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STIR IT UP: HOME ECONOMICS IN HIGHER EDUCATION, 1900-1945

by

MEGAN J. ELIAS

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2003

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September 17, 2003 David Nasaw
Date Chair of Examining Committee

Sept. 17, 2003
Date Executive Officer

Barbara Welter

Thomas Kessner

Louis Menand

Alice Kessler Harris

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

STIR IT UP: HOME ECONOMICS IN HIGHER EDUCATION, 1900-1945

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Megan J. Elias

Adviser: Professor David Nasaw

At the end of the nineteenth century, home economics emerged as an academic discipline in higher education. Theorists of the movement advocated a changed vision of society based in new ideas about the domestic environment. Home economists professionalized a body of knowledge and practice that had hitherto been considered private and natural. Leaders of the movement incorporated new ideas of scientific management and vocational education into their discipline. The predominantly female leaders of the movement gathered a rich assortment of disciplines under one roof. Social science and hard science, urban planning and clothing design as well as courses that prefigured women's study curricula found a place within home economics. Focusing on the movement between the years 1900 and 1945, This dissertation describes how founders of home economics conceptualized their discipline, how they secured cultural and academic authority for it and themselves and to what extent the movement they created was successful in its goals.

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Nobody makes it through ten years of graduate school alone. I have had the support of some very smart, funny and sympathetic people through this process. Chief among them was David Nasaw who taught me how to read the *Racing Form* and coached me into a full-time job. He is the ideal advisor.

At San Francisco State University Barbara Loomis correctly decided for me that I was a women's historian. At the CUNY Graduate Center in New York, David Nasaw, by his excellent example (chachkeles in the office) convinced me that I was a cultural historian. In two rollicking interdisciplinary seminars the sharp witted and comic partnership of Louis Menand and Nancy Miller made me certain that I was an intellectual historian.

While I was busy applying labels to myself, as is the graduate student wont, I had the luck of encountering Barbara Welter who showed me how history is done. Her seemingly tireless efforts to get student historians to consider actual sources is missionary work worthy of her globe-trotting ancestors. From my first days at the Graduate Center, Thomas Kessner has never let me off easy in a discussion and I can not thank him enough.

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It is perhaps appropriate that a historian's greatest debt should be owed to the dead. My mother was a serious scholar, a true friend, and made the world's best raisin pie. Whatever this dissertation lacks is missing because she could not read it. It is dedicated to her memory.

In Memory of Diana Vincent-Daviss (1943-1993)

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Abstract

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Introduction

At the end of the nineteenth century home economics emerged as a new academic discipline. In 1875 there was one four-year course in home economics, at the University of Illinois. By 1940 most state university systems had at least a department of home economics and some had dedicated separate colleges to the discipline. When Martha Van Rensselaer was hired by Cornell University in 1903 to write bulletins for farm wives, she had to invent a home economics major for herself in order to earn a BA degree. Twenty-nine years later, at her death, the new building of the College of Home Economics was named for her. Annual conferences of the American Association of Home Economics routinely welcomed nearly one thousand attendees. In the space of fifty years, a small group of women, mostly trained in the sciences, created a discipline for women and largely about women. The subject of the discipline was the home and the work performed within it. This dissertation discusses how founders of home economics conceptualized their discipline, how they secured cultural and academic authority for it and themselves, and to what extent the movement they created was successful in its goals. Most people educated in American public schools remember taking, and seldom enjoying, some form of home economics during high school. Few realize that these courses are the remnants of a vigorous movement to redesign how we think about and behave in our homes.

Home economics emerged as a discipline within higher education during a period of widespread change in American universities. The introduction of vocational education, scientific research methods, and the social sciences, as well as the arrival of female students on the campuses of state universities, provided the context in which home economics was born. From outside the university, theories of scientific management and the arts and crafts movement inspired and influenced the new discipline. Like agricultural science and like social work, to both of which it was closely related, home economics attempted to make a profession out of what had hitherto been considered innate, natural, and without intellectual content.

Writing about home economics by historians has often dismissed the movement in academia as a way of sidelining women by relegating them to traditionally female spheres of home and child care. This interpretation ignores the fact that no home economics department was designed, organized or run by a man. I argue that the women who created home economics departments created them to serve intellectual and cultural needs that they felt were not being met. The movement developed as a response to modernity, offering women a way to manage their homes in a changing world. The education offered was not, however, merely tactical, but philosophical, including ideas about art, nature, beauty, science, work, economics, and gender. It was also significant because it created roles of authority for female professionals. In some ways, the home economics movement prefigured the women's studies movement of the 1970s.

Women who had received degrees within the sciences became the first professors in home economics programs, not because these were the only jobs available to them, but because these were positions that they created themselves. Taking into account the fact that the nature of academic education was in a period of transition and re-shaping at the very moment that home economics was born, I present the discipline in the context of a range of intellectual movements active in the growing American university. By taking this approach I want to keep in mind the question of why housework—which, after all, has to be done—is still widely understood to be work which is neither physically nor intellectually serious. I intend to take the silly seriously here in the interests of deconstructing common sense.

The home economics movement in academia began in 1899, when a small group of academics met at a private vacation community in Lake Placid, New York. The group shared a commitment to applying science to the domestic environment and hoped to spread their ideas. The Lake Placid group proposed a list of topics for discussion which was diverse in a way that has been characteristic of the movement throughout its existence. Topics included "proteid metabolism in relation to dietary standards," "readjustment of values, social and economic," "the architect and the housewife," "the cooperative laundry," and "refined life on small incomes." The founders of the movement perceived an interrelationship amongst these issues that called for the creation of a new unifying discipline.

The work of female academics who led the movement, among them Ellen Richards of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Martha Van Rensselaer of Cornell, carved a niche for female authority in the new world of professional education and the research university. Female academics were exemplars of the progressive spirit in education. They worked with the idea of improving women's lives and, within this work, acknowledged and analyzed questions of gender, power dynamics and class. At least one home economics department, Cornell's, grew to include courses that traced women's roles in western history and addressed issues of power and politics.

By 1909 the movement had gathered enough interest around its rich collection of subjects to begin publishing a monthly journal and holding annual conferences. In 1914, the Smith-Lever Act allocated extension service education funds for home economics, signaling national recognition of some of the goals of the movement. In 1915, the United States Extension Service opened an Office of Home Economics, which became an independent bureau in the Department of Agriculture in 1923. During the First World War, academic home economists were able to expand their base of cultural authority by making major contributions to the war effort. Home economists at universities offered their services as dieticians, clothing experts and institutional managers to local, state and national government agencies.

During the 1920s, home economists became involved in the rapidly expanding fields of advertising and marketing. Sometimes professionals allowed their names and academic affiliations to be used as endorsements, but more often they struggled to promote truth in advertising and to educate consumers. Advertising and marketing professionals quickly discovered the selling power of an expert's endorsement and began to imitate the language of home economics in advertising. Corporations began to sponsor research in home economics departments and to offer demonstrations of their products based on the demonstration model developed in academic departments.

When the Great Depression began, home economists were ready with advice and strategies and again served in local, state and national relief efforts. In 1932 Eleanor Roosevelt published *It's Up to the Women*, a manual for depression-era living which she had compiled with help from friends at Cornell's College of Home Economics. Through wars and depression home economics professors continued to develop curriculum that enhanced their own status as cultural authorities. Each need they discovered could be met by employing another trained home economist. The field began with a focus on farm families and grew to include prescriptions for middle-class family life as well as careers and lifestyles for single women. Neither in practice nor in theory did the movement ever endorse the notion that women belonged only in the home or that housekeeping was a uniquely female talent. By reconceiving the modern woman as a manager, a central part of a managerial society, home economists helped promote the idea of women as independent citizens. On the other hand, they never directly attacked the cultural assumption that housework was women's work, thereby passing up the chance to make an assault on gender norms in the interests of equality.

By the 1950s, the movement had begun to lose its progressive fervor in higher education. While home economics was standard in public high schools, supported by government funding, the more radical goals of the movement were not achieved. In many ways, the feminine domesticity of white middle-class culture in the 1950s was a return to the Victorian era. While home economists had attempted to blur the boundaries between home and work, professionalizing housework and domesticating the professional world, the ideal home of the 1950s was set at a pristine remove from the working world. Where home economists had worked within a culture of scarcity, emphasizing thrift and conservation, the dominant culture of the 1950s was based in ideas of abundance which de-emphasized the traits home economics had made its central virtues. As the 1960s ended, many home economics departments had closed, been subsumed by other departments, or changed their names. Human Ecology was the choice at Cornell, suggesting the encyclopedic nature of the knowledge that home economists had claimed as their own. Other departments took the name Family and Consumer Sciences, emphasizing the movement's concerted effort to shake the idea that it was limited to women's work in the domestic sphere.

The home economics movement has seldom been treated seriously as a force of intellectual and cultural influence, yet for more than one hundred years it has developed and expanded as a source of social authority. By looking at ways in which a small group of women invented and propagated their own ideas about science, art, beauty, functionality, natural resources and domestic life, this dissertation will restore to American history a submerged narrative of gendered knowledge and knowledge about gender. It will make the argument that constructions of gender are never separate from other intellectual constructions and that only by focusing on interplay and simultaneity can we develop a meaningful understanding of our culture's common sense.

There are no comprehensive histories of the home economics movement. The most important work on the topic is a 1997 collection of essays that is the result of a 1991 conference at Cornell. The collection, *Rethinking Home Economics, the History of a Profession*, is an invaluable collection of work by scholars in several fields. It skillfully refutes the notion that home economics was simply a project to keep women in the home. The essays give readers many points of access to the history of the field by connecting it to different contexts. An essay on African-American home economics education, for instance, links the history of the field to African-American history as well as linking women's and African-American history to each other. Another essay on home economists as rural electrification agents reveals connections between the movement and government programs of the 1930s. The collection is important because it not only gives a sense of change over time in the field itself, but also argues for the importance of the field to other areas of historical inquiry, particularly (but not exclusively) women's history.[1]

My work here is intended to complement the work begun by the contributors to *Rethinking Home Economics* by providing a portrait of the first generation of leaders in the movement. Writing about the first generation gives me the opportunity to consider the movement in the dynamic period of creation. While I am interested in the ideals and potential of home economics as a specific movement, I am also very much interested in what draws people to such movements in general. The potential for personal fulfillment through ideological commitment is something I focus on here and which I find particularly fascinating.

I focus on higher education here because that is where I think the ideals of a movement are often presented in their most ambitious and distinctive form. Because the college and university settings allow us (if only superficially) to imagine ourselves above the fray of ordinary life, it has often been the venue in which theorists operated most freely, taking ideas to their logical conclusions and sometimes beyond. I wanted to focus on the home economics movement in the setting where its practitioners felt freest to make their claims grand and their experiments intensive because I thought it was worth reiterating how very seriously home economists took themselves and their field. It seemed important to me to revive this sense of self-importance because the field and its content continue to be undervalued. I also wanted to look closely at the rhetoric and rationale of the movement because I believe that by questioning and understanding the now absurd-seeming common sense of other eras we take our own core beliefs less for granted.

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[1] In 2001, Cornell's department of Human Ecology, in association with the university's rare book and manuscript division, produced an exhibit on the history of the field. The exhibit has a permanent home

Yet another reason for me to focus on home economics in higher education and in its first phase is that I believe that at that time and in those places the movement had something of value to offer American culture which was only imperfectly received. I want to consider the idea that our domestic experience should be valued equally with our intellectual experience and that the two may support each other. Looking at the work and lives of home economists in higher education allows me to portray both the message and the real-life attempts to put it into practice.

Because my focus is on higher education, I do not talk about the home economics movement as part of the wider movement to "Americanize" immigrants. When home economists took part in Americanization projects, they mostly did so in urban environments and the population they worked with included elementary and high school students, as well as families, rather than college students. For the most part, then, I portray home economists in conversation with each other rather than with any particular audience. There are many stories to be told about community responses to home economics programs, but this is not one of them.

Aside from *Rethinking Home Economics*, the movement has been addressed in three different types of histories: histories of housework, histories of the scientific management movement and histories of women in higher education. None of these

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on the web site: rmc.library.cornell.edu/homeEc.

approaches has seemed completely satisfying to me because each has failed to take the movement at its word and consider its meaning in the lives of its practitioners.

Historians of housework approach the home economics movement from the perspective of home-makers—a bottom-up approach, in which the movement is portrayed in terms of social control. The basic premise in histories such Annegret Ogden's *The Great American Housewife* , Glenna Matthews' *Just a Housewife* and Susan Strasser's *Never Done: A History of American Housework* , is that home economics was created by the middle-class to impose its own ideologies upon poorer families. While it is true that home economics was a distinctly middle-class project, this approach tends to obscure the intellectual depth of the movement and the ways in which its practice and rhetoric served those who defined it. I look at the movement from the top down. Rather than exploring the ways in which the movement's ideas were used or rejected by the women who were their audience, I tell the story of how the ideas themselves were developed in a cultural and intellectual context.

Studies of women's education, such as Barbara Solomon's *In the Company of Educated Women* and Margaret Rossiter's *Women Scientists in America*, address home economics, but tend to see it as a diversion from the "real" project of winning women access to education in the “hard” sciences and liberal arts. I depart from them in that I am interested in how home economics expressed ideas about women’s education and education in general. I also differ from Solomon and Rossiter in that I approach the field from a cultural history perspective, focusing more on its internal logic than on its institutional history.

Probably my most important point of departure from previous approaches to the field is that I focus much of my attention on the complex interplay between the personal lives of the leaders of the first generation and the development of the profession. In doing so, I attempt to blend cultural and intellectual history to explore how personal experiences shaped intellectual practices. This is done in the interest of considering how the development of home economics created not just an academic discipline, but also a group of female professionals whose identity derived from domestic expertise. Because the idea of a domestic professional was an oxymoron in the era in which the field emerged, the ways in which the leaders of the movement presented themselves offered interesting reevaluations of women's roles in society and as citizens. Home economics, then, can be considered as one route that women were able to take to economic independence and intellectual, as well as social fulfillment. It was simultaneously committed to helping women who were not professionals consider themselves as such in an attempt to redefine what is important work in a society.

I conclude by looking at the legacy of home economics in popular culture and by considering what the first generation had to offer us. As usual, messages were mixed. The revaluation of domestic work seems to me to offer a route out of fixed gender roles and towards full sex-equality, but the leaders of the first generation were bound by cultural constraints and personal choices that made it impossible for them to recognize or take advantage of this strategy. Because housework is still very much women's work and, perhaps more than ever, both devalued and bound up in the consumer economy, it seems appropriate to reconsider the goal of the home economics movement as potentially more liberating than even its first leaders imagined. It is also useful, I think, to notice that fields of inquiry are created by people with specific personal histories in specific cultural contexts. To do so enriches our relationship to our own field and our practice of it.

Chapter One: A Few Earnest People

When asked in 2003 if he would take a home economics class, a male high school student from Glens Falls, New York, was quoted saying "I wouldn't take it unless I got real, real hungry."[2] His response sums up the shadow under which home economics has labored through its history. It has been misunderstood as a subject that does not have any intrinsic value, being merely a collection of more and less useful domestic information. It has also been exclusively associated with women. The argument of the article in which the student was quoted was that home economics actually teaches life skills. The boy's wonderful response, however, and the fact that the topic still seemed novel enough in 2003 for such an article to be written, reflect the fact that the scent of boiled cabbage still hangs around the subject of home economics. Indeed, the article's author, Abigail Tucker, asserts that until the 1970s home economics classes "were a hodgepodge of unrelated sub-topics like home fashion and care of the sick." Such a statement was the sort of apostasy that the first generation of home economists spent their lives combating.

The home itself was the central focus that connected these topics and gave them educational value. The high school boy ought to be taking home economics both because he might one day get "real, real hungry," and because he or one of his female classmates might be able to make a good living off of other people's hunger. Furthermore, and most important, the subject of nutrition, which encompassed the fact of hunger, was of vital importance to national health in the rapidly industrializing modern era. Because home life was an experience shared by all, the first generation reasoned, it, in all its details, was worthy of study at the highest levels of education. The first generation of home economists had the dual and interdependent goals of establishing an academic field and changing the way Americans experienced domestic life.

At the first organized meeting of home economists, in 1899, discussion had a revolutionary tone:

> The necessity for trained women as leaders of public sentiment was emphasized by several, and it was recommended that the attention of colleges be brought to the trend of the college curriculum away from the home: that they should be shown the important relation of home economics to the individual home, and the possibility of a new profession commanding adequate compensation.[34]

The idea that college education, which had never focused on the home, was actually tending away from it, is a curious idea. In fact, at the end of the nineteenth century the introduction of sociology, psychology, agriculture, and sanitary science did bring the subject of human life in its daily details into the academic arena. Certainly the theology- and classics-based education which preceded the introduction of the German model to American universities had little to offer those who wished to understand the relations of their homes to society at large. It was precisely because the academic field was opening up, beginning to consider human experience a fit subject for study, that home economics had been able to emerge at all. As the group, which called itself the Lake Placid Conference on Home Economics, and which met annually until 1909 when it became the American Home Economics Association, discussed their ideas for a new field they simultaneously posited a new professional role for women. The trained women that participants of the conference imagined would draw public and academic attention to this

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[2] Abigail Tucker, "Beyond Homemaking," *The Post-Star, Glens Falls, NY*, March 11, 2003.

[3] *Lake Placid Conference on Home Economics* (Lake Placid, NY: 1899) 5. The Lake Placid Club conference was held at a private vacation community run by Anna and Melvil Dewey. Dewey, most famous for his library classification system, was chancellor of the State University of New York and very much interested in educational issues.

trend and attract support for the introduction of a new branch of learning that focused on the individual's most immediate environment, her home.

The first decision they made as a group reflected their desire that home economics be taken seriously as a branch of knowledge. Melvil Dewey, host of the conference, explained his system of library classification to the group and they chose a number for themselves—339. This number, a subsection of sociology, had already been assigned to another subject. The conference members, however, felt no compunction about dislodging it because, "Pauperism, which is already classed under that head, is the result of a lack of attention to home economics."[5] Home Economics was at once established, at least in the minds of the conference participants, as both a serious branch of study and a curative force in society. Indeed, its respectability stemmed from its reformative powers. The work of the home, which was unpaid and low-status, could, if properly and progressively performed, rescue American society and culture from the perceived disasters of the modern industrial age. The aim of the movement was twofold: women's work in the home had to be modernized and popular opinion had to recognize this work and these workers as central to a healthy social future.

The group wanted home economics classified as a branch of sociology because they wanted it to be seen by the public as analytic, rather than purely vocational. Throughout the history of home economics, up to the present day, when it is no longer even called home economics, professionals in the field have adamantly insisted that the field can not be reduced to cooking and sewing. Although sauces and breads may be prepared and garments assembled, all work in the field is done scientifically rather than casually. The purpose of the pudding is to derive the proof. Describing the mood of the first conference, one of the participants might also have been describing the group's vision for the field itself: "Perfect harmony prevailed thruout the conference, and it was evident that those in attendance were women capable of seeing something outside their own routine work and of recognizing the importance of work done by others."[6] Home economists were to engage in both "hard" and "soft" science simultaneously, observing, for instance, common practices in making bread, experimenting with methods, and advocating, through classroom instruction and community outreach, an ideal standardized method. They attempted to change not only processes but also attitudes towards processes. Absolute faith in the scientific method as a tool for social reform marked the movement from its very beginning and allied it with other movements in education at the time—psychology, social work, and business education.

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[5] Ibid., 6.

The ascendance of science in the academy and the reorganization of higher education were integral parts of the slew of progressive movements that were active at the turn of the century. Home economics was one of these movements.[7] The progressive impulse in American culture can loosely be defined as a commitment to study and improve society through rational methods. Unlike the millennial perfectionism of antebellum reform movements, progressive movements appealed to reason, rather than morality. Reason and morality were not, however, set entirely in opposition to each other. The rational became sacred to many progressives, particularly those involved in the development of social science. For such progressives, home economists among them, science replaced religion as the primary way of seeing the world. The findings of the laboratory became as personally meaningful to academic progressives as the words of the bible.[8] As James Gilbert notes in *Redeeming Culture*,

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[6] The Deweys were advocates of simplified spelling—Melvil had even simplified his own first name—and all of the proceedings of the Lake Placid Club Conference on Home Economics were published according to the rules of this movement.

[7] See Steven Diner, *A City and its University* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980) for a discussion of the connection between the development of the modern research university and progressive projects and politics. See also his discussion of women's professions in the progressive era in *A Very Different Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 178.

> American social science... was a genetic carrier of both science and religion. Born in the Progressive Era crisis of the 1890s, it shared a dual lineage of optimistic Protestantism and secular Germanic and French theory. Its original goals were social reform, social control, and social amelioration, and its methods embraced social inquiry, social experiment, and even "laboratory" schools. At its most creative, it seemed a neutral terrain where science and religion might meet and settle their differences.[9]

For home economists, religion and science settled their differences in the home-as-laboratory, where science became sacred and the sacred became scientifically measurable.

The first home economics conference participants, as progressives, felt justified in placing their field within sociology because they did not think of it as a new discipline in its elements, only in its organization. The "trend away from the home" in education appeared real to them because they saw most of the elements that would be required for a full four-year course in home economics already in the curricula of the major universities. They emphasized the connections between related fields as they might be used to learn about and change life in the home. Home Economists at the Lake Placid Conference determined on "so adjusting all the various branches of home economics that they may help each other in all directions." The material was out there, but in the wrong hands its wealth might be squandered. The conference itself modeled the future it proposed—a confluence of separate elements to create a transformative whole.

