting of the grievance committee and the executive had a meeting also.

The school administration did not allow us to meet on school grounds.

Finally we were able to use classrooms for meetings but they weren't very happy about it. But this was one of the things that we demanded.

Check-off:

It took us awhile to win a check-off system. At first we didn't have it. We finally won it and then we had it for a few years and something we did we had courage enough to strike---we lost it. They took it away from us. We had been bad. We lost it because it was felt (by the government) that we'd lose our membership and therefore the association would be dead. We'd no longer be a force.

We knew we could not allow this to happen. So, we organized again and we had our members who volunteered to collect the dues and keep our membership alive.

It was a tremendous job because all that had to be recorded, All those dues that were collected had to be funnelled into one central place. It happened right here in this house and the recording of it was a tremendous job, keeping track of who'd paid their dues and who hadn't. We weathered that storm and finally got the check-off back again.

Recognition:

(recognition)
It was very difficult to acquire because it was a first. Never had government servants, public servants, been organized. The government always felt that you could not have public servants who were serving the public organized to a point where they could go on strike, and take the services from the public at their will. However, Saskatchewan got it. They were the first province to win it. After that, once you've got a precedent it's much easier to acquire. After it had worked for awhile in Saskatchewan we were able to bring our government around. Of course, there are changes in government too which gives a whole different viewpoint and made it easier for us.

Negotiation was a representation by people who would go to Victoria and talk with the Provincial Secretary, who was actually the go-between, between the government and ourselves. We had to deal with the Provincial Secretary, whose department this was at that time. The Boys' Industrial School Department was ^{the} Attorney General. So that made it a little difficult because you had to deal with two different people depending on whom you were representing. It was done face-to-face.

Patronage was a very strong issue that we fought. And really got rid of it, as much as you can expect. (It wasn't apparent because people were getting jobs on qualification and/or experience.) We fought for ^{the} posting of all positions. Often they're posted with someone in mind. We learned that that eventually happened.

Those awful days! There were twelve hour days at one time. Then they got them down to nine hours and then when we finally got an eight hour day and a forty hour week-that was really wonderful! Of course in the nursing staff, its forty hour week often wasn't a straight five days because they had to cover wards. But it worked out for them. If they accumulated time they got what was called "hot time", which was accumulated overtime, so they were able to get that off.

One of the difficulties with ~~the~~ the nursing staffs at the hospital was trying to get some sort of rostering ahead so they would know when their holidays were coming. People didn't know from the first of one month through that month when ^{they} they were going to have their days off. That was straightened out by some intelligent charge nurses.

People did get hurt. It's very difficult to handle very violent patients and not get hurt. Especially when you're trying not to hurt them. It was a condition of employment. You knew that you were going to work in a place like that and you undertook it. We paid compensation there and were compensatable when we were hurt, but what the employer did was to pay us our full wages so that we received more than we would on compensation. The compensation was paid to the government but we were paid our full wages. We really profited from that arrangement and they should be given due credit for that.

Equal pay for equal work was very, very central, ^{as were} hours of work, holidays, sick leave and the medical services--which took a long time to get help from the employers on that.

The workforce at the school was mostly male. There were three or four women out of probably fifty people. There was some office people, there was a nurse matron and there were some supervisors who actually were housekeepers. They supervised the boys in making beds and cleaning dorms and did the mending and so on. And then there was a teacher! (Laughs.)

The men did some supervising of the boys in the housework, but very little. It was just for the heavier type of work, perhaps polishing floors. Mostly it was outside work. They supervised them in athletic activities, would take them on trips, walks and so on. We had at one time a very good band and that was of course, all male. They never got involved in really treating these children as children. There wasn't any of the mothering process, because they weren't mothers. But some of the women staff did provide that kind of thing.

The woman who was the stenographer there was a key person in the administration. She was a very, very necessary part of it and very good at what she was doing. And the nurse and matron-I think probably their responsibilities, while they were different, were just as important.

There were differences in pay between men and women, that was something that we were working to improve. Our cry was "equal pay for equal work". and It's always been difficult to decide the equalness of work. However, in the nursing staffs at the provincial mental hospital it wasn't too difficult to do that, and there the difference was considerable in the wages that were received. In fact, for a long time, Essondale was a school of nursing, for psychiatric nursing, and the students received a certain stipend. There was considerable difference in what the male students received from what the female

students received. That carried on right until the time that nursing education was taken over by B.C.I.T., when people had to pay tuition to attend it.

It ^{was} not just the fact that women were not being paid as much as it was the fact that anyone could be doing the same kind of work and not be receiving the same pay for it. It seems to me a very unjust thing. ~~that two people~~

Equal pay for equal work became a goal of the entire association after a few of us persevered. I was fortunate because I was expressive and outspoken and totally dedicated to this idea. I became a member of the provincial executive where I had a voice that reached every association in the federation, if you will. I also was president of this local, which at that time had twelve hundred members, and I was president for two, two-year terms and I was listened to, which was helpful in getting this cause forwarded.

There were several women that rallied to the cause, especially in the nursing staffs where it was such an obvious injustice. Some of the men felt that the jobs weren't equal, that they were doing more. (That) very often if things were really violent the men got called on sometimes to assist, but it worked the other way too. They didn't realize that sometimes women were called ^{up} on to assist. The female wards had far more nurses on them and I think the male staff rather thought that wasn't fair. When the male staff got on female wards, which they have in later years, they found that it takes more staff to deal with disturbed female patients than it did with male. It took awhile to convince some of these people and I'm not sure some of them were ever convinced.

It wasn't hard if you were a woman who was receiving less money to be convinced

ANNA ARTHUR EQUAL PAY 3.3 and other women's issues

something should be done about it. It was only by speaking out and organizing and increasing our numbers of active members, that something could be done to change it. That was the first thing ⁱⁿ making people realize that change was possible. People accepted things as they were at the time. "It had always been that way, it probably always would." I guess that probably was the most difficult thing, making people realize that surely we could change things. It wasn't beyond the realm of possibility at all. That got people interested.

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This equal pay for equal work was very, very central in negotiations.

~~In negotiation~~ It always came back to this issue of proving equalness of work and it was very difficult to do, until finally we got job specifications and job descriptions and at that point things began to become very apparent.

Essondale supplied the male nursing staff with a uniformed suit which was a beautiful grey serge once a year. The women had white nurses' uniforms and they received laundry privileges for those. Seeing that that kind of allowance was maintained was quite a thing. Later the union lost that by a very astute move of the government, who decided that for the sake of mental patients, it probably would be better if they saw nursing staff in regular street clothes. They wouldn't differentiate so. Whereupon they lost that without having the good sense to hold out for money to replace it.

There were women on the executive from other branches ~~Madeline Johnson~~^{Madeline Johnson, Claire Scott}, Joan Gower, a couple of others. The interesting thing is that the women who were in the association were active and I can't say the same for the men. Many of them were just members. But the women that were in it were right in it. They were working hard. They were very good members. They were always talking to the people that they worked with and I suppose you'd call that organizing. They were really putting forward the benefits of the association. They would undertake to collect dues when we needed that sort of thing. They would take people to meetings, they would round up a group and get them there. I think of Bessie Doik, she worked very hard for the association and Ann Romeo, sisters Ruth Hawkins and her sister, Kay Murray used to work very hard for us, Margaret Mackie. There were more. Women took office and contributed very much to it. One of the strongest of them all was Joan Gower, who was a superb parliamentarian and a very active, intelligent person.

~~We had all age groups there. It was very difficult getting young people~~ ^{NEW PARAGRAPH}
organized into the association because they hadn't had any experience with that sort of thing. Students couldn't see the need of it. They were the ones that were suffering from discrimination, especially in the wage bit. I've found that in young clerical staff they can't see the need of being organized. Perhaps because they look at it as an interim sort of thing and they're not career-minded.
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I've found everywhere it's very difficult to organize young people. Active people were in their thirties. Married women weren't so anxious to get involved in it. They thought if anybody should be involved in it it should be the husband. I suppose it was a traditional attitude at that time. This is one of the difficulties of organizing, changing those attitudes.