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[8] "Laboratory" here means any place where experiments were performed, including settlement houses, chemical laboratories, community kitchens, farmers cooperatives, and, eventually, the "practice houses" of home economics departments.

[9] James Gilbert, *Redeeming Culture* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997), 253.

Melvil Dewey opened the second conference, in 1900, with the encouraging statement that "Every great movement has been started by a few earnest people; a score of the right ones will do more effective work than a great mass meeting."[10] Their numbers might still be small, he told his friends, but their impact did not necessarily need to be so. Dewey asserted the group's identity here as an elite with responsibilities to the masses, a common notion of progressive movements. Who then were these right ones? Who designated themselves and were designated by their peers as really forward thinking and capable of creating not simply a social movement or an academic discipline, but a completely new understanding of the home? This dissertation focuses on five of these "earnest people"—Ellen Richards, "mother" of the field; Isabel Bevier of the University of Illinois; Martha Van Rensselaer who, with Flora Rose jointly established home economics at Cornell; Sarah Arnold, first dean of Simmons College; and Louise Stanley, chief of the Bureau of Home Economics—who went on to have a significant impact on the movement and who shared, through personal and professional relationships with each other, the burdens and excitements of a founding generation. This chapter introduces the first five of these six women and presents the cultural and intellectual contexts of their involvement in the movement.[11]

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[10] *Second Annual Conference on Home Economics* (Lake Placid, NY: 1900), 13.

[11] Because Louise Stanley was not appointed to her position as Chief of the Bureau of Home Economics until 1923, she is introduced in Chapter Three in the context of professional friendships and personal partnerships. Flora Rose appears throughout as Van Rensselaer's co-chair and companion, but because more of Van Rensselaer's correspondence from this era survives, I have focused on her rather than Rose.

The Euthenicist: Ellen Richards

Foremost among all home economists until her death in 1911, Ellen Richards was known as the mother of the movement. She is also known as the founder of environmental science. For her, the two were inextricably linked. Richards had graduated from Vassar in 1870, where she studied chemistry. She entered Vassar after a fretful two years of living at home, during which she realized the severe limitations on women's professional opportunities. After Vassar, Richards won acceptance as the first female student at the new Massachusetts Institute of Technology. That MIT was a relatively new institution at the time partly explains how Richards was able to gain entrance. In fact, MIT was not quite ready for Richards. Although she completed the work needed to earn a doctorate, she was never awarded the degree because MIT did not want to give its first Ph.D in Chemistry to a woman. Maneuvering her way through this hostile environment, Richards cannily used gender role expectations to help make herself a valued member of the community.

As Richards wrote during her study at MIT:

> Prof A accords me his sanction when I sew up his papers or tie up a sore finger, etc. Last night, Prof. B. found me useful to *mend his suspenders which had come to grief*, much to the amusement of young Mr. C. I try to keep all sorts of such things as needles, thread, pins, scissors, etc. around. . . they are getting to come to me for anything they want and they almost always find it. . . . As Prof. D. said the other day, "when we are in doubt, we go to Miss Swallow." You see, I am useful in a decidedly general way. . . they can't say study spoils me for anything else.[12]

She identified this as a distinct strategy to make her presence in the laboratories comfortable to the men there. By performing small domestic duties, she reassured them that they were not creating a monster, that she was still a traditional woman, despite the fact that she was an expert in her field. Richards was using domestic skills which were traditionally assumed to be part of a woman's vocation—motherhood—to assist her in achieving professional goals. In the process, she introduced domestic knowledge into the professional, analytical space of the university to make herself valuable to her peers not in spite of the fact that she was a woman, but because of it.

Women of the first generation were often quite adept at using "feminine wiles," perhaps more meaningfully described as domestic knowledge, to achieve their goals in the male-dominated world of higher education. These moments took on the status of foundation myths, repeated as apocrypha in interviews and reminiscences. The stories were so important to their tellers because they represented in miniature the project of the movement: to use the traditionally female world of domestic work to change society and women's status within society for the better. In many of these stories it is possible to see women seemingly volunteering for subservience, but equally possible, I argue, to see hapless men steered towards major decisions by simple arts. In such stories I see women not merely using the crafts acquired in gender socialization to enter a man's world, but actually changing that world by making these crafts currency within it.

Indeed, once Richards had completed her coursework, she brought the whole weight of the male-dominated scientific world to bear on the problems of the domestic sphere. By doing so she introduced the domestic sphere into the male world of science as a subject worthy of its attention. Richards began her career as a chemist with experiments on water and air quality in the Boston area. What she found so distressed her that she spent the rest of her life drawing attention to the subject of pollution. She pioneered the field now known as ecology or environmental science. In addition, Richards opened a

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[12] Robert Clarke, *Ellen Swallow: The Woman Who Founded Ecology* (Chicago: Follett, 1973), 32.

laboratory for female students at MIT in 1876 with the help of the Women's Education Association of Boston. In 1884, MIT opened all of its laboratories to female students.

Although she married (another MIT scientist) and kept a famously tidy home, Richards did not dedicate herself exclusively to her own domestic environment, but rather looked on the natural environment as a home itself.[13] As Sarah Stage notes in her brief biography of Richards, as early as 1890, Richards envisioned a future in which "the college woman would apply scientific principles 'not only in her own home, but in all work for the amelioration of mankind.'"[14] Within the larger environmental home, the household also interested her. If air and water were impure, that affected the people who made their homes in the polluted environment. For Richards, there was no science without human context. She applied a housekeeper's vision to the natural environment and a scientist's to the domestic.

In her commitment to breaking down the culturally constructed boundaries between the home and world, Richards both worked within and diverged from the movement for municipal housekeeping. Indeed, a model syllabus that Richards and Alice Norton presented at the third Lake Placid Conference included "Municipal Housekeeping" as one of its subject headings.[15] Advocates of this movement argued that women had a duty to involve themselves in the affairs of the world because they possessed innate qualities that the male world of industrial capitalism sorely lacked. Attributes such as spirituality and an impulse to nurture were considered distinctly female. Domestic reformer and writer Catherine Beecher (1800-1878) had argued that these qualities gave women a moral superiority which was best exercised in the management of the home. Municipal housekeepers argued that women must take their natural talents beyond their own four walls to mother to and manage the larger society.

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[13] In 1910, Caroline Hunt was visiting Richards when she received in the mail a scorecard for houses developed by a fellow home economist. Richards immediately asked Hunt to score her house. Hunt reported that the house could not receive a perfect score because it was not surrounded on all sides by downward slopes and therefore might have drainage problems. That Richards' house was judged imperfect lead Hunt to pronounce the scorecard an ideal, something to strive for, rather than an actually achievable reality. (Caroline Hunt, "Social Work for Students of Home Economics," *Journal of Home Economics* 2 (June 1910): 268.)

[14] Sarah Stage, "Ellen Richards," in Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vincenti editors, *Rethinking Home Economics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 24-25.

[15] *Third Annual Lake Placid Conference on Home Economics* (Lake Placid, NY: 1902), 92. The other topics were: Home and Family Life: ideals and standards; The House Beautiful (with subcategories:

Richards and her peers in the home economics movement never talked in terms of the innate or of female superiority. They offered a cultural rather than a biological or mystical explanation for women's difference from men: women were different from men because of the work they did. Home economists, then, agreed with municipal housekeepers that the home and the world beyond it needed to be reconnected, but saw the reconnection taking place in a different direction. Instead of simply taking the virtues of the home out into the world, they wanted to apply the technologies of the world to the work of the home in the combined interests of making the world more homelike and the home more worldly.

In a discussion of nomenclature at the sixth Lake Placid conference, Richards suggested a new word to designate the field—euthenics. This term for "better living" she proposed as sister to " a new word coined by Francis Galton to express a better race, *eugenics*."[16] Richards was the most persistent among leading home economists, in discussing the field in terms of "race conservation," but others of the field's leaders also saw home economics as a response to a crisis in human development. In general, they used the notion of race suicide, popular among some progressives, such as Theodore

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situation and architecture; sanitation; furnishing; cleaning and care); clothing; food in relation to health; science and art of cookery; division of the annual income.

Roosevelt, to express a fear that sustaining values in American society were in danger of dying out both because of declining birth rates among white Americans and because of a creeping effeminacy in the culture. While, as Gail Bederman argues in *Manliness and Civilization*, conversations about race suicide mostly focused on notions of masculinity, home economists saw the perceived threat in terms of values and mores being trampled by industrialization.[17] For home economists, the health of American civilization was threatened because the women of the American race were being kept in a state of primeval ignorance about the fundamental truths and possibilities of their daily existences.

Untying the Apron Strings

The feminism of the movement was located in this liberationist vision. Home economists wanted to free women from the stigma of women's work. Partly this would be accomplished by rationalizing women's labor—making less of it in the process—and partly by assigning it greater value. This created a dynamic paradox that the movement was never fully able to reconcile: if women's work was innately valuable, why attempt to replace so much of it with outside services? Like the visionaries who Dolores Hayden terms "domestic feminists" (Charlotte Perkins Gilman prominent among them) home economists located the source of female oppression in their socio-economic role—their labor.[18]

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[16] *Fifth Annual Lake Placid Conference on Home Economics* (Lake Placid, NY:1904), 63.

[17] Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[18] See Dolores Hayden *Grand Domestic Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), for a fascinating discussion of early feminist thinking about domestic space.

However, although the first generation of home economists whom I discuss here were suffragists in more and less public ways, they did not overtly argue that freedom from toil was freedom from male oppression. While they talked about women as victims, they never talked about men as involved in the forces that oppressed women. Liberation was from circumstances, not imagined in male versus female terms. Indeed, home economists argued that the forces of modern industrial capitalism which, if not mastered, had the potential to oppress women also oppressed men. Everyone lost out if the home remained pre-modern. In a sense this argument repeats Catherine Beecher's argument for separate spheres, because it insists that the home is as important as the world outside it. However, the refusal to gender oppression also suggests thinking beyond feminism, because it posits a world in which men also suffer from what appear to be their social advantages.

When asked if women ought to be paid for domestic labor in their own homes, Martha Van Rensselaer, of Cornell, once said that the reward for housework was properly "psychic," rather than monetary.[19] On the one hand, this statement echoes the sentiments of municipal housekeeping and separate spheres ideology by suggesting that women's work exists on a plane in which the work itself has value and is distinct from the brutal male world of capitalism. On the other hand, Van Rensselaer's argument lacks the emotional, almost mystical elements of Beecher's belief in female moral superiority.

The argument that women's work in the home belongs to an economy separate from the economy of men's work, or women's professional work outside the home, was central to the movement's problematic approach to their field. While home economists believed that women were equal to men in their value to society, they based their movement on three assumptions that did not, finally, add up to a viable whole. These assumptions were: 1) housework has to be done; 2) housework is low-status; and 3) women do housework.

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[19] Martha Van Rensselaer to Carrie Chapman Catt, June 23, 1928, Box 33, Folder 25, New York State College of Home Economics Papers, Rare and Manuscript Collections, Karl A. Kroch Library Cornell University (hereafter NYSCHE Papers). The letter is in response to one from Catt, who requested Van Rensselaer's opinion as part of her research for an article to be published in the *Pictorial Review*.

Dolores Hayden suggests that the failure of the domestic feminists to fully realize their goals for a changed society came through a failure to break with the second assumption. Neither domestic feminists nor home economists (and there was much overlap between these two groups) attempted to re-design male gender roles. Home economists chose to work against the second assumption, without directly attacking the question of whether housework was low-status because women did it or women did housework because they themselves were low-status.[20]

Educating Women

The conflicted approach to this conundrum can be seen in the relationship of academic home economists to the students who they attempted to educate into a new version of womanhood. College women were favorite study subjects for home economists, offering a controlled environment and facilities at times when money for research projects was in short supply. Using college women for studies was more than just convenient, however; it was also appropriate to the goals of the movement. The women encountered on college and university campuses were exactly the women whom the movement hoped to convert and who seemed most likely to be converted. Conversion was not simply to certain practices—conservation, moderation—but to the scientific method applied to ordinary life. The young woman who had been a participant in a departmental study would be more likely to look at her own post-college home as a laboratory, worthy of study, or so home economists hoped. One participant at the fourth Lake Placid Conference declared that "women need to feel that this [home economics] is culture as much as anything else. The husbands must be induced to cooperate in various experiments."[21] A well-educated woman would use her family for research just as her professors had used her and her peers.[22]

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[20] This conundrum took a new twist with the rise of Martha Stewart, who offers obsessive attention to housework as a means of class mobility.

The women on college campuses, particularly at the Land Grant universities where home economics thrived, would have been overwhelmingly white and middle-class. This was the movement's ideal audience—a woman who would not be able to afford a large staff of servants, but one who would have enough money and time to actually do the work required of a trained household manager. These women would also have shared cultural values and experiences with the movement's leaders. Notions such as the single-family home, the elevating influence of "fine art," organized leisure time, reverence for hand crafts, and dedication to Anglo-American cuisine were essential to the euthenically successful home.

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[21] *Third Annual Lake Placid Conference on Home Economics* (Lake Placid, NY: 1901), 109. Alice Chown was Field Secretary of the Canadian Household Economics Association.

[22] In 1936, the magazine *What's New in Home Economics* reported that, "A group of energetic young matrons of Seattle, all home economics graduates of the University of Washington, have banded together, calling themselves a euthenics group; their objective is that of making a scientific study of household problems in their own homes. . . The time and motion studies are carried out with no little amount of precision. Before any household task is put through the third degree, these "Sherlock" home economists make certain that the conditions are accurately controlled. If a soiled window is to be cleaned, therefore, the physical features of the window (degree of soil, etc.) must represent as nearly as possible the conditions found in the average home situation. One woman then performs the task. . . while the other members of the club carefully record the motions and time expended." They repeat experiments to test methods and materials. To answer the question of whether it is better to clean a house by picking up as you go along, or to give one periodic thorough cleaning, "Mrs. Kelley. . . let the house go until it was so dirty that she says her husband almost lost his mind! Then, for comparison, she employed the daily pick-up method, all the while making careful note of the time and mental conditions involved." No author, "Young Matrons Use Homes as Testing Laboratories," *What's New In Home Economics*, October, 1936. Clipping in Box 3, Isabel Bevier Papers, University of Illinois Archives and Manuscripts Collections, Urbana-Champaign, (hereafter Bevier Papers).

For women faculty in African-American institutions, the ideals of the movement often had another, uncomfortable and unattractive resonance. Faculty and students at African American women's colleges resisted the home economics movement in its early phases because they saw it potentially leading their graduates into lives of domestic labor, the very situations which they hoped to help their students avoid. As Daisy Kugel of Spelman College reported as late as 1931, "as regards study of home economics at the college, at the beginning of the year the general feeling of both faculty and students was that it is manual work only. The chief purpose of the students is to get away from work with the hands in a desire to achieve culture." Despite the strong distrust of the field, however, Kugel noted, enrollment of freshmen in home economics courses tripled between 1930 and 1931 as "every effort is made to adapt the work to the particular needs of the students, rather than to follow the traditional curricula. By this means it is hoped to improve living conditions, raise the standards and train leaders of the race." Although Kugel implied that Spelman faculty and students were changing the field to suit the particular needs of African Americans, the three aims she mentioned were at least rhetorically in line with the ideals of most white home economists.[23]

White home economists had no reason to fear that their graduates, mostly not from the poor and working classes, would receive BAs only to end up as live-in maids in wealthier women's homes. Because of the racial segregation of American society this fear was quite real for African-American faculty. Women at African-American colleges were being educated away from the necessity of taking work as domestics. Home economics seemed to drag them back into it.

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[23] Daisy Kugel, "Home Economics at Spelman," *Journal of Home Economics* 23 (March 1931): 247.

Female faculty at traditionally white women's colleges also resisted incorporating home economics into curricula because the field seemed to advocate a pre-feminist version of womanhood. Faculty and administrators at women's colleges like Smith and Mount Holyoke wanted their graduates to live a life of the mind as men's intellectual equals, rather than their well-trained help-meets. For both African American and white women's college faculty, home economics seemed like a dangerous experiment in social regression.

The Efficient Life

Home economists did not see their work in this way. For them, the movement was a way to elevate women's work by improving its methodology and status. But within this context, their idea of what women's work was, and even who women were, was distinctly class-bound. The better race which home economists had in mind was implicitly white and middle-class. The poor and non-white, the foreign, could be taught the wisdom of middle-class white ways as interpreted through home economics and thus rescue America's future from a chaos of waste and want. Home economists did not identify their project as middle-class or white, but these were the homes they focused on, the homes where all the elements of efficient home management might be found and exploited.

When Richards helped to open the New England Kitchen, in Boston, the intent was to provide not a soup kitchen, but rather a permanent demonstration station, to lead by example. Visitors were at once customers and students. The meals served at the kitchen were nutritionally balanced, cheap and relatively easy to prepare. Richards and her partners believed that once eaten, the meals would inspire visitors to recreate similar dishes in their own homes. By changing cuisine, converts would find themselves literally healthier, wealthier and wiser.

Organizers of the Kitchen fought to avoid the idea that their food was just for the poor, although they certainly believed it would serve the poor well. The idea that one kind of food was appropriate for all classes and cultures was both radical and conservative. It was conservative in that it refused the cultural/ethnic relevance of food, sacrificing specialty for nutritional rules, but it was radical in that it also rejected the class markings of diet. Rich people did not, the kitchen implicitly argued, eat better than poor people they simply ate more expensively. Money had nothing to do with food values; only science could determine those. As Richards said at the fourth meeting of the Lake Placid Conference,

> In food, not what we like but what is good for the many should be the standard. . . not that which we think we like, but that which is healthful and suitable for children and for efficient life. We too often come against the insane idea that liberty is license.[24]

Science could determine what was good for us, what was the proper fuel for the human machine. All else was fashion, in the case of the upper classes, and superstition, in the case of immigrants and the poor. This notion of the good set in opposition to the desirable echoed the arguments of those like Theodore Roosevelt who believed that civilization could lose potency by becoming too refined. For Roosevelt, the answer was virile imperialism, rough riding; for home economists, it was brown bread and hearty stews exhaustively tested for nutritional virtue.

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[24] *Fourth Annual Lake Placid Conference on Home Economics* (Lake Placid, NY: 1902), 35.

Richards and other home economists phrased the idea of race suicide in terms of "the disintegration of the family." Disintegration was directly tied to affluence and the increasing complexity of the market in personal goods. Richards warned that it stemmed from "this gratifying of individual tastes by a restaurant table, this selfish indulgence of personal whims in demanding a room by one's self in which no wish of an outsider is regarded and no restraint tolerated." She asked her audience if "this tendency [is] likely to produce a finer type of man and woman? Is there likely to result a more perfect race?" To combat blind following of fashion, Richards called for "such educational means as shall from the earliest years tend to knowledge of the true relations of *things* to the welfare of the person." For Richards, the creation of a "more perfect race" depended on the establishment of rational society, one in which women's work and time were both valued as vital to the survival of civilization. Where eugenicists of the era called for the breeding of new generations by those most "fit" to do so, Richards advocated the construction of a fit society, implicitly arguing that nurture was just as powerful a force as nature.[25]

The connection between civilization-in-crisis and the promise of home economics was more than implicit at the fourth Lake Placid conference. Papers by Jane Addams on "Democracy and Social Ethics," Thorstein Veblen on the "Theory of the Leisure Class," and E.A. Ross, who coined the term "race suicide," on Social Control were presented. Marion Talbot, one of the founders of Social Work, had prepared a statement that was presented by Mrs. A. P. Norton, one of the conference attendees. Talbot addressed the concerns of women's colleges and defended home economics against them. Simply to re-make the university so that it trained women students for domestic life would, she argued,

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[25] *Sixth Annual Lake Placid Conference on Home Economics* (Lake Placid, NY: 1904), 8.

> be as disappointing as it would be futile. . . There are probably at least as many women who sigh for a knowledge of the classics or of philosophy as who think their college course should have taught them how to make bread or deal with incompetent servants.
>
> The demand for home economics which will be met in time is of a different kind. It is the demand which shows that. . . the activities of the home are far wider than physical well-being, that the obligations of home life are not by any means limited to its own four walls, that home economics must always be regarded in the light of its relation to the general social system, that men and women are alike concerned in understanding the processes, activities, obligations and opportunities which make the home and the family effective parts of the social fabric.[26]

Talbot did not value home economics as a way for rich women, those with incompetent servants, to live easier lives, nor as a way to return women to the kitchen, rather than letting them enter the academy and professions as full members. Rather, its value was in its re-making of society to focus intellect and labor on the family as American civilization's basic unit. Home economics, if properly begun, would give women in the home their rights as managers of society and their responsibilities as members of a world beyond the four walls of their homes. Norton, commenting on Talbot's words, returned the discussion to the idea that American women were being left behind in the development of modernity. She insisted that home economics, "is the best subject yet found to teach power over things. It is humiliating to be conquered by things."[27] For home economists, the threat to American civilization came not from race amalgamation or effeminacy, but from the very engines of progress. Race suicide resulted from abandoning culture to mechanization, rather than taking the reins into one's own hands and using modern technology and knowledge to bolster traditional practices and virtues.

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[26] *Fourth Annual Lake Placid Conference on Home Economics* (Lake Placid, NY: 1902), 22.
[27] Ibid., 23

Richards articulated this belief in an address to the association of American Collegiate Alumnae in April, 1904, urging that

> instead of "beating our wings against the bars," we college women have determined to "conquer fate" – to free ourselves from the unnecessary trammels of the middle ages and yet to keep all that is essential to the sweetest and purest home life.[28]

Women could only emerge from the middle ages by taking seriously the work that was associated with their gender and by applying to it all modern principles available. Sweetness and purity were no longer simply to be romantic ideals, but measurable quantities discovered through academic research.