***Tremendous clerical staff in Victoria that was very young and difficult to organize because they just weren't interested. They were interested in making a little money and they didn't see it as a long term job.

Many people [women] didn't feel that they had the time to give to the union. I've noticed always, not just with women, if one attempts to hold a meeting just after work the chances of keeping them is poor. People set up patterns, they're going to get that ~~four~~^{four-thirty} bus because they always do and the meeting isn't going to hold them. Unless there is some issue that's really threatening them, then they will stay and work. The time to have union meetings is in lunch hours, if you're all having the same lunch hour. In so many places they're staggering lunch hours and you just can't get a group together.

Women's activity in the union was pretty well accepted here, and in part--and I don't mean to sound conceited--because of the behavior and achievement of that the women who were in it early gave to it. We made it for women in the association and in the movement at that time, we could have lost it if we'd been strident and emotional and irrational.

There was discrimination against women in terms of promotion. I think that still goes on. There are some very competent people who can't rise above a certain level. There are some traditional viewpoints, such as, "a man is forceful, a woman is bitchy." Some women wanted responsibility and they were quite capable of doing it. On the whole that's what holds women back. They reach a point and they are afraid to take the next^{big} step. They seem to think that they can't cope beyond a certain point and I don't think they give themselves a chance to find out. They need a little more self-confidence.

My people were all professional people, ministers and doctors. So unionism wasn't in my family at all. ^{They} were very concerned, all of them, about the welfare of people. ^{in unions} So I suppose [my interest] was a natural thing.

To be an organizer you need an ability to talk to people, an ability to get an overview of a situation without becoming too emotionally involved with some little detail of it. You have to keep your head. You cannot lose your sense of proportion when you're organizing and when you're negotiating. You need not become an emotional mess about the thing. An empathy with people is very important. You have to understand their problems, put yourself in their shoes without getting too upset about the whole thing, and still have a zeal for the situation. You have to be physically in good condition because it's a very trying thing.

night school

I took some courses, on top of everything else I was doing. I have always felt that I couldn't do a job unless I knew what I was doing. You have to have a really good knowledge before you can explain it to other people. I went and took courses on job planning, job descriptions, and specifications and personnel planning.

I was in hot water [at work] a great deal of the time. I was having to speak out on issues that weren't accepted well by administration and it became so bad that finally when the school moved to Vancouver Island--it went over to Brannon Lake--I never did receive a termination notice. I was just left here and it was because I had stirred around so much that I was going to be taught a lesson.

The one place I fell down a bit was being able to withstand criticism. I'm a pretty sensitive person and am easily hurt and so I felt some of the barbs, felt them deeply. However, one has to forget about being an individual and realize that you're working for a cause.

I guess I was a little bit of everything at some time or another. I was secretary for quite awhile, seemed to end up being secretary in many things. I was president for two terms, that was something. First woman president that had ever been, and it was a feather for the women's cause when I had a second term. I was organizer and I was a ~~delegate to~~ the provincial, which was the central body of the Government Employees' Association for several years. I was Essondale branch's delegate to the annual convention and the monthly meeting. I was never paid to organize.

ANNA ARTHUR POST-WAR Affiliation with BCFL 1.1.

For awhile we were members of the Federation of Labour and they gave us a lot of encouragement and advice and supported us in strike action. We were affiliated with the Canadian Congress of Labour for some time. There was strong feeling in the Association on both sides concerning that affiliation. I think the feeling was that there was some pretty radical people in the B.C. Federation and the C.C.L. and that government employees shouldn't be that radical, that they should not be so definite in their demands and take such strong action, after all they are public servants and should have that civility about us. I don't know whether a certain type of person becomes a civil servant or whether it's just our traditional view of what civil servants should be.

Union Politics

That was one thing that always made us feel like second class citizens, as we expressed it, and still ^[es] the fact that we could not in any way get involved in anything that smacked at all of politics. To the point where we could not even stand for the school board or council in one's own district. You could lose your job, and people did for that. There was nothing we could do about it, it was a condition of employment. Since then it's not nearly as rigid in that respect. One of the reasons that we had to leave ^{at} the B.C. Federation for a time was because it had such strong support for political groups.