Richards told the story of a young woman who felt shame to admit to an aunt, a woman "of the old school," that she bought her underwear ready made. Richards sympathized with, but rejected the sense of shame. "Traditions of the past bind us as with bands of steel," she argued,

> and most of us have felt that shame... to have our aunts know that we have a man from the Buildings care company wash our windows or that we sent our husbands' vests to the tailor to have the pockets mended. It is not because we do not know how to do things; oh no! It is because we hold other affairs of more value.[29]

If modern markets provided ways for women to liberate themselves from some of their daily drudgeries, then they should by all means exploit these opportunities, but this did not mean abandoning knowledge of these tasks to others, rather it meant having greater control through an understanding of the larger picture. The modern woman could help create a more perfect race by understanding her gender work more deeply and by understanding her own role, as a full participant in civilized society. For Richards, her work in sanitary and environmental science naturally led to home economics because women were the people most closely connected to the basic elements of daily life—diet and shelter.

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[28] *Sixth Annual Lake Placid Conference on Home Economics* (Lake Placid, NY: 1904), 27.
[29] Ibid., 29.

Home economists perceived the rationalization of home life, like the rationalization of the business and industrial sphere, as common sense. Miss Hilda Meisenbach, reporting on a display of craftsman-style furniture at the St. Louis Exposition of 1904, commented that "over and over again, women look at the furniture, sigh and say they wish there could be a way of dispensing with "former mistakes" so that the "sensible furniture" might be substituted." The new idea of sensible furniture (and food and clothing and house-work) was one of the home economics movement's most powerful themes. Former mistakes included not just errors in aesthetic judgement, but ways of thinking about the home, its place in American society, and the role of women within the home. As a card handed out to visitors at the Exposition explained, "Home Economics stands for the ideal home life for to-day unhampered by the traditions of the past." This did not mean more technological innovations, necessarily. [30]

Often it meant a very particular aesthetic which valued simplicity and moderation. A craftsman-style bench might be more comfortable than a horsehair settee, but it was also less indulgent than a down-stuffed chaise. Home economists favored the arts and crafts style both because its lines were cleaner, resulting in less actual cleaning than ornate carved Victorian-era furniture, and because it carried a message of moderation. It was functional, but also plain and not visibly divorced from pre-industrial means of production. It looked as if it had been made by people who married art and craft rather than abandoned them for mass production. For home economists the scientific was beautiful and the beautiful scientifically determined. An object could not possess beauty if it did not also represent rationality.

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[30] Ibid., 30–32.

Nice Clean Dishcloths: Martha Van Rensselaer

One of the apocryphal stories of the movement involved this project of marrying aesthetics and science. Martha Van Rensselaer, who began attending Lake Placid conferences in their second year, was hired by Cornell in 1900 to write bulletins for farm wives as part of the University's agricultural extension program. Lacking a BA and any significant training in science, she set out to create her own major and earn her degree:

> The only available courses which seemed to offer any help were those in bacteriology, commercial dairy farming, and agricultural chemistry. Asked by the bacteriology professor why she wanted to study that science, she said, in her practical way, "I would like to learn about the bacteriology of the dishcloth so that I may explain to farm women the importance of its cleanliness." The professor replied, "Oh, they do not need to learn about bacteria. Teach them to keep the dishcloth clean because it is *nicer* that way."[31]

For Van Rensselaer, budding home economist, there was nothing nice about a dishcloth unless the woman using it understood and applied to it the scientific principles of cleanliness. Like Richards, she believed that the domestic worker would be useless, even dangerous, to society unless she possessed the latest knowledge of the world in which her work was performed. No woman was ever alone in the kitchen, in this view; rather, she was accompanied by both bacteria and the scientists who studied them. Home economics attempted to make the woman in the home aware of her connections to workers at all levels of society and equally to make those workers aware of her presence and their connection to her.

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[31] Caroline Percival, *Martha Van Rensselaer* (Ithaca, New York: the Alumni Association of the New York State College of Home Economics at Cornell University, 1957), 6.

Van Rensselaer was drawn to home economics through her experience with farm wives. Where Richards had looked first at science and then at its effect on daily life, Van Rensselaer first looked at daily life and then wanted to understand the science behind it. She had graduated from the Chamberlain Institute for Girls, a high school in New York, had taught for several years and had been appointed County Schools Commissioner in 1894, for Chatauqua county. In her work as commissioner, she had traveled throughout the region, meeting people in their homes. Although she had been raised in the rural community of Randolph, New York, it was her experience as a commissioner that awakened her to the difficult conditions of farm women's lives. A single, professional woman in a position of some authority, she was disturbed by the amount of work which farm women performed and the isolation in which they worked. Her own mother, the wife of a doctor, had made herself the center of intellectual life in Randolph, holding discussion groups in her own home, to which she invited local ministers and others to discuss books and the major issues of the day. As commissioner, the younger Van Rensselaer came to feel that the minds of women in farm communities were being wasted at solitary, heavy, and pre-industrial labor.

In 1915, obviously reflecting on her own up-bringing, Van Rensselaer argued that, "There is a larger amount of sympathy between the mother and daughter who wash the dishes and read 'The Lady of the Lake' together than between the mother who washes dishes and the daughter who reads 'The Lady of the Lake' alone."[32] For Van Rensselaer, culture had a place in the home and the home a place in culture. No woman would be fully educated who did not possess cultural awareness of both high culture—art and literature—that connected her to worlds outside her own, and to what might be called daily culture, the stuff of ordinary life. Her comment suggested a rift between generations in which more was being lost than won. Women could now attend colleges with men and be their intellectual equals, as her mother had been the equal of the thinking men in her community, but in the process they were becoming disconnected from the functions of home life. This created not just two generations, but two classes of women—those who performed housework and those who did not. When housework had no connection to culture, it became drudgery, and when culture had no connection to housework, it became frivolous. The daughter who read alone and did not help her mother in drudgery not only left her mother behind in the dark ages, but left all women there by denying the essential importance of their work.

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[32] New York State College of Agriculture, *Cornell Reading Club Extension Bulletin 1, No. 9* (February 1, 1912), 85.

While many home economists focused on the importance of the family to a wholesome national civilization, just as other contemporaries focused on the martial, "masculine" impulse, Van Rensselaer advocated home economics as a way to rescue women from the dustbin of history. Her attitude might be described as obliquely, or functionally feminist, without being overtly so. She believed that women were as important as men and as suited for doing any kind of work, intellectual or entrepreneurial, yet she phrased this belief in terms of the work that women had always done and which appeared to preserve their status as second-class citizens.

When appointed to the post of County Schools Commissioner, Van Rensselaer, then in her late twenties, had been asked to promise that she not marry while employed.

She refused and the school board allowed her to take the position anyway. There is no indication that she thought she would be getting married in the near or far future. As a young woman, she had been engaged to a man. When he decided to move west, she broke the engagement rather than go with him as his wife. She became a career educator and administrator, and, seven years after arriving at Cornell, in 1907, was joined by Flora Rose, who would become her partner for the remainder of her personal and professional life.[33] By refusing to agree not to marry while working for the county, Van Rensselaer publicly rejected the idea that for women marriage was a vocation that could not be pursued in conjunction with other, equally fulfilling vocations. This one personal protest reflected Van Rensselaer's larger commitment to dissolving the walls between private and public life for women. As a home economist, she insisted that women's work in the home be modernized so that women could take part in modern civilization, both by being in step with it and by having more time actually to participate in it as citizens. Richards' commitment to informing women about the physical, biological and chemical world in which they lived and worked expanded through the work of other home economists into a movement to make women recognize their rights and responsibilities as full citizens. They had in their daily care the basic unit of civilization, the home, and must never lose sight of the home's connection to the world beyond it, lest their work lose meaning. Knowing the proper way to wash dishes and knowing how to enjoy the Lady of the Lake were only worthwhile if valued equally.

Van Rensselaer's interest in modernizing and enriching the lives of rural women differentiated her from home economists who came to the field through an interest in urban problems or, like Richards, in pure sciences. Her particular perspective found its perfect outlet in Cornell's agricultural extension program. Because Cornell University was founded as both a private college and as the state's land grant institution, its agriculture department was, and is still, responsible for the state's agricultural extension service, which supplies useful information to the state's farmers. The extension service also offered institutes during which farmers from across the state can visit the campus and attend lectures on agricultural subjects. Having noticed that farmers' wives tended to accompany them to the farmers' institutes that the New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell had begun holding, Liberty Hyde Bailey, dean of the college, proposed that programs be designed especially for the women. The idea was grounded in a specific understanding of gender and work. It did not occur to Bailey that women might be attending the institutes because they wanted to know the most modern techniques of agriculture. His audience probably shared this understanding with him. Whatever agricultural work women did, they most likely thought of themselves not as farmers but as farm wives, a group with different responsibilities from those of the men in their lives.

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[33] Van Rensselaer and Rose's partnership, as well as the same-sex partnerships of a number of other women in the field, are discussed at length in Chapter Three.

Women might assist in agricultural work, but they were not in charge of it, just as men might perform specific chores around the house without becoming managers of domestic labor. Bailey had the idea, however, that if women came to the institutes, it was not simply for the sake of sociability, getting away from the house and meeting other people, but because they also wanted to be educated. He hired Van Rensselaer, on the recommendation of Melvil and Anna Dewey, to find out what farm women would like to know and then to help them learn it. Van Rensselaer immediately turned this into an opportunity to find out what farm women's lives were like in the interests of directing them to new kinds of knowledge. She established sessions for farm wives at the institutes and began sending out Home Economics bulletins through the State Agricultural Extension service, which was located at Cornell. State home economics extension services, run by land grant universities became major employers of home economics graduates. Agents traveled for the service, bringing exhibits and demonstrations to rural communities and producing the bulletins that brought women of the state the latest information or thinking on domestic life and labor.

Van Rensselaer's first communication with her prospective audience asked them to think like scientists. The first bulletin, a letter sent out in 1900 to about 5,000 farm wives in New York state, requested the women to count the steps they took in daily tasks and to add these up into miles, sending the results back to Cornell. Van Rensselaer wanted to know what women were doing with their time every moment of the day so that she could help them to rationalize their work. It was just as important to her that farm women should have this experience of observing their lives analytically, instead of naturalistically. To count the steps and add them up would give the farm wife objective knowledge of her own subjective experience, would make her, at the most simple level, an expert about her work, rather than simply at it. Counting a step meant noticing it and potentially seeing how it might not have been made, and therefore how it might have been saved.

Much as Frederick Taylor (1856 – 1915), the father of scientific management, envisioned a cooperative relationship between management and worker in the interests of production, Van Rensselaer's first bulletin proposed a colloquial relationship between readers and writers: "We want you to talk back to us, even though you feel called upon to tell us we are wrong." In fact, this invitation was somewhat disingenuous.[34]

While Home Economists clearly believed that they actively sought suggestions from their audience, this input was limited in practice to topics of experience, rather than methods of approach. The discussion questions which followed each bulletin article were usually heavily weighted towards a certain spirit of response. The question of steps, for instance, reduced the farm woman's daily life to physical motion, mechanizing her in theory and leaving no room for the emotional life. The question implied that there was a certain number of steps which would be found to be excessive, regardless of a woman's own sense of freedom of motion. As Caroline Percival blithely remarked in a brief biography of Van Rensselaer, "Miss Van Rensselaer knew now that farmers' wives could be less like drudges and more like happy people only through a scientific approach to housekeeping."[35] That Van Rensselaer *knew* this was more evidence of her own outlook than of the inner life of farm women themselves.

Along with the discussion questions, Van Rensselaer provided "Plans for Club Study" encouraging "farm women to form small groups for study, discussion, and social pleasure." The invitation reflected her own sense of the farm woman's life as one of isolation and ignorance. A loose-knit structure was to be established, with women receiving discussion topics from the experts at Cornell, discussing them amongst themselves and then referring back to the academy for the further edification of both groups.

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[34] Martha Van Rensselaer, *Cornell Reading Course for Farmers' Wives Supplement 1* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Department of Agriculture, 1901), 1. The first page of this bulletin is part of the online exhibition on the history of Home Economics at Cornell, http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/homeEc.

[35] Percival, *Martha Van Rensselaer*, 7.

Whatever the biases contained within the bulletins, they were successful enough with farm women eager for "advanced" methods of housekeeping that, in 1903-1904, Van Rensselaer was able to offer three courses in Home Economics through the College of Agriculture. The courses she devised were: The Homestead; Women's Work and Home Economics; and Literature and Art for the Farm Home. The choice of courses is notably lacking in any of the "hard" sciences which she had felt it necessary to include in her own course of study and which were becoming staples in other home economics programs. The inclusion of literature and art specifically chosen for the farm home reflected Van Rensselaer's own upbringing and her conviction that labor and culture belonged together. Art and literature could speak to and about labor while labor could be enriched by the connections that art and literature provided. To the crowd in the kitchen—already including woman, germs, and physical scientist—Van Rensselaer's courses added the poet, the painter, and the social scientist. To look at women's work in an academic setting was to acknowledge its relevance to society as a whole. By isolating women's work as a topic for study, Van Rensselaer encouraged women to think of their lives and work as existing on the same plane of value as philosophy, mathematics, and law.

“I do not care if you can cook”: Isabel Bevier

At the sixth Lake Placid conference, held in 1904, two years after Cornell began offering these courses, Isabel Bevier described the different course that the University of Illinois was taking under her direction. The new department of Household Administration had opened in 1900 with 20 students and now had 245, including 40 men who were studying personal and public hygiene. Bevier assembled the department by borrowing courses previously taught in other departments. Created in this way, it was clear that home economics was not a new topic, but a new way of thinking about already established topics. Unlike Van Rensselaer, Bevier was a trained scientist with several years experience teaching in colleges and universities. She had studied with Richards in her laboratory in Boston, and so approached the work of creating an academic department as an insider.

Alice P. Norton reported to the conference that the department at the University of Chicago was a "unification of courses that already existed." Among these were courses, in sanitary science and dietetics, that Marion Talbot had been teaching "since the beginning of the university. . . under the department of sociology." Bevier described her department as "allied" with the Agricultural College, but noted that the College of Science and the College of Literature and Arts also gave degrees in Household Administration. Norton listed some of the courses gathered together in the new department:

> An introduction to the study of society, chemistry, bacteriology, physiology. . . the organization of the retail market, the state in relation to the household, the legal and economic position of woman, and courses in House decoration, textiles and design.[36]

Although only recently assembled, the department already had a research fellow working for her doctorate in Household Administration.

When Isabel Bevier was hired to develop the new department in 1900, Dean Eugene Davenport, who hired her, "felt far from certain about her strength. . . and I was somewhat skeptical as to whether such a department could be established in a university so as to make it really worth the time and cost." What he had in mind was

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[36] *Sixth Annual Lake Placid Conference on Home Economics* (Lake Placid, NY: 1904), 39–40.

> A university department which would command the respect of other university departments and at the same time make an impression upon the home life of the people, particularly in the farming districts. I wanted a department which was really scientific and knew what it was talking about and could attract students to the fundamental principles upon which the comfort and healthfulness and attractiveness of the home must rest. I cared little about fanciful or spectacular demonstrations in cooking or dressmaking, but a great deal about women being educated so that they would have sound judgment and considerable resourcefulness in determining what a good home needs and how to get it. . . I told her that I should not care to have her engage in any work which was not based upon a sound scientific principle; that while it would be desirable for her to elucidate these things now and then before a public audience, it was to be distinctly understood that her main work would be in her laboratories and lecture room, and would be judged by the measure of University respect which she was able to gain for it.[37]

In other words, it was Bevier's responsibility to sweep out of the way thousands of years of cultural stigma attached to women's work. She was to make of it a field that students would be drawn to and that her peers, regardless of gender biases, would accept as the equal of their own fields. Bevier described her own state of mind at beginning this adventure:

> I shall never forget my first impressions of Champaign that April day when I arrived to be looked over. . . I thought I had never seen so flat and so muddy a place: no trees, no hills, no boundaries of any kind. This lack of boundaries, physical and mental, the open-mindedness of the authorities and their willingness to try experiments, indeed their desire to do so, opened up a whole new world to me.[38]

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[37] Lita Bane, *The Story of Isabel Bevier* (Peoria, IL: Chas. A. Bennett Co., Inc., 1955), 25–26. Because Bane was Bevier's friend and successor as Head of the Department of Home Economics at the University of Illinois, her biography is clearly partisan. The work can be read as part of the mythology that the leaders of the movement created for themselves. There is no reason to think that anything about the account of Bevier's life is actually untrue, but it is important to note that the tone is heroic rather than analytic. Bane's work includes some of Bevier's own notes on her career, but these also, because prepared for a public audience, may project a somewhat idealized or politic version of events.

[38] Bane. *The Story of Isabel Bevier*. 29. In Urbana-Champaign to be interviewed for the job of director, Bevier obviously did some "looking over" of her own.

Bevier found the Land Grant University the most congenial home for the new movement because it was not tied to tradition. The Land Grant Universities seemed to be inspired by the scientific method, rather than a conservative commitment to culture for culture's sake. For Bevier one of the most important aspects of this new pedagogical spirit was coeducation. She had taught at several women's colleges before arriving in Urbana-Champaign, and had "decided that I would not spend my years teaching in any woman's college, although I had learned much while living in them. But I had never been able to make them seem other than abnormal places of residence for me." She credited her early years amongst her brothers (she was the last of nine children) and the friendship of her father as having made her "entirely coeducational in all my sympathies." For Bevier, segregating men and women in education was as "abnormal" as separating household science from the liberal education of women.[39]

In 1869, the University of Illinois had begun admitting women students to a Ladies Department. Lou Allen was the "lady instructor of the highest attainments and large experience" hired to head a department of Domestic Economy. Until 1880, when she married a regent of the University and left Urbana-Champaign when he took a job elsewhere, Allen presided over a department that she claimed would prepare women for their duties as wives and mothers, "enabling them to bring the aids of science and culture to the all-important labors and vocations of womanhood." This preparation included courses in chemistry, physics, design and drawing, British and American authors, German and French classics, political economy, logic, the history of civilization, household esthetics, mental science, food and dietetics, and home architecture. Clearly, the ideal of womanhood she had in mind was progressive.[40]

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[39] Ibid., 30–31.

Like Van Rensselaer, Allen valued cultural attainments equally with scientific methodology and practical skills. The woman who graduated from this program would, ideally, not just know how to run her household, but be an expert on the institution itself from every possible angle. She would know the role of the home in history, would have read enough literature to give her a broad perspective of human nature and creative impulses, and understand the environment in which she lived and worked at a molecular level. She would not simply be a loving wife and mother, but be an expert on the dynamics of family life, monitoring her own relationship with her husband for unhealthy tendencies and making sure that her children achieved all the regular stages of development in a timely fashion. She would be her own social worker, decorator, inspector and Chatauqua agent. This holistic and potentially radical approach to women's education lapsed in the twenty years between Allen's departure and Bevier's arrival. In the intervening time, women like Richards and Bevier, who were trained as scientists, came of age and began to direct the movement in a way that emphasized the scientific approach over that of general culture.

This approach was reflected in the way Bevier went about establishing her department. Remembering her first days on campus, she remarked that "My pedometer showed that for three days I averaged five miles per day in even the restricted space from the Engineering Building to the top floor of the Natural History Building, where the department was temporarily located." Just as Van Rensselaer's first bulletin asked women to count their steps, Bevier counted her own, using the latest technology to do so.

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[40] Ibid., 31–32.

Her busy days of assessing the possibilities for her new curriculum were scientifically measured and recorded. Women's work, whether it was managing their own homes or establishing academic homes, could be quantified. That Bevier wore her pedometer in public as she dashed around the new campus reflected her belief that women's work must be analyzed scientifically in order to be modern. She emerged from the chains of the middle ages with the future strapped to her ankle.[41]

The two departments that Bevier mentioned symbolized, in her pairing of them, her approach to the field. The advances of modern technology and its methodologies—engineering—would be used to help women gain control of their daily environments—natural history. Bevier consulted with Dean Davenport and the vice president of the university, Dr. T. J. Burrill, on what to call the new department which would make this possible. As quoted in her biography, she remembered that,

> The three of us wanted science as the basis and approach to the subject; but it was Dean Davenport who said, "I believe there will be some day a science of the household. Let's get ready for it and develop it." So the child was called "household science" and thus due warning was given that neither a cooking school nor a milliners shop was being opened at the University.[42]

To emphasize the scientific over the practical was to break with the notion of home economics first propounded by Catherine Beecher.

For Bevier it was more important that women understand the world they worked in than that they could perform any particular household arts. The president of the university, Andrew Draper, encouraged her in this approach, telling her that

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[41] Ibid., 35.

[42] Ibid.. Throughout the autobiographical notes that she provided Bane for her biography, Bevier emphasized her dependence on others both to identify and to accomplish her goals. This may have been her

> I don't care if you can cook or not, I will get somebody to do that. I want you to run your department and it will be judged by the results obtained in its laboratories and classrooms and its success by the measure of University respect obtained for it.[43]

Home economists at the University of Illinois were to be judged not by their ability to make a nice meal, but by their intellectual ability to understand and manipulate data and materials. Because Draper was both open to the idea of educating women in the state universities and anxious that institutional prestige not be weakened by their presence, he and other men like him helped make it possible for home economists to present themselves as scientists.

Despite such high-minded pronouncements as Draper's, however, academic home economists often found themselves using their laboratories to make nice meals. Sometimes, early on in the development of the field, this came at the request of male administrators and sometimes it was their own idea, to show off the department to visitors or to entertain themselves at faculty meetings or parties for students. From the earliest stages of this academic movement its leaders fought the notion that they were teaching cooking. Cooking, even more than sewing, with which it was often paired, represented the ideals against which the leaders were struggling. Bevier recalled that in her first year at Illinois,

> No day passed that some one or ten people did not appear to see the "noo buildin",' or the "noo" department, and the "noo" woman, or to find out about something. There were distinguished visitors who wished to have explained how cooking could belong in a university. [44]

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sincere understanding of her career, or it may also have been the politic gesture of someone who was conscious of representing a movement.

[43] Ibid., 34.

[44] Ibid., 39.

Such visitors irritated Bevier and others like her on two interconnected levels. Home economists wanted the world to understand the dignity of women's work, but at the same time they did not want to be stigmatized for involving themselves in it. To say that home economists were people who wanted to start cooking classes in the university was to reject their scientific qualifications and pretensions outright as well as to reject the notion that women's work—symbolized by cooking—had innate social value.

When the dean of the liberal arts college at the University of Illinois asked Bevier how much credit her department was giving for bread making, she answered proudly, "Not much, because we are not baking much bread." The pronouncement expressed the ambiguities of the field. Scientifically trained home economists both insisted that bread baking was an intellectually worthy pursuit, and that they were not doing it. Their status lay in the nuance. They were not baking bread, but studying it, a distinction that it would be easy enough for their peers in other departments to mock long before the days of social and cultural history.[45]

For Bevier, "It was a source of real satisfaction" when, two years later the same liberal arts dean who had questioned her about bread making included two of her courses, household sanitation and home decoration, in the catalog of his college. The inclusion meant that she had had some success in selling her idea of the home as a legitimate field of study. She recalled a similar episode when a superintendent of the University whose two daughters were students there accosted her one night when she was on the way home. He stopped her to say "'Do you know you haven't the word cooking in that catalog once?'" Bevier replied

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[45] Ibid., 37.

> Oh that is because cooking is not all that we do with food. Some we freeze, some we dry, some we just wash and eat raw. I wanted a chance for a large liberty for my work in food so I said "selection and preparation," which covers much more nearly what I want to do.[46]

Whereas the liberal arts dean had sneered at Bevier because he did not think bread making was rigorous enough for the academy, this trustee felt that she was being too scientific and not actually teaching his daughters to cook, something he wanted her to do. Both men mistook the movement's motives. Both assumed that Bevier would be teaching young women to cook. To one man this seemed inappropriate and to the other entirely proper. What Bevier tried to explain to them both was that she did not emphasize the practical over the abstract in methodology, only in subject matter. Her students would learn to approach the material of daily lives—bread, cloth, air—both as physical and social scientists. Whether they ever learned to cook their parents a nice meal was beside the point.

The Dean: Sarah Louise Arnold

For Sarah Louise Arnold, who began attending Lake Placid conferences in 1903, the year after she was appointed Dean of Simmons College and head of its department of Household Science, practical issues took precedence over the abstract. For scientists like Richards and Bevier and for social reform-minded home economists like Van Rensselaer, the movement in its early stages focused on creating an ethos, a new way to think about the work women did in their homes. For Arnold, the movement offered a new avenue for women to become economically self-supporting. Home economists in universities would soon begin to list the many opportunities that their field created for women to become professionals, but for Arnold this was immediately the most important aspect of the field.

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[46] Ibid., 40–41.

Simmons was founded as a vocational college for women. By making Household Science one of the original five departments (Secretarial, Science, Library, and Nursing were the other four), the Corporation, of which Arnold was a member, endorsed the field in its practical applications. Henry Lefavour, Simmons's first president, wrote that the corporation agreed: "The college is to be professional or industrial, and [...] everything must be in the nature of a direct contribution to a bread winning career or fundamental to its acquisition." The corporation, then, believed that home economics already, even in its earliest stage of development, offered women professional ways to support themselves.[47]

The college was based on a fundamental belief that women were not out of place in the work force, but that there were certain fields in which they belonged and that it was worthwhile dedicating time and resources to preparing them for these fields. Over time, home economists like Van Rensselaer and Bevier would come to see their field as one that created opportunities for women because it raised social awareness. By training women to notice and bring to public attention problems in the domestic sphere, home economists would be creating jobs for these same women as experts and reformers. Arnold saw the relationship between supply and demand immediately. Although her main academic interests lay in language arts and reading, she became head of the household science department at the same time that the college opened and she became its dean. A professional woman, she served as a role model for her students. By establishing herself as head of household science, she made the department relevant and professional.

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[47] "Timeline of Simmons College History," Simmons College Archives and Manuscript Collections (hereafter Simmons College Archives).

Arnold's route to home economics was closer to that followed by Van Rensselaer than that of Richards or Bevier. Something of a child prodigy, Arnold read Latin when she was eleven and had graduated high school at thirteen. After graduation, she was kept home in rural Massachusetts because her family thought her too young to attend college. In the four years before she was allowed to go to college, she became her mother's assistant in household management. According to various accounts of her life, she credited this experience with fueling her later interest in home economics. Whether it was, as in Van Rensselaer's case, understanding for the first time the immense amount and pre-modern conditions of woman's labor, or whether her mother was able to make the work interesting for a young woman who clearly had scholarly tendencies, we can only speculate. It is interesting to think that while being held back from what seemed to be her natural, although at the time somewhat unorthodox vocation of scholarship, Arnold was trained in another, housework, which her culture would have considered the more natural. Whatever the nature of the impression that her years at home left on Arnold, it did not inspire her to settle down and begin caring for a home of her own. When her family judged her old enough, Arnold was sent to Westover Normal College to become a teacher. While it might seem that this was a further restriction on her intellectual freedom, teacher training colleges being perhaps less stimulating than liberal arts or science colleges, it does seem that Arnold had a genuine interest in pedagogy and did no t simply take to the field because she wanted something to do while waiting for a marriage proposal. After graduating she taught for a few years and then, like Van Rensselaer, became a superintendent. She was appointed Superintendent of Primary Schools in Minneapolis in 1888 when she was 29. While in Minneapolis she met Dr.

Mary G. Hood, a general practitioner. When Arnold was appointed Superintendent of Public Schools in Boston, Dr. Hood moved east with her and the two remained together until Arnold's death in 1948. Setting up house together in Newton Centre, Arnold went to work as Superintendent while Hood opened a private practice. By 1899, then, when Arnold was offered a seat on the corporation to found Simmons, she was a very successful professional woman involved with another professional woman in what appears to have been a deep and sustaining domestic partnership. Like Van Rensselaer, her commitment to women in the professions was both personal and public.

As Superintendent in Boston, Arnold was the highest paid woman working in education at the time, earning a salary of four thousand dollars a year. And yet, speaking in 1908 at a general session of the National Education Association, she argued that while

> It may not be the privilege of every woman to devote her life to children of her own; nevertheless, in every woman who is truly prepared for her work in the world, the spirit of the mother is regnant;—and the task which will most appeal to her will have in it generous caretaking for the lives of other children. . . in all our conceptions of the education of women, this function, this privilege, this right, must take precedence. . .We shall be wise, then, to test every plan for the education of women, not merely with questions of immediate expediency or of personal advantage, but always with the thought of the larger contribution to the common good, and the higher function which women can never surrender.[48]

Somehow, the professional successes that she, Dr. Hood, and their many female friends within the home economics movement had achieved had no meaning except in that they fulfilled the female role in society. Sometime in 1890 or soon after, Arnold wrote in a magazine about a woman who was clearly Hood:

> My thought follows her in her work, as she goes in and out of sick rooms, carrying always some message of hope and courage, or as she passes

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[48] Sarah Louise Arnold, 'Reconcilement of Cross Purposes in the Education of Women.' Address to the General Session of National Education Association, Box 1, Folder 6, Sarah Louise Arnold Papers, Simmons College Archives.

> through the hospital wards, leaving both healing and blessing. Her noble life must leave its influence in many a heart, while her skill brings strength to the weak body. I myself am stronger because she is so brave, more earnest in my endeavor because she lives a consecrated life. How can we be grateful enough for the inspiration that comes to us through knowing noble women?[49]

Noble women were those for whom work was a sacred duty, rather than a grim necessity. They worked as women, expanding their domestic duties out into the world beyond the home. They did not threaten men in the workplace because they did not labor in the same way. For them the reward was in the work, the mothering of society, and not in financial compensation.

Because Arnold believed that women's work had a kind of meaning that men's did not, the subjects that Simmons offered as majors reflect this ideal. Teaching, nursing, library work and household science all agree with notions of women as nurturing and civilizing forces in society. That Simmons also offered a major in sciences and that the household science department had a science-based core reflected the new idea that women also belonged in science and that science could belong to the world of women's work.

The field of home economics, as it took shape in the first years of the Lake Placid conferences, was based in the idea that the rationalization of domestic labor was not only possible and desirable, but also essential to the creation of a healthy modern world. Home economists exhorted each other and the faculties of major universities to reevaluate domestic life and labor. Drawing on developments in pedagogy, such as the introduction of coeducation and the creation of the research university and social sciences, and social trends such as scientific management, notions about race suicide, and concern for the destructive aspects of industrialization, the leaders of this movement acted in concert with and also against prevailing trends to create a field that was at once conservative and radical. The leaders of the movement made their commitments to it based on experiences that were both personal and shared. Among the first generation of women in the professions, they sought to maintain and also to modernize traditional notions of womanhood, labor and intellectual life.

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[49] Scrapbook III, 13, Box 1, Sarah Louise Arnold Papers Series I, Simmons College Archives.

Whether they came to an interest in science through an interest in women, or to an interest in women through training in science, these leaders shared a common commitment to drawing on the strengths of the industrial era to combat its weaknesses. That they focused their attention on women in the home reflected the transitional nature of their roles as pioneers.

Chapter Two: A Department of One's Own

In early July 1903, the Lake Placid Conference met at Simmons College. The venue reflected the group's commitment to vocational education for women, but it had also been chosen because the National Education Association was meeting at the same time in Boston and the Lake Placid group was eager to encourage overlap in the meetings. The nation's educators must be made aware of the innovations home economics could provide and home economists must be seen as part of the educational establishment, members of its associations rather than of a fringe element.

In her opening address to the conference, Sarah Arnold, dean of Simmons, emphasized the notion that home economics was not new material, but rather a new way of understanding old material. "All that we glean has been known before," she assured her listeners, "We apply it to ourselves when we come to recognize our God-given heritage, the need that we care for and maintain the worthy home." In the context of the simultaneous meetings of educators in the city, the worthy home meant more than simply one's personal domestic space.

The task involved rethinking culture, crossing boundaries that had been established between kinds of knowledge and practice. "The science and the art are interdependent," she argued,

> Each interprets the other. Shall we not learn, by and by, that to each equal honor belongs? Who can say that the hour spent in the chemical or biological laboratory need exceed in value the hour spent in the kitchen or the nursery? There is no higher or lower; each yields a necessary part of the perfect whole.[50]

Arnold argued that home economics teachers should be given a liberal education so that they had all of the tools of the culture to apply to their field and also so that they could place their field in context. A teacher who understood that art and science were equally valuable and interdependent ways to understand and negotiate human experience would be able to nurture her students' understanding of women's work as essential to society.

The role of the home economics teacher at the secondary school level, "is not that of original discoverer. She must apply to her province, the home, that which others have learned in their special fields of science or art." The home economist at the university level would make original discoveries but her material would not be new. In a sense, her most important discovery would continually be that the ordinary mattered, that materials and methods of daily life had bearing on the larger context of modern American society.[51]

Based on this idea that they could reorganize pre-exiting fields of knowledge to make a new discipline, the Lake Placid group had sent out a letter to the presidents of American colleges and universities arguing that

> In the general elasticity in educational curricula at the present time, there was both an opportunity and a danger; an opportunity to direct the growing sentiment in favor of some instruction along the lines of economics of living, and a danger that too enthusiastic advocates might secure the introduction of courses unsuited to the collegiate course as it is now understood.[52]

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[50] *Fourth Lake Placid Conference on Home Economics* (Lake Placid, NY: 1903), 11.
[51] Ibid.

They understood the moment as one favorable to experimentation, but worried that the full potential of their project would not be understood. To include the economics of living in a liberal education was a new concept, but it might easily be undermined by the introduction of courses in simple practice, the cooking and sewing classes that haunted the movement's pioneers. This chapter will discuss the ways in which these pioneers attempted to establish a discipline that would elevate the trivial without trivializing the elevated. As Isabel Bevier's statements to one of her critics (quoted in the previous chapter) that her courses were not all about making bread illustrate, home economists felt in great danger of being held responsible for introducing a field that was not rigorous or intellectual, but merely female.

The responses that the Lake Placid group received to their letter were "for the most part courteous but non committal."[53] College and university presidents were not openly hostile to the movement, but plainly left the work of initiating change to the home economists themselves. A Professor DeGarmo, of Cornell, who attended the conference at Simmons advised the group that colleges now "appeared like lions, but really are like lambs; and they will meet this demand for home economics work by allowing alternates or greater latitude in substitution in entrance requirements."[54] De Garmo's comments once again joined home economists' hopes to their fears. There was room in the modern university for programs that crossed disciplinary boundaries and university officials might easily come to accept home economics qualifications as equal to other kinds of qualifications. On the other hand, home economists might suffer the stigma of being seen

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[52] Ibid., 27.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., 15.

as "alternate" to the major project of the university—education that was both liberal and useful.

Most of the women who started home economics departments in colleges and universities agreed with DeGarmo that the quickest route to academic acceptance was to collect existing courses into a new organization. In the beginning, most of these courses were taught by professors in other departments—engineering professors taught sanitation, architecture professors taught home design, economics professors taught economics. As speedily as they could find or train women for the task, however, home economics departments began to adapt these courses to their own vision. In 1900, Isabel Bevier announced the opening of the Department of Home Economics at Illinois:

> This department aims to provide an opportunity for the application of physics, chemistry, physiology and bacteriology to household affairs along the lines of selection and preparation of food, home sanitation and nutrition, as well as a study of the management of the household and expenditure of the income according to business methods. It is thought that, by the correlation of this work with some of the regular courses given in the various colleges of the university, special advantages will be offered to women students, in accord with present tendencies in their education.[55]

Bevier emphasized that none of the courses were new; rather, the revolution was in the new application. Leaders of the movement, like Bevier, announced that they had found new uses for traditional subjects, that they were ready to expand the reaches of human knowledge through the intersection of two elements—academic research and the ordinary home—which had previously been seen to be opposites. There was something boldly oxymoronic about the project. Because of the cultural contradictions at its roots, the home economics movement struggled constantly to define itself against both the academy and the home. Looking at the ways in which subjects were selected and treated in the creation of departments allows us to see the rationales and internal problems of the movement as it found a home in higher education.

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[55] Undated newspaper clipping "UI Household Science," Box 1, Folder 1900, Bevier Papers.

Next to Godliness

The courses that home economists chose to adopt and adapt reflected the earliest assumptions and limitations of the movement. Following the lead of Ellen Richards, MIT chemist, most home economists in colleges borrowed sanitation courses from their engineering schools. Seen as all-important in the early days of the movement, sanitation courses did not remain in the core of most departments for very long. When home economics departments became family science or human ecology departments in the 1970s, they did not incorporate sanitation into curricula. Sanitation courses are once again the exclusive possession of engineering courses, although they may also be found among the courses in public health programs, a more recent outgrowth of home economics.[56] The pioneers of the movement, however, considered sanitation one of the pillars of their temple. The first course that Isabel Bevier's department of Home Economics offered was "Home Architecture and Sanitation," six lectures on the history of architecture, heating, and plumbing. Bevier explained that

> I chose that name because I thought we could teach a greater variety of things about the house and the home under that name than under any other, and I wanted the class to begin early to understand that what we were working at under any and all names was the home[57]

Even before introducing students to the ideas of calories and enzymes and getting them into the lab to study the processes of gelatinization and the power of yeast, Bevier felt that the department must ask them to think of the home as a unit and as a subject of study. Her first request of the students in her department, then, was that they step outside the boundaries of their traditional gender roles, come out of the kitchen and see their sphere—the home—from the outside. Furthermore, she wanted them to take it apart, mentally, and understand all of its parts and functions. By asking her students to perform an analysis of the home she was removing from it any aura of the sacred or natural. Homes were machines, just as bodies were machines, and they could be designed and reorganized for maximum efficiency. By making the home a subject, something to be studied and improved upon, Bevier de-romanticized it and woman's relation to it.

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[56] Early home economics departments often included personal hygiene courses, a more intimate view of sanitation. These courses developed into physical education courses and departments as well as connecting to psychology courses, as mental hygiene was also a concern.

By removing the course on domestic architecture and sanitation from the engineering school, however, Bevier was simultaneously re-humanizing the subject. The home should be considered as a machine, but it was just as important that it also be considered in its many relationships to the human lives lived within it. When Bevier appropriated these courses, she altered their content by putting more focus on household contexts. There is no evidence, however, to suggest that she or other home economists watered down the scientific content of their courses. Women of the first generation who had trained as scientists had done so at coeducational institutions for the most part. As they established the field, it was important to leaders of the movement to insist that their courses were just as rigorous as those taught by other departments. Introductory courses in chemistry, biology, and physics were usually prerequisites to more specialized courses in the field. Home economics majors would take these courses outside their department, alongside students in liberal arts and science majors. Later in the movement, this strict adherence to standards established by male science professors would come under attack,

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[57] Bane, *The Story of Isabel Bevier*, 36.

but for the first generation, it was essential to achieving full acceptance in academic circles.

Martha Van Rensselaer of Cornell chose bacteriology as the first step in her own home economics education and dedicated one of her first two bulletins for farm wives to household sanitation. To start with sanitation was to start with a kind of emergency mentality. Bacteriology identified the enemies to healthful modern living and sanitation introduced ways to combat them. The turn of the century, as Nancy Tomes argues in *The Gospel of Germs*, was the era when Americans first became aware of the bacteria that live amongst us. National exposure to the subject in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) sensationalized the germ as an enemy. Sinclair argued that the way to combat the germ, in the form of unclean meats, was through a reorganization of labor and regulation of capitalist enterprise. Along with urban reformers and progressives such as Jane Addams and Florence Kelley, home economists had begun to address Sinclair's concern before *The Jungle* was even published. Urban reformers insisted on sanitary reforms in cities and industries. Home economists meanwhile argued that women, as the primary purchasers of food, must be educated so as to avoid poor quality goods, not only because such goods wasted money, but also because they were dangerous. Beyond simple avoidance, home economists wanted to train women to insist on sanitary production practices.

Tomes notes that Florence Kelley, who was a leader in the consumer education movement, complained that information about bacteria was not available to the average woman in a form she could use "to avoid 'buying smallpox,' as she put it, along with her new garments."[58] By drawing attention to the bacteria in ordinary life, home economists were arguing for the necessity of their field. The larger project was to make the home a legitimate field of intellectual study and scientific as well as professional practice. In order to get the public and university administrators interested, home economists used a subtle kind of scare tactics. Relating the apocryphal story of Van Rensselaer and the dishcloths, Tomes notes that "Home economists sought to teach not only the rules for disease prevention but also the scientific rationale for why their observance was so important."[59] The movement that flourished in times of crisis, such as the First World War and the Great Depression, began in the crisis of the discovery of the germ.

Keep a Clean House

The new interest in purity of commodities created a new career—inspection—which home economists were quick to see could be a new opportunity for women trained in universities. Ideally, every woman ought to be trained as a professional inspector of any goods she might encounter in her daily marketing. In this vision it was natural and common-sense for women to be society's inspectors. Certainly men could train for and hold such positions, but not all men need have a background in inspection as all women must. Leaders of the movement, despite the ways in which they personally departed from traditional gender roles by becoming professionals, were largely unable to imagine a world in which domestic and female were not integrally linked.

Consumers' leagues, such as those founded by Kelley, attempted to connect consumers to producers and to create a common understanding and interest in conditions of production. If consumers, who were mostly assumed to be women, wanted the best quality for their money, they should concern themselves with the means of production, including labor practices as well as sanitary conditions.

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[58] Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 138
[59] Ibid., 141

In 1897, Richards consulted on the establishment of the School of Housekeeping in the Women's Educational and Industrial Union in Boston. The School, which was absorbed by Simmons College in 1902 to create a department of Home Economics, offered courses in sanitation, food chemistry, home sociology, house architecture, principles of housework, marketing, and sewing. In just seven years, the interest in sanitation had expanded beyond hygiene and nutrition to include new ideas about clothing, consumerism and social science. If the disposal of waste in a household could be rationalized so as to avoid disease, then every other element of domestic experience might also be made to answer for the health—mental as well as physical—of a home's inhabitants.

From 1904 to 1908, Martha Van Rensselaer's home economics department at Cornell offered education in sanitation as part of two separate courses. "The. Homestead," taught by a team of male professors from the agriculture, engineering, and architecture departments, included sanitation, as well as "landscape architecture," "water supplies," "rural architecture," and "lawn-making." A separate course, taught by Van Rensselaer herself, was "Women's Work and Home Economics," which covered the use of sanitary equipment in the home as well as the history of social conditions, decorating and furnishing, food, hospitality, and the conservation of strength.[60] By giving her course a historical perspective, Van Rensselaer emphasized her field as a new approach to old problems and a positive advance over the practices of the past. Making her students aware of the historical social problems of poor sanitation and then introducing them to the newest equipment in sanitation, Van Rensselaer played the role of evangelist—first leading her audience to despair and then magically rescuing them from hell.

By the 1908-1909 academic year, sanitation, construction, and decoration had been separated into their own course at Cornell. While it is easy to understand the relationship between construction and sanitation, the addition of decoration may seem out of place today. For home economists of the first generation, however, not only was the elimination of dust-catching elements such as carved furniture and heavy drapes important, but they also made connections between mental hygiene and aesthetics, sincerely believing that aesthetics such as Arts-and-Crafts and Japanese design that celebrated simplicity promoted sanity and mental stability. Ornate architecture and busily patterned fabrics were thought to stir up emotions, perhaps leading to agitation, just as highly spiced foods were assumed to be unhealthy.[61] In a Cornell Reading Course bulletin on household furnishings, Helen Brinkerd Young declared that "In the last analysis, disorder and ugliness are destructive agencies, while order and comeliness are constructive agencies in a person's environment. A sound environment, is, therefore, nothing more nor less than a set of outward conditions so adjusted as to encourage the richest living. Illustrations consistently simplified décor, straightening lines and reducing the numbers of objects in a room.[62]

By 1910, the Cornell bulletin listed a course in Household Sanitation separate from the course in Household Construction and Furnishings. This was the only change in

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[60] Cornell University, Cornell University Bulletin, 1904-1905, NYSCHE Papers.

[61] I will discuss this further later in the chapter.

[62] Helen Brinkerd Young, "The Arrangement of Household Furnishings," Cornell Reading Course IV, No. 85 (April 1915): 1587.

the curriculum from the preceding bulletin, and was significant of changes that would characterize the movement for the next fifty years. The core ideas of the movement were already spawning distinct fields of interest. It was the great struggle of the first generation to keep the connections between sub-fields central while simultaneously encouraging the development of specialization. What made home economics a distinct field was that it recognized (perceived) connections between subjects. But in order to encourage depth, leaders also had to encourage atomization.

Beginning in 1911, Van Rensselaer hosted a series of lectures by notable women to help students understand that an education in home economics could lead to something besides teaching. Her first speaker was her co-director, Flora Rose, in her capacity as nutritionist. The second guest was Florence Kelly who represented the new field of consumer advocacy and industrial inspection, a line of work based in knowledge of sanitary sciences.

Also in 1911, the Simmons College bulletin noted that among the many career paths open to a woman trained in home economics were

> Inspectors of foods, of factories, and of places where food or clothing is produced or sold, or where labor is employed, are essential to the enforcement of laws for the improvement of sanitary and labor conditions. . . The power of research is required to discover, analyze, and interpret conditions, surrounding any social or business effort.[63]

As of 1907, the Simmons College department of Household Science required students to take courses in "sanitary care of the house" as well as in cooking and marketing. The connections between these three subjects are simple to understand and epitomize the approach of the movement, connecting women and the practices of domesticity to the social and microbiological world around them.

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[63] *Simmons College Bulletin 1911*, 3, Simmons College Archives.

In 1900, the *Pantagraph*, a central Illinois newspaper, reported on the new University of Illinois department of Household Science established under Isabel Bevier's direction. Students would be taught to apply hard sciences, such as chemistry and bacteriology to domestic themes, such as "home sanitation and nutrition."[64] As H.C. Sherman, a chemist who had worked with Bevier before she settled in Illinois, remembered

> No hyphenated or watered-down science courses for Miss Bevier! But also, no slightest indication of any lingering desire to remain puristic appeared to bias the socially-minded development of this new type of training. Thus she set the stamp of sterling quality upon the new coinage and the scientific esteem in which home economics is held in any comparable institution is closely proportion [sic] to the fidelity with which it has followed the standard set by Miss Bevier.[65]

That Sherman honored Bevier's commitment to scientific study reflected both Bevier's own goals and those of the first generation who strove to establish their field as a respected entity within the academic community.

The 1909 University of Illinois catalogue listed a course that paired architecture and sanitation, as well as offering courses in decoration, diet and budget making.[66] In 1911, Bevier wrote that "good courses in home sanitation can be given with almost no new material in all our women's colleges." The tools—chemistry, bacteriology—were apparently out there, a feature of the new scientific spirit of education; they simply had to be put to the proper uses. If this was true in women's colleges, which did not generally have professional schools attached to them, it would be even more so in the larger co-ed public universities. Bevier went on to add that

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[64] No author, no date., clipping from *Pantagraph*, Box 1, Folder "1900," Bevier Papers.

[65] "Bevier Anecdotes, 1929" (Recollections collected in 1932), Box 2, Bevier Papers.

[66] Eugene Davenport to a selection of deans of colleges with Home Economics departments, October, 28, 1909, Bevier Papers.

> the library doubtless affords much material for a course on "the family." Economics is probably in the curriculum already and can easily be supplemented by a course on family budgets. History and literature courses can be made to yield much data about the place of women in family and public life.[67]

Bevier here offers an early version of the kind of reclamation of women's stories that would be central to the women's studies movement of the 1970s and 1980s. Women's lives, even in their domestic activities, had not gone unrecorded, rather they had been recorded but never analyzed. It would be the job of Bevier's students to apply their scientific analysis to women wherever they could be found in the record.

Home economists were those who saw the crisis conditions of unclean food and unhealthy shelter and saw a larger problem, an entire environment—the home—neglected and the people whose milieu it was—women—left powerless to effect change. From Richards' interest in sanitation grew courses in food science, domestic design, household management, and family psychology. Each solution to each social problem was based in a central concept that health was a state of moderation and conservation. In order to achieve and maintain their ideal of social health through moderation, home economists focused their attention on the built domestic environment and all its interior functions and experiences.

Beyond Four Walls

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[67] Isabel Bevier, "College Women and Home Economics" *Wooster Quarterly* (25) no. 2 , whole number 97 (April 1911), Box 2, Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences Department Dean's Office papers, University of Illinois Archives.

Early departments of home economics reflected the assumption that what went on in the home was women's business by borrowing courses in domestic architecture from architecture and engineering departments. There was no sense that women who took such courses within the home economics department would become architects. They would not learn the theory and practice of architecture as a profession, but rather would come to see the home as a created environment. Women who had been properly educated would be able to consult with architects and builders to design their own homes if they should have the opportunity. Those who would not get to design their own homes would nonetheless learn to think architecturally about the pre-existing homes into which they moved.

The interest in bringing women to structural architecture was an important development out of what has come to be called the cult of domesticity. The term refers to a trend which had its heyday in the mid- to late nineteenth century. Middle-class white women found a form of self-expression, albeit highly stylized, and therefore questionably individualistic, in the decoration of interior spaces. During this period middle-class men spent increasing amounts of time outside of the home, in offices, saloons, and clubs. The women they left at home were assumed to possess a kind of angelic purity which made them unsafe (and perhaps undesirable) in public places. These women then created interior worlds through the construction of intensely layered and meaning-laden private spaces. Simultaneously, middle-class women began to insist on having a presence outside the home, as social homemakers. The woman who raised money for orphanages and homes for wayward girls was often the same woman who spent large sums of money and a great deal of time creating an interior environment that had more to do with display than comfort.[68]

The creation of this domestic cult was both influenced by and best expressed in Catherine Beecher's writings. Beecher (1800 – 1878) was an educator and social reformer who distilled and popularized the idea of woman as angel in the home and wrote the first domestic manuals to rationalize women's work in the home, believing that it was woman's proper sphere, and just as important as the public sphere which men inhabited and managed. In fact, the domestic sphere, because it was associated with women, who were naturally more spiritual than men, was actually superior to the public sphere where men operated in a chaos of greed and grime. Beecher went further than many of her readers in creating her own domestic world when she drew up designs for efficient houses. Despite her disapproval of women entering into the public sphere, she did cross a boundary by becoming architectural in her imagination. Or perhaps she simply felt that domestic architecture ought to be removed from the male world and given a proper place in the half of the social world that belonged to women. In *Grand Domestic Revolution*, her discussion of feminism and design, Dolores Hayden argues that Beecher developed very sensible designs that made architecture the servant of necessity. Her drawings shaped rooms and entrances to make domestic work easier. Like the first generation of home economists, she saw the house as a place for labor and believed that its form should reflect this function. Beecher was also interested in the home as a spiritual refuge, a kind of private chapel, where Christian faith would flourish. Home economists believed in the home as a place to restore one's spirit but not to commune directly with any particular deity. Early home economists seem to have been among the first generation of American academics to accept psychology as a legitimate enterprise with valuable contributions to every-day experience.

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[68] Period rooms such as the late nineteenth century parlor on permanent display at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, offer fascinating evidence of this trend. The Brooklyn room is a seemingly eclectic collection of textures and objects. Each object—a glass dome enclosing fake flowers, an oversized bronze spear curtain rod—is imbued with emotional and social meaning. It would be possible to read the entire room and create a portrait of the woman whose domain it once was. Because such rooms represent achievements of women of the era, it might be more correct to say that they resulted in a kind of emotional comfort—a sense of work properly done—rather than physical comfort.

Following the aesthetic philosophy of William Morris (1834 –1896), English poet, reformer, and founder of the Arts and Crafts movement, home economists equated the experience of beauty with psychological comfort, rather than awe or ecstasy—the more romantic notion. The living room was to replace the parlor, becoming a place for living—subtle activity and regeneration of the spirit—rather than a place in which to display the social status of the family. Of course the approved ingredients of the ideal living room—Arts and Crafts furniture and pottery, hand woven rugs, and Japanese prints—were not cheap or readily available and therefore carried their own class markings. A visitor to the euthenically correct living room (if she had been educated to know what to look for) would have been able to read her hostess's social status just as easily as might a similarly educated visitor to a high-Victorian parlor. A visitor would have noted the absence of thick draperies and admired her hostesses liberation from dust, or perhaps envied the way in which glass doors on a bookcase kept dust from the pages of the few, well-chosen volumes, some history perhaps, and philosophy, but no dog-eared novels.

Domestic scientists believed fervently in Morris's invitation to "have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful," and further conflated the two, so that an object's beauty was in its utility. Each object in a room and the room itself had to be selected or designed for its usefulness. This was in direct contrast to the Victorian fashion for objects chosen for meaning. For home economists, the difference between a glass-enclosed wreath made of the hair of dead relatives and a simple vase glazed in earth tones and holding a small bunch of dried grasses was the difference between the dark ages of superstition and ignorance and the new bright future in which science was an art and art a science. The vase and grasses were beautiful because they worked—they soothed jangled nerves and reconnected one to the natural world.

As a specific example of this transition, we can look to wallpaper. In a wonderful article, Jan Jennings reveals the way in which during the first two decades of the twentieth century wallpaper became an issue of morality for home economists because it represented a woman's ability to control her environment. Home economists urged women to educate themselves in color theory and design principles so as not to be manipulated by salesmen. They also argued that wallpaper harbored vermin. Above all, however, they urged the simplification of pattern or removal of wallpaper because it represented an aesthetic that they considered unhealthy. Jennings notes that Helen Brinkerd Young, a Cornell-educated architect who became head of the college's department of domestic art, wrote that wallpaper had a direct impact on the character of a home and its inhabitants. Busy patterns that hinted at three dimensions and anything in the color red tended to encourage uncontrolled passions. In the place of pulsating florals or martial motifs, home economists like Young suggested simple earth tones. The purposes of the home—sanctuary and workplace, rather than temple—should be uppermost in the minds of decorators.[69]

Because most women did not think of aesthetics in terms of utility, home economists felt called upon to re-educate them. Bulletins from extension programs announced the new thinking while classes in domestic architecture drew students' attention to how homes were going to be used by those who lived in them, rather than read by those who visited them. It was not necessarily a good thing, home economists taught, to have a big house because a big house meant more work for the woman who lived in it and potentially more room for the kind of clutter that detracted from a home's ability simultaneously to calm and energize. A modest house designed for the functions of domestic life—food production, some textile work, and restorative relaxation—was really superior to the finest mansion. Eleanor Roosevelt acted on this philosophy in 1932, when, rather than redecorate the White House's public rooms, she reorganized its kitchen to make work easier for the staff.[70]

In order for American women to design or arrange homes that were functional and aesthetically fulfilling (according to the sensibility of the movement), they had to learn what a house actually was, what it contained, how it stayed up, and what relations parts had to the whole. In early domestic architecture courses, the house was presented as a problem. Historical surveys were included so that students could get a sense of houses changing over time as technology and taste evolved. Courses asked students to think of the home not as something natural, but as an institution constructed by people and by societies. Students were encouraged to think of themselves as potential innovators, within the boundaries of what their teachers considered the main functions of a house and the legitimate range of taste.

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[69] Jan Jennings, "Controlling Passion: The Turn-of-the-Century Wallpaper Dilemma." *Winterthur Portfolio* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 243-264. Jennings's article is a fascinating exploration of wallpaper as an element in women's control over their domestic environments. The article includes a discussion of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's story "The Yellow Wallpaper."

[70] The meaning of Roosevelt's reorganization is discussed in terms of the Depression in Chapter Five.

As Dolores Hayden writes, by 1900, a small but vocal group of people had already introduced the notion that woman's relationship to the domestic could be altered for the better. Hayden's "domestic feminists" were people like Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Edward Bellamy who wrote about ideal future worlds in which women's gender identity was disconnected from domestic work. Domestic feminists imagined, designed, and occasionally even built homes (usually apartment blocks) in which there was no kitchen. If you removed the prison from the home, Gilman and others argued, there was no way to keep women locked up.

Of course home economists never saw the kitchen as a prison, nor the tasks performed around the house as the tools of gender oppression. They did share with domestic feminists, however, the idea that the home could be rationalized. The rational home was organized so as to make the most of its inhabitants' time and talents. If a good affordable laundry existed in the neighborhood, for instance, then there was no moral reason why a woman ought to be stuck at home washing clothes. Or if a family could afford its own washing machine, then the best, most efficient model should be bought. Anything that made work easier was good so long as it preserved quality.

In 1909, an article in the *Journal of Home Economics* gushed praises for the Sunshine Laundry, in Brookline Massachusetts, a collective endeavor, run by two sisters who were graduates of Smith College. Helen Ridlon, a professor at Simmons, described the laundry as full of light and air, a hive of joyous activity, where intelligent workers turned out beautifully cleaned clothes and linens. Customers sent in orders from all over New England and some of the Midwestern states. It was easy to see, she wrote, "how such women—workers with brains and culture, which means appreciation of high standards and ideals—are needed in this field alone." A woman who sent her laundry to such a place was as wise and modern as one who took her children to the very best doctor or who had her clothes made by the very best (not necessarily the most fashionable) tailor. In an age of expertise, no one need settle for amateur work just out of a sense of gender obligation.[71]

Homes designed by Hayden's domestic feminists were semi-communal endeavors. Buildings included common kitchens and laundries staffed by paid workers. Many provided cleaning services and some had day care centers as well. As Hayden points out, most of the visionaries who wrote about such homes of the future assumed that these paid employees would be female but did not address the problem created, or perpetuated, by this assumption. Women's work would still be done by women, just not by middle-class women. Rather than finding a way to pay women for the work they did in their own homes, domestic feminists more often suggested paying other women to do it for middle-class women, leaving open the question of who would cook, clean and care for the children of the working class.

For academic home economists, the professionalization of housework did not imply such a radical shift of the burden onto working class women. Although they did advocate the use of public laundries where available and pay-by-the-hour cleaning services—seen as the miraculous solution to "the servant problem"—they focused more of their attention on rationalizing work within the home than on removing it. As Caroline Hunt wrote in 1909,

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[71] Helen Ridlon, "Another View of the Sunshine Laundry," *Journal of Home Economics* 1 (October 1909): 375.

> If the history of household industrialism had been written there would have been lots of chapters on the cooperatives, all unsuccessful. But the purpose of coops, to lessen the work of housekeepers (as public understands it) has been accomplished in part by delegation of tasks to specialists. [72]

Hunt noted that Municipal utilities, as well as commercial laundries and bakeries, had eased women's lives significantly in the last thirty-five years. Although a fully cooperative society seemed ideal to Hunt, she did not think that Americans were ready for it yet; rather, she encouraged housekeepers to use modern conveniences to free up their time so that they might participate more in the communal activities of civic life.

Domestic architecture courses taught students to see the single family home as a work environment above all else. Ideally, the environment would be designed so that each individual could fulfill her potential, assuming that her potential was to clean, cook, care for children, and yet have enough time to keep up with current events and have a rich cultural life. Attention was given to placement of sinks, stoves, and work surfaces, both in relation to each other and in relation to the woman who would be using them. Stairs and doors should all be placed convenient to the natural movement patterns within the house. Despite the reality that most students would not have the opportunity to design their own houses, domestic architecture courses taught them to think of the home as a variable and controllable environment, something that existed to serve its users rather than the other way around.

Power of the Purse

While sanitation and domestic architecture introduced students to the "home" aspect of the field, courses in economics were also essential to the endeavor. Early economics courses borrowed from liberal arts departments dealt with classical theories of economics. Soon, however, home economics professors began to teach a more specialized form of the subject. While acquainting students with the theoretical side of economics and offering a general picture of the U.S. economy, economics courses in the home economics colleges turned students' attention to the daily, domestic practicalities of the subject. Rather than thinking about the wealth of nations, economics courses in these departments considered the household budget, from sows' ears to silk purses and everything in between. Economics was part of other courses in the field, too. Food science courses dealt with it, as did domestic architecture, interior decoration, and textile sciences and clothing design. At every opportunity home economists advocated moderation. When buying a cut of meat, they urged their students, choose neither the cheapest nor the finest. Get something in between and make the most of it. If selecting fabric for a new suit, think in terms of durability first, then beauty, because durability is, after all, a kind of beauty of its own.

Home economists in colleges and universities taught their students to think of themselves in terms of income and budgets, subtly introducing the notion of class into the liberal arts education. As students prepared budgets for every conceivable level of income they were implicitly being asked to imagine themselves in the full range of

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[72] Caroline Hunt, "Woman's Public Work for the Home an Ethical Substitute for Cooperative Housekeeping," *Journal of Home Economics* 1 (June 1909): 220.

economic shoes. What would it be like to live on a workman's wages? What was the difference in quality of life between the workman's family and the family of a professional? By helping their students to see for themselves the very real differences between a life with enough extra money for movies or sugar and a life without, home economists encouraged a kind of class awareness through meaningful detail unlike any offered in political science, history, or economics courses at the time.

Molly Dewson, who would later achieve fame as a Democratic party activist and journalist, briefly taught courses in household economics at the School of Housekeeping in Boston, part of the Women's Education and Industrial Union. The School of Housekeeping was established in 1897 and subsumed by Simmons in 1902. Dewson had to write her own textbook, a guide to budget-making titled *The Twentieth Century Expense Book.* Her biographer, Susan Ware, points out that the book did not include budgets for families with children.[73] Like Dewson, who shared her private domestic life with another woman and did not have children, many early home economists were in the process of self-creation as a first generation of professional women and their work often reflects their own needs in this role more strongly than the needs of the general population of women. Although they would most likely have objected to the idea, the courses they taught and books they wrote tended to suit and therefore subtly endorse the lifestyle of the single woman or the female couple as much or more than that of the heterosexual family. A cooking course at Simmons College, offered in 1917-1918 was actually specifically designed for the single woman and titled "kitchenette cookery." As part of the class, the busy students prepared and ate lunch together.[74]

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[73] Susan Ware, *Partner and I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 38-39.

While Molly Dewson may not have intended an overt critique of women's economic roles in society, Edna Day, of the University of Missouri Department of Home Economics, clearly intended something of the kind in her introductory course for freshmen. Describing the course as taught in 1909, she wrote that

> We take up what is probably more sociological than economic, the discussion of the fact that the work that used to be done in the home by the women is largely done in factories, and hence the home maker is not the producer in the sense that she used to be, and we discuss some of Mrs. Gilman's ideas of the wife earning money outside of the home. It is all very elementary. I do not expect much more than to set the girls to talking.[75]

Gilman was by no means a neutral figure. She advocated a form of women's liberation that rejected traditional ideas of motherhood as a woman's primary calling and designed homes in which there were no kitchens because she thought that women were unjustly chained to the domestic and that the only way to free them within their own homes was to make it physically impossible for them to do domestic labor. By removing kitchens and advocating public childcare, Gilman amputated limbs from the traditional notion of womanhood.

Day's assertion that she did not expect much from the students on their first encounter with Gilman and with discussions of women's changing economic and social roles suggests that she did expect these ideas to sink in and to transform her students at some point further on in their education. She did not describe the transformation she had in mind, but rather seems to have assumed that her readers in the *Journal of Home Economics* would know what she meant and share her views.

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[74] Simmons College Bulletin, 1917-1918, Box 3, Folder 2, Simmons College Department of Nutrition Records, Simmons College Archives.

Day's discussion of the shift of productive labor out of the private home would, if coupled with Gilman's ideas, have celebrated this change, just as Richards celebrated the fact that there were professional laundries available that could iron her husband's vests better than she could. The professionalization of many elements of domestic labor potentially freed some women—those who could afford such services—to participate in public life to a greater extent than ever before. As they lost their roles as domestic producers, however, home economists began to warn, women must work actively to maintain their control of the domestic sphere. Just because one could now buy bread already baked and even sliced did not mean that one should abandon all knowledge of bread-making and simply buy whatever loaf advertisers succeeded in selling you. Woman's role had shifted from producer to consumer, but was no less great in its importance. In fact, as variety became the spice of consumerist life, a woman needed to know more than ever before about domestic products and processes. Furthermore, thanks to modern science (both physical and social), it was now possible for women to know more than their mothers and grandmothers ever had about food, clothing, and shelter. A woman's choices in the market were now informed by scientific studies of vitamins, nutrients, and calories, as well as investigations into labor conditions and endless batteries of quality testing.

By taking a sociological approach to economics, Day challenged traditional teaching methods. In fact, she seems to have made an early attempt to teach labor history

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[75] Edna D. Day, "Home Economics at the University of Missouri," *Journal of Home Economics* 1 (June 1909): 232.

by teaching economics as something experienced and shaped by ordinary people rather than as an abstract science of shifting supply and demand. In the same year that Day published this description of her course, Van Rensselaer toured the department at Missouri. She wrote to Day that she was most impressed with the department's work with people outside the university, those on the farms and in the small towns surrounding Columbia.

> Another thing that pleased me greatly was your interest in the women of the state. I feel after several years of experience that I am justified in commenting upon this as a feature which will help you personally and help your department as much as anything else. The benefit which will come to these women simply cannot be estimated. I tried to express the idea that the best foundation for good work was when the people joined with the college to carry out these popular movements.[76]

Because home economics departments in state universities were so intimately connected to state agricultural extension programs, the material used in economics courses in the departments was generally fresh from the fields around them.[77] Students surveyed local women to understand how they spent their money and then considered ways to stretch the budgets of these real people. The fact that examples were so often taken from real life gave the work of home economics departments the urgency of a social movement. This, at any rate, was the hope of many of the movement's leaders, who wanted to create a field and simultaneously and consequently improve the world around them. The desired transformation would include increased communalism and heightened awareness of the interconnection of production and consumption. The study of economics in the context of the private home and domestic labor would be a means of creating broader understandings throughout society by connecting personal experience of markets to larger trends in society.

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[76] Martha Van Rensselaer to Edna Day, 1/9/09, Box 14, Folder 25, NYSCHE Papers. When Van Rensselaer visited Columbia, Day was too busy to show her around, so Louise Stanley gave her a tour. Stanley was an instructor in the department at the time and would later become chief of the U.S. Bureau of Home Economics in the Department of Agriculture.

[77] Agricultural extension programs are run by land grant institutions within the states.

A Simmons college bulletin from 1911 offered courses in the "economics of housebuilding" as well as "philanthropic problems," and "economics (principles and applications to 'industrial U.S.')." Sarah Arnold and her staff clearly shared Van Rensselaer's interest in making connections between the world within the university and that surrounding it. Arnold's students were much more likely than Van Rensselaer's to already be part of the working class, but the courses she offered them seem intended to make them understand their personal experience of class and labor in a larger context.

Square Meals

One subject which could not be borrowed from other departments was food science. Introducing food science to the university as one of the core elements of the field was essential to the movement, but also difficult. Because no mater what names home economists gave to courses in nutrition and dietetics, the public and other members of the academic community insisted on asking why coeds needed to be taught cooking. Food sciences emerged almost immediately from the original, Ellen Richards-inspired focus on sanitation. By the turn of the century, middle-class women could begin to rely on cities to manage sanitation on the large scale and they could afford interior plumbing. Richards' devotion to the issues of pure air and water was in a sense no longer current for middle-class women of the movement. What became more interesting to them was the idea of a diet that was pure, not simply of dangerous microbes, but also of unnecessary or weakening elements. Following in the footsteps of such movements as Grahamism, and vegetarianism, leaders of the movement were interested in supplying the human body with its perfect fuel and they tended to think in terms of machinery, rather than taste.

Departments offered courses not in cooking, but in food science, nutrition, and dietetics. In these courses, students were expected to learn to think about food in a new way, as a substance which it was more important to test than to taste. Nutrition was presented as a matter of social, as well as personal health. When Ellen Richards began teaching sanitary sciences at MIT in 1884, she was joined by Mary Hinman Abel, her partner at the New England Kitchen, who taught nutrition. While Richards taught students how to test air and water purity, Hinman Abel helped them explore the chemistry of food and digestion. That nutrition was considered part of sanitary science reflects the notion shared by many home economists that there were good foods and bad foods, and that to eat the bad was practically to poison oneself. Non-nutritious foods were not simply a waste of materials, they were as bad as contaminated foods. It was as important to teach people how to eat "properly" as it was to teach them how to eliminate disease-spreading elements from their daily lives. Early home economists connected nutrition to mental health also, claiming that nutritious meals at home would prevent men from visiting saloons. Jacob Riis expressed this idea when he said that the best way to encourage temperance in tenement neighborhood was "a cookery school slapped down right there in the middle of the block."[78] Philanthropist Mrs. Qunicy Shaw (Pauline Agassiz) advocated giving Richards a grant "to pursue studies in the food and nutrition of workingmen and its possible relation to the question of the use of intoxicating liquors."[79]

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[78] Quoted in Laura Shapiro, *Perfection Salad*. (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1986), 138

[79] Caroline Hunt. *Life of Ellen Richards*, 215.

For progressive era reformers, the movement to improve sanitation stemmed from an environmentalist understanding of the world. If environments could be improved, the people who lived in them would improve, too. A drunk was a drunk not because he was morally inferior but because his environment gave him few other choices and no sense of self-worth. As Helen Brinkerd Young, Cornell home economist, wrote, "It is the common experience of mankind that the human race cannot live much above its environment."[80]

When it was organized in 1915, the department of home economics in the U.S. Department of Agriculture invested in a respiratory calorimeter, an expensive and cumbersome machine which became the centerpiece of the department's laboratory and which measured energy expenditure in active subjects. By 1930, when the department became its own bureau within the U.S.D.A., the calorimeter was consuming half of the department's budget and its use was finally discontinued as too expensive. The calorimeter stood as a kind of idol, representing the movement's commitment to thinking about food in neutral, scientific terms, rather than as an element of culture. Nutrition professors such as Flora Rose were hired because they had backgrounds in the "hard" sciences, rather than certificates from cooking schools or experience in restaurants. Courses such as "physiology of nutrition," offered by Simmons, or "food selection and preparation" at Illinois, or the "Foods and Advanced Course in Foods" that Flora Rose taught beginning her first year at Cornell, all suggested a significant change in woman's relation to food. In all of these courses women were taught to take food apart, analytically, rather than to construct and serve it. Cooking was sometimes part of the process, but it was not the focus of the experience. Early food science courses reversed a woman's traditional path from kitchen to table, sending her back into the kitchen as observer rather than simply preparing her to emerge from it, piping-hot delicious dish in hand.

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[80] Helen Brinkerd Young, "The Arrangement of Household Furnishings, The Cornell Reading Course VI No.85 (April 1915) Farmhouse Series No. 7.

The Domestic Science department at the University of California at Berkeley called their course "experimental cooking," but it was taught in the nutrition laboratory rather than in a kitchen, and the department sought for it an instructor with training in "quantitative food analysis."[81] While many home economics departments designed and ran lunchrooms for use by students and faculty, when food was in the classroom, it was not a meal.

In *Perfection Salad*, Laura Shapiro mocks the first generation of home economists and cooking experts for their apparent lack of interest in flavor. She suggests that the new food engineers actually feared the pleasures to be found in food. This seems an overstatement of a complicated issue. While Richards railed against the poisoning of the palate with notions of personal taste, and while some customers objected to the blandness of the food served in her New England Kitchen, home economists were as absorbed by issues of palatability as those of nutrition. Their goal was to get people to eat and enjoy the things that were good for them. It would have pleased home economists enormously to be able to serve people whole wheat breads and raw vegetables and have them appreciated for their flavors as well as their nutritional soundness. Unfortunately, the culinary aesthetic of the era did not allow for this.

In the pre-Alice Waters dining rooms of America, home economists found that people did not appreciate the flavors of nature undiluted. Upper middle-class Americans of the late twentieth century may have learned to enjoy the elements of their food, to celebrate the integrity of a carrot or beet. But they did not come to this self-consciously enlightened position simply because it is the truth about food (how can such a thing exist?). Rather, they developed this aesthetic through the influence of the hippie, natural foods, and back to the land movements as well as through waves of fitness crazes. What went into the body became as important an issue as early home economists had hoped, although diets have not often been resolved in ways that they would have approved. It is interesting to think about what a woman like Isabel Bevier would have made of "power bars."

Because Americans at the turn of the century were largely uninterested in food's nutritive qualities or in the concept of "whole foods," home economists developed methods of making them eat what was good for them. The white sauces which, Shapiro notes, covered everything that cooking schools prepared, were a way of getting Americans to enjoy a whole range of vegetables, such as cabbage, that were healthy but unpopular. The "creaming" of every vegetable certainly seems to detract from its health value when we look at it today—after all, creamed spinach swims in a sea of whole milk, butter, and flour—but at the dawn of the science of nutrition, it was a way to make sensual and attractive what was really healthy. Shapiro has misunderstood, among other things, what was sensual and what seemed special and exciting to the palates of early twentieth century Americans.

Another apocryphal story of the movement attests to the power of white sauce. In 1911, New York State legislators were invited to the Cornell campus as part of a project

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[81] M.E. Jaffa (Secretary of the Home Economics Committee) to Benjamin Wheeler, March 10, 1913, Agnes Fay Morgan Papers, 1904-1953, University Archives, Bancroft Library, University of

to get funding for a home economics building. Dean Bailey of the Agriculture College asked Van Rensselaer and Rose to prepare a meal for them. As Rose remembered it, "We said we would be delighted to. We would always take on anything that came along." The two women prepared the meal and served it with the help of seven students. Menu selection proved all-important:

> One of the things we had was creamed cabbage. Those were the days when they smothered vegetables in white sauce – the white sauce sort of stood for home economics—but we made it really right with buttered crumbs on the top, and when we served this, the Legislator sitting next to me said, "Miss Rose, what is this delicious dish I am eating?" And I said "Well, you are eating scalloped cabbage, good old simple plain scalloped cabbage." And he said "Oh no I am not, I don't like cabbage but please give me some more." . . . And later when we asked for money for a building, he whirled round in his chair and said, "I want to vote for the woman that made me eat cabbage."[82]

The legislature allocated money for a new building. The story is interesting on several levels. The legislator knew that he ought to eat what was good for him, but needed the lure of the cream sauce and buttered bread crumbs to do so, reflecting both the tastes of the time and the degree to which nutrition had already become something people were aware of. Rose herself acknowledged changes in taste when she implicitly contrasted "those days" of white sauce to these days when it is not so ubiquitous. She also obliquely reflected on the role of her field in changing tastes when she said that home economics was synonymous with the sauce that made the healthy palatable.

This story appears several times in the collected papers of the department, attesting to the fact that members of the department found it meaningful. Nancy

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California at Berkeley (hereafter Berkeley Archives).

[82] Undated interview with Flora Rose, c. 1953. conducted by Mary Philips. Box 32, Folder 14, NYSCHE Papers.

Berlage, a home economics historian, reads the story of the dinner, held in a long hallway of Roberts Hall, as an example of men in the University exploiting the women of the department, using them to entertain guests, rather than taking them seriously as academic peers.[83] But we can also, and more interestingly, see the story as a victory for the women of the department. Like Ellen Richards sewing on buttons to win acceptance in the male laboratory, Van Rensselaer and Rose used their own domestic skills to get what they wanted from the non-domestic world of state and academic politics. In Rose's account, as in Van Rensselaer's, which does not differ substantially, the legislator is made to look something of a fool, voting his palate, rather than his convictions. As well as seeming foolish, he is also portrayed as a student, a successful product of the movement. He knew that the women of the department had done him a good turn nutritionally by making him eat his cabbage and like it and he was converted to the cause, voting funds for a new building.

Endless experiments on how to preserve flavors of meats and vegetables in the cooking process as well as the carefully planned menus for faculty meetings and professional conferences all attest to the fact that early home economists had an abiding love of food and flavor. The Cornell Department of Home Economics became famous for its Cornell Bread, which was fortified with soy flour and powdered milk to be both nutritious and tasty. Private notes between members of the department, however, suggest that for the faculty the school's most popular creation was the Dom econ Cake, named for the Domestic Economists who invented it. The cake is a rich, though not dense chocolate cake which is easy to make and difficult to stop eating.[84]

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[83] Nancy Berlage, "The Establishment of an Applied Social Science: Home Economists, Science, and Reform at Cornell University, 1870 –1930" in ed. Helen Silverberg, *Gender and American Social Science: The Formative Years* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

Although the early home economists show much evidence of having enjoyed food as much as any of their contemporaries and although they experimented with it scientifically, there was very little cultural experimentation. Despite the fact that by the 1920s such excursions into the exotic as tamale pies, Hawaiian chicken, and lo-mein were regular items in the home economics sections of women's magazines, the first generation of nutritionists did not think much about spices. This is partly due, of course, to the fact that they mostly came from middle-class Anglo-Saxon Protestant homes where there was a limited tradition of spice use, but also to the fact that spices have no nutritive value. Lacking protein or vitamins, spices were uninteresting to those in search of the perfect food when perfection was defined in terms of fuel, rather than passion. Even white sauce could play a role in balancing a diet as it contained both protein and starch. Spicing, too, can be a matter of individual preferences, while the grail that home economists sought was one diet for all.[85]

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[84] I include the recipe here both because I think it is worth perpetuating and because it gives a sense of how home economists wrote recipes and of their enjoyment of food.
Ingredients: 2 oz chocolate, grated; 1/4 cupful butter; 1/2 cupful boiling water; 1 cupful sugar; 1 cupful flour; 3/4 teaspoonful soda mixed with 1/4 cupful sour milk; 1 egg. "Mix the ingredients in the order in which they are given. The boiling water will melt the chocolate and butter. Do not wait for the mixture of chocolate, butter, and water to cool before adding the other ingredients. The cake batter will be exceedingly thin but must not be thickened. Bake as a loaf cake and frost with twice-cooked frosting flavored with chocolate. A delicious variation of this cake is to bake it in layers in a moderate oven, put it together with chocolate filling, an dice it with boiled or twice-cooked frosting. If properly baked this cake will be delicious and moist. It can be kept for several days.". Recipe published in *The Cornell Reading Course* Vol. IV, No, 75 (November, 1914): 1470.

[85] A menu from a banquet given at the 1923 reunion of people who had worked in the Food Administration during the First World War gave evidence of more complicated palates. The feast was perhaps willfully extravagant for a group of people who had spent the war trying to simplify American diets. The menu included: Delice of fruits; petitie marmite; diable a 'okra; Celery; salted nuts; olives; Aiguilette of Sea Bass Aux Crevettes; rose potatoes parisienne persillade; Medallion of Sweetbread and Virginia ham; ideal, fresh mushrooms; Zephyr of Guinea Chicken; Polonaise; new peas au beurre; Salad Margot; Fantasie aux fraises mignardises; mocha java; appolinaris.. Box 1, Folder 16, Sarah Louise Arnold Papers Series II, Simmons College Archives.

Indeed, despite a genuine interest in palatability, too great an emphasis on flavor would have made food science classes look too much like cooking classes, the nightmare of home economics leaders. Nutrition courses introduced students to a new way of thinking about food—in terms of values rather than flavors. Calories were counted, the basic food groups defined and many experiments performed. What was the actual chemical process that caused bread to rise? Why did some conditions favor rising and others retard or prevent it? What were the vitamins present in beets and how were these changed by cooking or pickling?

In 1897, when she was teaching at the Pennsylvania College for Women, Isabel Bevier produced a bulletin in which she noted that

> A series of experiments carried through a number of homes discloses that the use of food is determined more by the pocketbook of the buyer and the individual taste than by any considerations of getting the greatest possible food value for the money...The Americans are not economical feeders. Too much is bought that is not valuable, too much is wasted, and too much is paid for things that could be replaced to better advantage with cheaper and better substitutes.[86]

Bevier and her peers in the movement wanted to adjust American attitudes toward food, to make their relationship towards it more scientific and even more businesslike. The shopper and menu-planner, always assumed to be female, must learn to think of food in terms of values—both economic and nutritional. She must be encouraged and enabled to discover what items were good and bad deals financially as well as what was good or bad for her family's diet.

Home economists devised countless budgets for households of varying sizes and classes, attempting to tailor diets to both occupation and pocketbook. The family of a factory worker was considered not simply as an income, but as a unit in which certain levels of nutrients would be required for maximum efficiency. With the proper nutrition and thrift, a family might even move up the economic ladder, into a whole new and, if they were wise, professionally designed budget.

In 1907, a female trustee of the University of Illinois complained that the home economics department was not spending enough time teaching clothing and millinery. Bevier defended her early focus on food:

> We commenced with the food problem to try to develop a course that should teach people to cook successfully by first teaching them the principles underlying it and give such practice as was necessary to establish these principles in their minds. It seems to us that we have been very successful in demonstrating that that can be successfully done... First, the principles that underlie the selection and preparation of food seems to us more fundamental to life. Second, they have to do with chemistry, physics, bacteriology and physiology and therefore require expensive equipment and laboratory work.[87]

Bevier's reply was a defense of the movement as an intellectual, rather than a vocational endeavor. Clothing design could and should be approached seriously and artistically, but the problems of food purchase, preparation, and consumption involved more rigorous thinking and connected women more powerfully and intricately with the structures of both nature and society. Bevier's statement to the University trustee is an example of her passionate belief that women's work was fundamental to the functions of society and ought to be recognized as such. Students in her department ought to understand their roles in context, both historical and sociological.

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[86] No author, no date., newspaper clipping "Nutrition Investigation," Box 1, Folder "1897," Bevier Papers.

[87] .Isabel Bevier to Mrs. I.S. Raymond, February 25, 1907, Box 1, Folder 1907, Bevier Papers.

Beyond the Skill Set

Within early home economics courses, economics and history of domestic architecture were introduced to obliquely discuss women's roles in society. Food science and domestic art courses did not challenge these roles. Early courses which may be seen as precursors to women's studies classes, however, did directly question the roles in which women found themselves. Designing her curriculum in 1911, Isabel Bevier felt confident that "History and literature courses can be made to yield much data about the place of women in family and public life."[88] She wanted her students not simply to learn how to manage domestic labor, whether in their own homes or in commercialized domestic environments such as tea rooms, hospitals and corporate cafeterias, but also to have full historical, sociological and political awareness of their place in society. Bevier did not ever suggest that the connection between women and domestic work ought to be questioned and de-naturalized, but she did require that her students understand their place in a global context, a requirement that surely opened the door for critique of the conflation of woman and home. To know that an institution, such as womanhood, is not timeless, but rather changeable and changing, is to begin to consider the possibility of changing it oneself.

In the 1903 to1904 academic year, Martha Van Rensselaer offered a course in "Woman's Work and Domestic Science," in which she discussed the history of women's work in the home and how modern developments might change and improve this labor. In the 1904 to1905 Bulletin the course was described as addressing "Social conditions, past and present" of American women as well as sanitation, decoration, clothing, and food science. Also included in the course was a consideration of "conservation of strength," in other words, how to keep the job of keeping house from killing one. These courses did not challenge the notion that the domestic realm was female, but they did at least suggest that roles had changed over time.[89]

By 1907, Flora Rose had joined the faculty and together she and Van Rensselaer taught a course titled "the Home," which covered the "History and evolution of the home; laws governing the home life; the home in its relation to outside factors; home-making as an occupation; correlation of science in home economics."[90] By offering such a course they clearly intended to make people think about women's roles in society. That the course was taught by two women who had never been married, had no children, and were in fact soon to move in together to establish a lifelong domestic partnership made the course modern in ways that its instructors could not recognize. Rose and Van Rensselaer, like Dewson with her child-less budgets, were offering an alternative to the traditional even while they were attempting to preserve the nuclear family by modernizing it. When such women lectured on the new career opportunities opening to women in home economics, they served as living examples not simply of those same new career opportunities, but of alternate lifestyles.

In the 1910s, Cornell offered courses taught by Blanche Evans Hazard, a labor historian with a Ph.D. from Harvard, who was very much interested in women's roles in society. She taught "Woman in Industry," "Primitive Woman," and "Woman and the State," as well as a course in the "History of Housekeeping." Hazard described her course on women in industry as dealing with factory conditions, the conditions of tenement life,

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[88] Bevier, *Wooster Quarterly*, 1911.

[89] New York State College of Agriculture, *New York State College of Agriculture Bulletin 1903-1904*; *New York State College of Agriculture Bulletin 1904-1905*, NYSCHE Papers.

and occupational diseases.[91] In 1909, Jessica Peixoto, a sociologist, historian, and the second woman to receive a Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley, taught a two courses in the Household Science department there titled "The Household as Economic Agent," and "the Child and the State."[92] Hazard and Peixoto represented the most maverick tendencies of the movement, in which the consideration of womanhood itself was an essential condition of the study of the home. Most others did not go so far in their attempts to understand the broader context and cultural construction of a woman's life and her labor. The pioneers of the movement, however, made room for women like Hazard, welcomed them, and sometimes defended them or their ideas from attack by conservative trustees or members of the faculty. For these leaders, to open the home to academic study was to open women's lives, both to cultural analysis and to opportunity for change.

In later years, after suffrage and after the gains made by women during and after the second world war, pioneers could look back and openly claim their movement as one of liberation. In 1954, Flora Rose wrote an appreciation of Helen Canon, a colleague who had come to Cornell in 1915 and became the first head of the Department of Economics of the Household and Household Management. Of Canon, Rose wrote,

> The genuineness of her values made the goal she sought a rich understanding, a goal whose objective was to give women increased understanding of the importance of the economic structure of society and their significance as consumers and homemakers to its welfare. From a

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[90] New York State College of Agriculture, *New York State College of Agriculture Bulletin 1907-1908*, NYSCHE Papers.

[91] Annual Report of the Department of Home Economics, New York State College of Agriculture, 1918-1919, Box 37, Folder 13. NYSCHE Papers. Also see the biography of Hazard on Cornell's excellent history of home economics web site, rmc.library.cornell.edu/homeEc/bios/blanchehazard.html.

[92] Merasi Nerad, *The Academic Kitchen* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 36.

> background of broad general education, she saw in the emerging field of home economics the best opportunity to accomplish this end.[93]

This was the common vision of the first generation, a sense that the boundaries between home and the world must be made porous and dynamic, so that information and energy could pass between them. Canon, whose partner, Beulah Blackmore, was also a member of the faculty, an expert in textiles, had experienced this change within her own life. Because she was simultaneously a graduate student and instructor at Cornell and then a full professor and head of a department and because she shared her personal and professional life with someone who was as interested in the questions of modernizing gender roles as she was, she fulfilled many of her own dreams for women in general and set a fascinatingly complex example for her students.

The interesting contrast between the lives that many home economists lived and the purported focus of their field—the life of the ordinary home maker—developed into a critique of the field that emerged in the 1920s and 30s. The critique that home economics as an academic subject was too far removed from the daily needs of most women simultaneously represented the success and failure of the movement.

"She Doesn't Know Much About Living"

During the 1930s, just as it seemed to the movement's leaders that their skills were most needed, critics began to attack home economics as too abstract, not focused enough on the daily needs of the ordinary housewife. The department at Berkeley suffered such an attack from a former student. Margaret Wilkinson Bindt (Mrs. Henry

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[93] Flora Rose, "Tributes Paid Professor Canon," *Ithaca Journal*, July 10, 1954, clipping in Box 4, Folder 44, NYSCHE Papers.

Martyn), who had graduated from Berkeley with a BA in Household Science in 1925, complained to Berkeley president Benjamin Sproul that Household Arts and Household Science courses were too specialized:

> There is nothing which a girl, looking forward to a career of some sort, but also looking forward ultimately to marriage, can take which will give her the general orientation in this most important field. . . Unless [the course in homemaking] could be so organized as to avoid a lifeless, academic, formal approach, which is a damper inherent in most college courses, it might almost as well not be organized at all.

She reported that many of her friends were discouraged from taking household science courses because the pre-requisites were too difficult, complaining that, "If one wishes to take the work offered by the department of Household Arts in Household Management, the student finds that a course in Civil Engineering is prerequisite." A survey on student attitudes towards home economics curricula collected by the JHE in 1937 echoed these sentiments. Many wanted to include "more all-round training for living. . . more practical home management house experience, more chance to develop social qualities, more training in the solution of financial problems," and, oddly, "more music appreciation." For women who had spent their entire lives trying to get away from the finishing school model of women's education, such demands must have been troubling.[94]

Agnes Fay Morgan, who ran the department at Berkeley, was a researcher in the field of food preparation. She remained adamant that her field was a science, not a skill set and that her curriculum accurately reflected the prevailing wisdom of the field. Helen Thompson of the Home Economics department at UCLA felt that "our students want training for work. Practically none of them look forward to home making as their sole occupation." In 1939, Morgan was still defending this position. In a paper delivered to the Association of Land Grant Colleges and Universities annual meeting, Morgan called for home economics education to concentrate more on what we now call the "hard" sciences. She argued that, "The research method. . . and the presence of research activity must infiltrate every phase of the undergraduate courses in order to ensure a supply of professional research personnel and also a fair degree of return from the effort and expense of maintaining a research program." Arguing that a strong reputation for research was essential to the status of the field, she quoted Van Rensselaer, who had written to Morgan that "I should like to assist on a research program because I think it is absolutely fundamental to home economics progress." For Morgan and for Van Rensselaer, the field's status derived from its reputation as a science, its distance from the kitchen.[95]

In 1934 an administrator at University of California Hospital wrote to Berkeley Provost Monroe Deutsch conveying the criticisms of a representative of the Kraft food company who had been working with Berkeley home economists at the hospital. The Kraft employee complained that the Household Science course did not "give enough actual practice in "every day" food preparation and cooking. In other words, she seemed to think that there was too much theory and not enough practice." Deutsch responded that "The impression on our campus is that people like Dr. Agnes Fay Morgan and Dr. Ruth Okey are highly competent. It may be that their work is not practical enough." When Deutsch consulted Okey, she assured him that the emphasis on the practical was "a temporary thing, partially a result of depression unemployment." She felt that people had

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[94] Beulah I. Coon, "A Survey of Studies Related to the College Curriculum in Home Economics," *Journal of Home Economics* 29 (February 1937): 78.

[95] Agnes Fay Morgan, "Undergraduate and Graduate Preparation for Home Economics Research," *Journal of Home Economics* 31 (December 1939): 685.

become panicked during the crisis and were temporarily reluctant to commit themselves to any sort of study that did not seem to have immediate results or money-making potential. Clearly she felt sure that once prosperity returned, students would also return to the higher branches of learning. At the same time, enrollment in Berkeley's Department of Household Science had risen sharply throughout the depression, suggesting that the field appealed to students as more practical in the current economic climate than did other disciplines.

An article in the Household Magazine in May 1929 addressed the argument against theory. Irene Westbrook wrote a column titled "Us Brides of a Year" that discussed the issues of a first home, one without children. In May she wrote about brides and finance:

> Ida had been a home economics teacher for eight years before she and Fred were married and when she decided she wanted to try running her home on an allowance of $75 a month, his family thought it would wreck their happiness. "Fred's going to ask you what you did with all that money at the end of the month," a sister-in-law said to her confidentially. "You've been a successful teacher, and theory is all right in the classroom but it can't work in the home."[96]

According to Westbrook, Ida managed very well, and ended up with savings at the end of the year. Westbrook was endorsing the idea that theory, taking a long, objective, analytical view of the situation, was the only way to run a successful home. Ida, a trained, professional home economist, had an advantage over her sister-in-law because she believed that she herself, not her husband, was the ultimate authority in the management of her home. Ida, not Fred, decided the household budget and how it should be spent. She looked at her work in the home as an extension of her previous career, not as dependent on her relationship to her husband. For her, theory was the indispensable means to practice. For Isabel Bevier, too, there was no point in simply teaching the most efficient methods of housework; what mattered was the conceptual.

In 1929, Benjamin Andrews of Teachers College had noted that

> Miss Bevier speaks of some of the earlier Home Economics teaching regarding the family undertaking by persons who had no training for it and who dealt in familiarity rather than facts and principles, characterizing it as "that heaven, home, and mother kind of teaching." She always stood for careful preparation for scientific background and a wholesome life philosophy in the teachers and for facts and principles rather than emotionalism in content.

Andrews approvingly remembered Bevier desacralizing the home and the woman within it, working against Catherine Beecher's earlier philosophy in which woman, although ideally trained for her work, also existed in a semi-mystical connection to domestic work.

For Bevier, as for Agnes Fay Morgan, the end result of study was not simply a nice home, but a rationalized theory of niceness. Just as Van Rensselaer had found it insufficient in 1900 to tell housewives that clean dishcloths were "nice," Bevier and her peers could not present a "wholesome life philosophy" for the family and home without scientific principles. The appearance of expertise was what made the whole project attractive and practicable. It would have been nothing to come forward as a group of good housekeepers intent on sharing their skills with younger women. To present themselves as scientists was (they hoped) to remake the popular notions of home, science, and woman. And to make themselves visible as experts was self-validating and self-fulfilling. When home economists concentrated their energies on the seemingly abstract issues within their field, they satisfied themselves as scholars, rather than focusing on their roles as educators. Like most academics, they committed themselves to the issues of their field as much or more than to the project of educating undergraduates.

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[96] Irene Westbrook, "Us Brides of a Year," *Household Magazine* 29 (May 1929): 30.

Unlike many other academics, such as classicists or historians, however, the subject of their discipline made this split allegiance more controversial. Because their field was designed to raise awareness of and improve practices within the domestic environment, a trickle-down approach to knowledge in the field laid the movement's leaders open to criticism.

Even within the ranks of home economics leaders, there were differing opinions on how to weight theory and scientific education against practical skills training. Lita Bane, Bevier's successor at Illinois, suggested that many in the field were improperly focused on abstracts. Where earlier home economists had attempted to change the status of all women through their rationalization of women's work, Bane argued that home economics education was best tailored to the needs of the individual. Although she harkened back to the older model in her worry that the field had not made homemakers adequately aware of their social worth, she went on to declare that "the successful homemaker is not preeminently a scientist; she is an artist – proficient in the art of fine living." She acknowledged that the field had achieved a high level of academic standing, but she worried that this had blinded its leaders to the realities of women's lives. "On the natural science side," she argued, "we've done well. What are we going to do with the social sciences and art?" In other words, she wanted to see the field shift from an emphasis on the "hard" sciences to the "soft" sciences.

As her guide for success, Bane quoted Caroline Hunt, another of the movement's most well-known spokeswomen. Hunt defined the field in terms of individual women, arguing that,

> The final test of teaching home economics is freedom. If we have unnecessarily complicated a single life by perpetuating useless

> conventions or by carrying the values of one age over into the next, just so far have we failed. If we have simplified one life and released in it energy for its own expression, just so far have we succeeded.[97]

The energy released from housework, which pioneers of the movement argued could be applied to citizenship, Hunt and Bane reserved for individual fulfillment. This emphasis on the individual stood in interesting contrast to the collectivist thinking prevalent during the 1930s, almost a harbinger of the mentality to come in the 1950s

Interestingly, Bane suggested that the reason home economists were overemphasizing the abstract and paying too little attention to women's daily lives was that so few of them had experience as adults with such lives. Including herself in a group perhaps unfit to preach to young women, Bane reasoned that "most of us are not living in the thick of present-day family life," rather "we know a few bachelor women's homes or apartments, the homes of a relative or two, and a few faculty families." The only experience of family life that most home economists could refer to, then, was that of their childhoods. These experiences were of course almost useless because they predated the field. For Bane, unlike many of her peers, the single woman's home or the home that two women shared was not useful as a model. She lobbied for a redirection of effort away from scientific analysis of domestic work to a more detailed investigation of its practices. In doing so, she moved away from the movement's radical potential. To announce that the goal of home economics was to make housework better for the women who did it was to abandon the project of dissociating women from the domestic.

Clara Brown, professor of home economics at the University of Minnesota, also sided with the dissatisfied Berkeley graduate, warning her peers that "we have loaded our college courses with prerequisite requirements in physical and biological sciences and filled the student's days so full of laboratory hours that they have none of the leisure we talk so much about in which to develop desirable personal qualities or to think about how to use what they are learning." Brown, who might have been receptive to the addition of music appreciation courses to the field, blamed this neglect of students on the field's hunger for status. "We have been so concerned about academic respectability – about upholding scholastic standards, about living down the reputation among some of our academic colleagues that home economics offered a haven for the intellectually unfit, that we have failed to do what we should have done for the majority of our students." Brown suggested that academic home economists take more time to consider the needs and interests of their students, as well as to study "current trends" in domestic life. Rather than striving to create researchers, Brown seemed to suggest, home economists should research their own students and design curricula accordingly. Although she did not acknowledge it, her ideal was to shift emphasis from the lives of women in general to the lives of college women in specific, further weighting the field towards the lives of middle-class women.

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[97] Lita Bane, "Philosophy of Home Economics," *Journal of Home Economics* 25 (May 1933): 378-381.

Other home economists worried about such criticism, both internal and external. In the JHE, Francis Zuill, head of home economics at Iowa State University, recounted that "an elderly man who is overseer of the poor in a small Iowa community, in speaking of the relief activities of the home economics teacher, said 'She knows her subjects, but she doesn't know much about living.'" For many who read it, the comment must have stung. Home economists had spent the previous thirty years building up an academic discipline to stand among the other, arguably esoteric, fields of learning, only to be accused of being too abstract, too far removed from common experience. Where once they had been shunned for bringing the stuff of everyday life into the academy, they were now attacked for not knowing enough about these very things. For the many single women, and those who lived in female partnerships, the accusation that home economists did not know about "life" might also have a deeper, more personal potential to wound.[98]

Effie Raitt, who was Director of the School of Home Economics at the University of Washington and president of the AHEA addressed the practice/theory debate in her annual message to the association in 1935 and in an earlier article written for the JHE. Recounting that a dean at her university once told her that "The trouble with you in home economics is that you have no philosophy," Raitt took the opportunity to present her vision of the field. For Raitt, there could be no meaningful distinction between practice and theory. "Every division of home economics subject matter," she wrote, "presents esthetic, scientific, economic, and sociological aspects. . . the subject matter that is the matrix from which we crystallize our concepts and procedures is live, dynamic, glowing with vitality." She attempted, seemingly, to argue that atomization was compatible with cohesion. Raitt ranked the field among other, traditionally male professional disciplines: "In home economics, as in law, medicine, engineering, 'the philosophy that integrates it' is based upon use." She found that in the end the best way to define the field "is to state that it is a complex." She preferred using the term professional rather than applied to define the field, because "it implies a broad cultural foundation in general and a philosophy which is a comprehension of purpose and relationship."[99]

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[98] Frances Zuill, "New Frontiers in Home Economics Education," *Journal of Home Economics* 25 (August/September 1933): 555.

[99] Effie Raitt, "The Nature and Function of Home Economics, *Journal of Home Economics* 27 (April 1935): 265.

Raitt's position, then, was that the movement's power was in its expression of the connections between its skill groups, not in the groups themselves.

For Raitt, a rededication of the field to the individual housewife would have missed the point. Its far-reaching nature was its strength. It seems natural that this would have been her perspective as she was a well-educated professional woman at the very top of her field. Her experience was markedly different from that, for instance, of the dissatisfied Berkeley graduate who complained that her courses in home economics had not prepared her for housekeeping. Raitt achieved her status and satisfaction through the creation and development of a field of study. In order for her life to have meaning, her field had to also have meaning. For the unhappy home maker, taking the long view did not seem to help much with the performance of tasks that continued to be associated with her status as wife.

In her annual address Raitt remarked that home economists had tended to "Emphasize the esthetic or scientific aspects but may fail to note the economic and sociological. They are inclined to think more in terms of the classroom and lab than of the home... fail to note obligations to current problems of the life about them." Rather than calling for a new focus on practical skills education, however, Raitt called for more emphasis on theoretical connections between subfields and for greater opportunities for post graduate work. She quoted Edward Lindemann who argued that the new era brought about by the depression "calls for relational, rather than analytical thinking." In home economics this would mean a shift of emphasis to include the "soft" sciences as well as the "hard" sciences that had earned the movement its public respect.[100]

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[100] Effie Raitt, "Annual Message of the President of the American Home Economics Association," *Journal of Home Economics* 27 (October 1935): 481-485.

Abby Marlatt, head of the department of home economics at the University of Wisconsin, confirmed that the shift from hard to soft was underway. In 1936, she wrote that "The emphasis of training on the applied biological sciences, applied chemistry, and applied physics is now being shifted to the economics of consumption and the psychology of group relationships not only in the home but also in the community."[101] Marlatt, like Ruth Okey at Berkeley, connected this shift to the influence of the New Deal, which focused attention on practical solutions to social problems.

In fact, although neither Raitt nor Marlatt discussed this, the hard/soft, practical/theory debate was itself a result of the work that pioneers had done in the field. It had been a constant struggle for the women of the movement to come to a point when people could accuse them of not seeing the world outside their laboratories. In a sense, the moment that the movement was criticized for being too abstract, having too little to do with women's work, was the moment it finally arrived in academia. This arrival, as is often the case with a movement, was also a departure.

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[101] Agnes Samuelson, "An Administrator Looks at Home Economics," *Journal of Home Economics* 28 (October 1936): 522.

Chapter Three: Domestic Partnership

In 1906, Ann Gilchrist, dean of the Women's Department at the University of Tennessee wrote a letter to her friend Martha Van Rensselaer, at Cornell.[102] An important mutual friend was visiting in Ithaca and Gilchrist wished she could be there, too. "Dear lady yourself," she wrote from Knoxville, "So Mrs. Richards is with you now. I could find it in my heart to envy each the pleasure of being with the other. Please give my love to Mrs. Richards and don't tell her bad things about me – for I count much upon her good opinion." Gilchrist sent her love to Richards, a personal gesture, but also joked about her career, begging Van Rensselaer to keep her on the good side of the woman who was the acknowledged mother of home economics and leader of the movement. The letter was a mixture of professional and personal communication that was typical of the leaders of the home economics movement.

In her letter Gilchrist regretted that she had not been able to nurse Van Rensselaer through a recent illness by "being there to make omelets and hot lemonades." She then went on to combine the intimately personal with the professional in one lively sentence, writing that, "I've talked four hours today one hour foods – one hour dietaries—one selection of silk – and one on methods – and now I'm treating myself to the double luxury of washing my hair and writing to you while it dries."[103] In this and other letters to Van Rensselaer, Gilchrist was communicating simultaneously as a friend and as a colleague, a member of the small and tight-knit community of home economics leadership.[104]

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[102] In the case of the University of Tennessee, the Women's Department was the home economics department. This conflation of gender and subject was not something that home economists sought out. At the University of Illinois, however, the home economics department was housed in the Women's Building.

While the leaders of the home economics movement built departments and developed a field, they simultaneously created a community of like-minded activists. This community had a strong character of its own that stood in a complex and important relationship to the field and the ideals of the movement. This chapter will discuss some of the bonds within that community and how they affected the teaching of home economics in colleges and universities.

Most women in the movement shared their personal lives with other women, living with them in intimate partnerships that exhibited all the characteristics of successful marriages—loyalty, mutual support, physical closeness, and deep affection. We may not ever know for certain whether or not these partners had sex as we now define it, but it is clear that these attachments were both romantic and satisfying. These relationships were not kept private, but rather were celebrated throughout the community and made public to students. It is one of the most fascinating and complex facets of the movement's early years that the domestic relationships which so many professors modeled for their students and for the public were so different from the accepted norm and from what home economics courses seemed to prepare students for—the heterosexual marriage and family.

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[103] Ann Gilchrist to Martha Van Rensselaer, January 16, 1906, Series II, Box 14, Folder 25, NYSCHE Papers.

[104] Later in the year, Gilchrist sent Van Rensselaer and Rose a pancake griddle, combining the personal, professional, and practical in one much-appreciated gift. Van Rensselaer wrote that she would think of Gilchrist every time she made pancakes and then amended that to say "However, that is too prosaic, and think I would prefer to keep you in mind all of the time." (Martha Van Rensselaer to Ann Gilchrist, March 6, 1906, Box 14, Folder 25, NYSCHE Papers).

That women in the movement tended to share their personal lives with other professional women was not unusual. Boston marriages, or domestic partnerships between two single, often professional women of the middle and upper middle-class were common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Boston Marriage was the name given to these arrangements, rather than a New York marriage or a Toledo marriage precisely because such partnerships grew out of the friendships formed at the many women's colleges in the Boston area. At the women's colleges students met others who were, like themselves, not entirely content to move from the role of daughter to the role of wife/mother without exploring a little of the world beyond the domestic. Same sex relationships were common among women as they began to establish themselves in colleges and universities. Many female students developed crushes upon each other and engaged in elaborate courtships. John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman quote a description of such rituals, "When a Vassar girl takes a shine to another, she straightaway enters upon a regular course of bouquet sendings, interspersed with tinted notes, mysterious packages of. . . candies, locks of hair perhaps. . . until at last the object of her attentions is captured, the two become inseparable."[105] Whether or not such partnerships included a sexual element, they existed within a network of professional women with emotional ties to each other.

The colleges immersed young women in a same sex environment at just the time in life when others of their peers were marrying—forming heterosexual partnerships.

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[105] John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 126.

Furthermore, colleges allowed young women to consider professions and financial independence from men, as well as exposing them to the worlds of science, history, literature, and art which invited them to make a mark on the world. Female professors and female administrators provided them interesting new role models. The women's colleges did not invent lesbian partnerships, but they made it possible for independent women to meet each other and to form bonds that were intellectual as well as romantic. To Caroll Smith Rosenberg's "female world of love and ritual" they added ideas and the possibility of professional fulfillment. Two women who met in a rural town and fell in love had few options for mutual financial support. Two women who fell in love at Wellesley could imagine living together comfortably on combined professional salaries.

As D'Emilio and Freedman write, same-sex intimacies were particularly easy for white middle-class women to maintain "given the emphasis placed on their superior spiritual and nurturing qualities. Women's socialization... encouraged them to form bonds with other women."[106] Because for most of the nineteenth century women, particularly white middle-class women, were considered superior to sexual impulses, the notion of female homosexuality was virtually nonexistent. Women were affectionate, rather than erotic and the bonds they formed with other women did not appear to threaten the social order in any way. In fact, two spinsters sharing a home saved any number of brothers and nephews the cost of their board.

The question of sexuality within these relationships is by no means unimportant. Intimate same-sex relationships have always existed. Different cultures at different times have treated them in different ways, making alliances easier and more difficult to pursue and maintain. The fact that no one referred to the partners in a Boston marriage as lesbians does not mean that they did not have sexual relationships; it simply means that American culture at the time felt no need to name and control these relationships. Society accepted intimacy between women, and, because no one thought it necessary, limits to intimacy were not prescribed. Because white middle-class women were assumed to be asexual, their intimacies could not, by definition, be sexual, even if they would seem so to us today.

As Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz notes in her study of women's colleges, "By their mature years, many of the women professors within the women's colleges had committed themselves to other women. They had made choices, and in the process had formed deep and meaningful attachments to other women which opened up realms of self-knowledge, emotional growth, and a shared life."[107] Such bonds continued to form in coeducational colleges even where the presence of male students and male faculty offered opportunities for heterosexual alliances. Single-sex dormitories continued to provide female (and male) students with a homosocial domestic life until the 1970s. As for faculty, the sense of isolation which many women may have felt as they found themselves in a minority on campuses probably made the companionship of other academic women particularly welcome. Female faculty on coeducational campuses still often form women's faculty groups to discuss women's issues on campus as well as to offer each other support.

For female professors, colleges and universities at the turn of the century could be lonely places in which few colleagues shared one's experience of pioneering. The lady professor was often considered out of place and even a traitor to her gender and to nature itself. For such women, the companionship of other professional and professorial women

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[106] Ibid., 125.

was probably profoundly comforting. For women in home economics, the experience of difference in a male world was both exaggerated and eased because they had established an entirely female world within the university. Home economics professors were considered bizarre intruders in the first years of the movement, as male faculty in the sciences and liberal arts struggled to deal with the idea of kitchen laboratories. But within home economics departments, women were judged the most important people in society because they maintained the home—the basis for all civilization.

The field as first developed revolved around female partnership. Together, women would work out ways to improve domestic work and to give it the status it deserved. Then women, as workers within the home and as domesticators of the work world, would be recognized as a class unto themselves with power in the market and much to contribute to civil society.

While the women whom Lefkowitz Horowitz discusses may have crossed disciplinary boundaries in their personal relationships, many home economists found partners within their field. That they did so is significant. Two female English professors might live together without their domestic arrangements having any impact at all on the teaching of literature. But when two women dedicated to making home life rational, modern, and fulfilling chose to live together, they made a statement, however unwitting, that the domestic ideal did not necessarily include heterosexual relationships.

After Flora Rose retired from her position as Dean of Home Economics at Cornell, and some ten years after the death of her partner in 1932, she established a new household with the home economist Claribel Nye. Nye had graduated from Cornell in

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[107] Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 190.

1914 and gone on to a career in extension work in the west. When Rose retired from Cornell, she went to live with Nye in California in a house in the Berkeley hills. The two were committed to each other and when Rose died, Nye wrote to a friend at Cornell that, "She belonged to the College and the Alumnae and many others in whom she had been so interested and to whom she was devoted, but I was so close to her these past 19 years that I'll admit being devastated and forlorn these past weeks. I hoped so much that we might have another year together."[108] When Nye herself died, in 1970, friends suggested that any memorial donations of money be made to the Flora Rose fund, a scholarship at Cornell. Rose's own will had included a large bequest to the Martha Van Rensselaer Alumnae Scholarship fund. In death, as in life, Rose's personal partnerships were intertwined with her professional work.

The way in which home economists paired up with other women seems to me not merely a feature of economic realities of the time—that it was very difficult for a single woman to keep a household by herself. Louise Stanley, of the Bureau of Home Economics, was the highest paid woman in government, Flora Rose and Martha Van Rensselaer were co-chairs of a department, and Sarah Arnold was dean of a college.[109] The fact that Isabel Bevier lived alone on her salary as head of the department at the University of Illinois is proof that it was perfectly possible to do so.[110] The couples presented here seem to have paired up, then, not for economic motives, nor simply because of genuine love but also because they shared the radical notion that the heart of a household was partnership.

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[108] Claribel Nye to Helen Canoyer, August, 31, 1959, Box 6 Folder 16. NYSCHE Papers. Canoyer was dean of the College of Home Economics from 1953 to 1969.

[109] According to Van Rensselaer's biographer, when Flora Rose was offered a higher salary than her partner because she had advanced degrees in the field, she refused, preferring to maintain their equality in all things. Percival, *Martha Van Rensselaer*, 10.

[110] Bevier seems to have opened her home on occasion to students who could not afford housing. In praise of Bevier's home as one "surprisingly free from superfluous furnishings and processes which can, so easily, become hindrances instead of affording satisfaction." Former student and later University of Illinois staff member Anna Van Meter noted that because of Bevier's "simplicity in management it has been possible for her to offer a home with opportunity for self-help to one and another young woman who,

Like Ellen Richards, they sought equals, but unlike Richards, they found them in their own gender. These couples created households that were in miniature versions of the new social order their work implicitly advocated. Each woman performed household duties and provided nurture and support, but neither would have been defined by her performance of "woman's work." Because both partners performed both female and male roles in the partnership, they removed gender from the equation. Even when home economists lived alone, as Bevier did, they formed close bonds with members of their departments and with others in the movement, visiting and corresponding, sending presents and love.[111] For home economists in and out of partnerships, daily life reflected the ideals of their movement.[112]

Within their private homes, domestic work was performed by professionals and had therefore achieved exactly the same value as work performed outside the home. It was one of the great failures of the movement not to make this connection explicit and to insist that as long housework remained female its status could never be elevated.

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otherwise, might have met disheartening difficulties in the way of finishing a college course." Box 2, Folder "Bevier Anecdotes 1929 -" Bevier Papers.

[111] Although single for her entire adult life, Bevier does seem to have had one romantic attachment to a younger member of the faculty, Maude Parsons, whom she called "Little" Parsons in her diary. A colleague, Grace Stevens recalled that ""Miss Bevier too, had a most tender side: she was very fond of Maude Parsons who was the efficient head of the newly organized cafeteria in the Woman's Building. She lovingly called her 'Little Parsons' and liked to have her sit on her lap (Perhaps I should not mention 'little Parsons' as she was a dear, lonely slip of a girl and some years later took her own life.)" Box 2, Folder "Bevier Anecdotes 1929 -" Bevier Papers.

[112] I am indebted to Joan Jacobs Brumberg, Steven H. Weiss Presidential Fellow and Professor of Human Development and Women's Studies at Cornell University for pointing out that just because both partners in these relationships were women does not mean that they actually shared the work equally. What seems more important to me is that both could have been expected to do housework in a way that male partners were not.

Probably the theoretical tools to make this connection did not yet exist. Despite the admiration for partnerships expressed again and again in letters between couples in the movement, it was not yet culturally possible for these couples to declare themselves analogous to heterosexual couples. Because they could not openly acknowledge that sexual love played any role in their partnerships, they could not acknowledge these partnerships as equal to those between men and women.

Personal Hygiene

Home economists themselves were not prudish people. They introduced sex education—often called "hygiene"—to college curricula and seem to have believed that a healthy sex life was essential to a stable home life. Lou Gregory, who taught the first courses in home economics at the University of Illinois in the late 1870s, "lectured on the anatomy, physiology, and hygiene of the female pelvic organs, convinced that women became invalids for lack of knowledge on the subject."[113] Gregory, like the home economists who would follow her, believed that the more a woman knew about herself as well as her environment, the better off society would be. The veil of modesty under which middle-class white women of the nineteenth century were supposed to live obscured from them matters vital to their own health.

During the First World War, Isabel Bevier lobbied the president of the University of Illinois for courses in health, including sexual health. She said that war work had brought out the need, noting that "Red Cross work in Home Nursing is showing the ignorance of the women of the first principles of personal hygiene. Meanwhile the

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[113] Winton U. Solberg, *The University of Illinois 1867 –1894 An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Champaign Urbana: University of Illinois Press 1968), 162.

University of Illinois is teaching a few folk dances." She challenged the president to recognize that University of Illinois students were living in a new age in which traditional notions of modest womanhood were as anomalous as folk dances. Where Lou Gregory had taught hygiene to help women take care of themselves, Bevier argued that it should be expanded to help them take care of others too. In order to make better citizens of young women, universities needed to trust them with information about male anatomy as well as knowledge about their own bodies and health.[114]

In 1914, members of the Simmons College department of household economics suggested offering a course in eugenics and personal hygiene "to be given by a woman physician." That a woman physician was required indicated both a lingering sense of modesty and a progressive sense of women's expanding professional opportunities. The use of the term eugenics suggests that the course would deal not simply with a description of sex and reproduction, but would also include discussion of the cultural significance of sexuality. Sex was not simply a bodily function, but a social function. The ideas of eugenics, as misguided as we now consider them—racist and in opposition to human diversity—reflected the home economist's desire to break down the walls between the private domestic world and the public.[115]

Eugenicists argued that what went on in the bedroom was not private, but was rather a matter of racial import. Children were not to be conceived simply to gratify the desires of their parents, but as conscious attempts to perfect humanity. For the majority of academic home economists who did not marry men or have children, this might well have seemed a reasonable approach to the subject. If the home was going to be professionalized, given all the benefits of technological development and the scientific method itself, then why stop at the bedroom door? Home economists pioneered the field of child development. It would probably have made good sense to many of them to begin thinking about a child's development, in terms of its genetic ingredients, before conception. Just as use and beauty were inseparable in the movement's aesthetics, rationality was an important feature of romance.

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[114] Isabel Bevier to Eugene Davenport June 12, 1917, Box 1, Folder "1917," Bevier Papers.

In 1927, Martha Van Rensselaer assigned the book *Companionate Marriage*, by famous jurist Benjamin Barr Lindsey, to her students in a class on Woman and the Family. The controversial book argued that procreation need not be the sole basis for marriage and that a childless marriage maintained through birth control could be just as satisfying and was as morally acceptable as one without children. When A.R. Mann, the dean of the agriculture school, of which Home Economics was then a department, objected to the book, Van Rensselaer defended it vigorously. Her reply seems empowered by the need to defend her own relationship with Rose, a companionate marriage if ever there was one. Van Rensselaer's response to Dean Mann was politic but assured. She wrote to him that

> There has been no question in my mind as to the desirability of discussing in connection with a course on the family types of marriage and marriage customs past and present. My own reaction against trial marriage would prevent my introducing that subject but if it were introduced I should feel called upon to express an opinion. The question of companionate marriage is distinct from trial marriage. It insists on a state of lawful wedlock for those couples who for one reason or another do not wish to contribute children to society or are not ready to do so. It seems worthy of frank discussion. In fact, I would go farther than than [sic] and say that we older people who have well adjusted lives must discuss these things with the younger generation. They discuss them among themselves with greatest freedom and frankness and they need whatever help we can give them...

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[115] Simmons College, *Annual Report of the Household Economics Department, 1913-1914*, Box 1, Folder 3, Simmons College Archives.

> While I would not be in a position to prefer companionate marriages, they must be recognized as very common among people of our acquaintance and in society generally.[116]

Van Rensselaer was holding her ground against the dean of a college. She made it clear to him that she knew more about the subject than he did, offering to lend him the book, and noting that "I agree with you that 'discussions of this character are exceedingly dangerous except in the hands of persons fully competent to guide them, with great wisdom.'" Although noting that she was not in a position to declare herself such a guide, she asked "Is not the guidance of a sane adjusted adult better than the present undercurrent discussions with no guidance whatever." Seeming to deny her own authority in one sentence, she subtly asserted it in the next. She was a "sane adjusted adult," one of those "older people who have well adjusted lives," despite the fact that she had never been married to a man, did not have children, and shared her life with another woman. Such sane adjusted people, she argued, had a responsibility to recognize that their students were aware of sex, that they discussed it amongst themselves, and that they could not but benefit from informed guidance and frank discussion of the issues. Not to discuss the book with students would be "to indicate that we do not feel that young people are frank and fine enough to discuss a mater of this importance. "

The fact that she was who she was did not, in Van Rensselaer's mind, disqualify her from giving guidance on the issue of sexuality in marriage. It is significant to note that she described herself as not in "a position" to prefer companionate marriages. She does not say that she is against them, and points out to Mann that to do so would be to condemn the lifestyles of many people who were respected personal friends of both the dean and herself. This reference to their shared social circle, which included academics and state officials, suggests, in fact, that companionate marriage was often the choice of the serious, the intellectual, those committed to causes of human progress. Her argument has a faint air of eugenics about it—the intelligent people are those who do not breed without careful, rational consideration. What is most important, though, is that Van Rensselaer argued against the dean using examples from their shared social circle, mixing the academic—the assignment of a text—with the purely personal and arguing that the links between the two were illuminating, rather than a distraction. Throughout her professional life, she worked at revealing and strengthening the connections between the professional and the personal, not hesitating to allow her own relationships into the process.

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[116] Martha Van Rensselaer to A.R. Mann, December 22, 1927, Box 33, Folder 26, NYSCHE Papers.

For home economists in higher education, departments became an extension of home and home a miniature version of the department. Van Rensselaer, for instance, sent new year's greetings to Louise Stanley's staff in Washington, as one would to a family, while Bevier held staff picnics at her own home. Women like these offered a new model of womanhood to their students by mixing private and public life in a new way. Rather than abandoning the female world of emotional ties and sociability to enter the male world of higher education and science, they brought this world with them into their departments, arguing by their every action that there was nothing unprofessional about being a woman.

Louise Stanley lived with two other pioneers for women's rights. In 1925, Stanley was living with Annabel Matthews, a lawyer for the Treasury Department who became the first female judge on the Tax Board, when their household expanded to include Mabel

Walker Willebrandt, a lawyer who was the first woman to argue a case before the supreme court. Willebrandt also worked in the Hoover administration, helping to establish a model prison for women. The three women lived together in a house in Washington, D.C. with Willebrandt's daughter, whom she had adopted after her marriage ended. Stanely and Willebrandt appear to have been close, although Willebrandt did seriously consider marrying a male friend during this period.[117] The two women and Dorothy visited Ithaca together and also spent time at Van Rensselaer and Rose's vacation house on an island in the Adirondacks. Letters between Stanley and Van Rensselaer during the 1920s portray the three—Stanley, Willebrandt, and Dorothy—as a family unit. In October, 1926, for instance, Stanley wrote to Van Rensselaer that "We should love to come up and bring Dorothy but I am not sure that that can be. I hope very much she can some for your Farmers' Week. Tell Miss Nye Dorothy still talks about the lady who *would* eat with the wrong hand."[118]

Just before Christmas that year, Van Rensselaer wrote "May you and your household have a very happy holiday season. I hope the youngest member is there and if she is you will all have a good time I am sure."[119] Earlier in the year, in praise of this household, Van Rensselaer wrote to Stanley thanking her for her hospitality during a trip that she and Rose had recently made to Washington DC. "The opportunity to go into your delightful home," she told her friend,

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[117] Dorothy M. Brown, Mabel Walker Willebrandt: *A Study of Power, Loyalty, and Law* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1984.) 126 and following. Brown does not suggest any particular intimacy between Willebrandt and Stanley. Her biography does not include any discussion of Stanley beyond her role as Dorothy's doting "Aunt Weezy." 131.

[118] Louise Stanley to Martha Van Rensselaer, October 6, 1926, Box 22, Correspondence Pi-Rn, Office of Home Economics Papers, Record Group 176, National Archives and Records Administration.

[119] Martha Van Rensselaer to Louise Stanley, December 23, 1926, Box 22, Correspondence Pi-Rn, Office of Home Economics Papers.

> Will be treasured. It is a great success and I think those of us who are enjoying making a home appreciate knowing when other people think we have succeeded. I was glad too to meet those who are sharing this. You certainly have a happy combination.. I consider it a rare privilege to meet Mrs. W and to have heard her. It was a pleasure I had not anticipated and which I would not have missed.[120]

Van Rensselaer's congratulations to Stanley reflected her professional ideals. A household was an institution to be established carefully and to be prized when it was well assembled. For the domestic scientist, this household of three women and a girl was no less perfect for its lack of a man.

Although by the 1930s Willebrandt had moved out of Stanley's house, the association between the two seems to have continued, at least in the minds of their friends. In a 1940 series of articles in *Good Housekeeping* on women in government, Eleanor Roosevelt paired Willebrandt and Stanley in one paragraph without stating their personal connection to one another, although she would certainly have known of it. Roosevelt herself was the intimate friend of journalist Lorena Hickock and many of the women in her circle, which included Rose and Van Rensselaer, lived in partnerships with other women. Clearly, when Roosevelt thought of Willebrandt, she thought of Stanley and vice versa because of their private bond, rather than because of similarities in their careers. Her pairing of the two, then, is almost a coded celebration of their togetherness. Those who knew them would have known why she paired them.

The intimate relationships these women shared with each other do not seem to have provoked the least censure or shame. In 1910, Arthur Dean, Chief of the division of trade schools in the New York City Board of Education and a friend of Van Rensselaer and Rose, sent the pair a copy of his latest book. As explanation for why he sent only one book to two women, Dean wrote that "as long as you are inseparable, you can just as well sit on that long sofa and read the book together." Van Rensselaer responded with a friendly letter in which she was quite open about the intimate arrangements of her household. She said that she and Rose liked the book and that "We have no idea of separating, therefore, one book is as good as two. Miss Rose sometimes reads me to sleep. At such times one book is as good as two, but it won't be this one that I go to sleep on." The book Dean sent his friends was probably his *The Worker and the State: A Study of Education for Industrial Workers*, which Century published in 1910. Van Rensselaer may have been underestimating its soporific powers. Reading the book together in bed, then, Rose and Van Rensselaer mixed the professional and the personal.[121] Sharing with Dean the image of themselves thus engaged was both an indication of how comfortable they felt in making public their private relationship and of their habit of keeping the boundaries between the professional and domestic as fluid as possible. Dean's letter and Van Rensselaer's response give no sense that either considered the intimacy of the two women illicit in any way. To the contrary, Dean seemed to celebrate their physical and intellectual closeness with his friendly teasing about their habit of reading together and his familiarity with their domestic arrangements.

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[120] Martha Van Rensselaer to Louise Stanley, March 3, 1926, Box 22, Correspondence Pi-Rn,

Letters preserved in collections of professional papers are sprinkled throughout with allusions to the personal. Many, like the letter from Dean, refer to partnerships openly and happily. Gretchen Gunther, apparently a home economist at Teachers College of Columbia University in New York, wrote to Van Rensselaer in 1912 discussing Van

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Office of Home Economics Papers.

[121] Although the letter does not specifically place the two women in bed together, I would argue that the notion of Rose sitting beside her friend's bed to read to her is more a maternal scenario than one likely to be played out between loving equals, which is how the two clearly saw themselves.

Rensselaer's plans to visit New York while Gunther and "Betty" who shared her apartment were away at the Lake Placid Club. Gunther wrote,

> Dear Friend, Yes to be sure we want you to use our apartment. Betty does, because she is the real "boss" there, but I do, too, because I want you to have a cozy bed while there to help rest your weary bones. I take my partner's dictation now. Isn't Lady Rose going? I hope so. . . Across the street is the laundry laboratory.[122]

Gunther referred to her own relationship, in which Betty, her "partner," was "boss," and to Van Rensselaer's partner affectionately as "the lady Rose." Rose was a significantly smaller person and this nickname suggests that her delicateness earned her a more feminine persona within the relationship. Gunther expressed her and her partner's shared affection for the two women and their concern for Van Rensselaer's well-being. No less important, she added a line to draw attention to the laundry laboratory—a local point of interest for visiting home economists.

The clearest appreciations of the partnerships that bound so many home economists came when one of a pair died. Then friends and colleagues wrote to eulogize not just the dead woman, but the relationship itself. In 1954, Flora Rose wrote to her old friend and former Cornell colleague, Beulah Blackmore. Blackmore's partner, Helen Canon, also a Cornell home economist, was dying. Rose wrote, "I could weep with you my Beulah but I could be happy too for the richness which the togetherness of you and Helen has given each of you. A precious thing indeed and eternal." When Canon died, Rose wrote again to reassure her friend that "The memories have built themselves into the tissue of your life and Helen will live again for you. Martha is as real to me after all these years as if she were here. Often I find myself saying to myself 'I must tell that to

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[122] Gretchen Gunther to Martha Van Rensselaer, July 15, 1912, Box 33, Folder 39, NYSCHE Papers.

Martha.'"[123] Rose recognized the "togetherness" of the two women as a source of strength, rather than simply a convenient living arrangement. For Rose there was no question but that a female partnership could be "eternal" and that it fortified each partner even after the death of one.

Another friend, E. Lee Vincent, who became dean of the College of Home Economics, wrote to Blackmore to celebrate not only Blackmore and Canon's relationship, but also Rose and Van Rensselaer's:

> Martha Van, Flora Rose, Helen Canon and Beulah Blackmore . . . What a quartette that is – two sets of friends who gave each other supplementation at critical points, who supported each other thru every vicissitude, who worked and built, shared and lived together in a whole pattern that has become a way of life for professional women fortunate enuf to have known any one of you, or, like me, all of you.[124]

She recalled that it was Canon who had encouraged her to move in with "Lucille," who became her longtime companion.

> "Do it by all means," Helen said, "It will mean much to you to live with another fine woman. Believe me, I know." And so I tried it. And she was right. It does mean much as you so well know. I have tried hard to be like you two – to keep the personal at home, never to behave on the job excepting as an individual who makes decisions on a purely professional – never on a personal basis. How magnificently you and Helen always did that. You ran [Textiles and Clothing]; Helen ran [Household Management] and neither, at least so far as the rest of us ever knew, ever ran the other. This has been a pattern for Lucile and me. We are grateful to you for showing us how. . . Lucile joins me in love.[125]

For Vincent to praise Canon and Blackmore for keeping the personal out of their professional lives was to admit the very intimate nature of their relationship. They neither squabbled in public, as some couples might, nor merged their identities as others would have done. Their ability to operate as equals was what seemed most precious to Vincent.

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[123] Flora Rose to Beulah Blackmore, June 30, 1954 Box 26, Folder 25, NYSCHE Papers.
[124] E. Lee Vincent to Beulah Blackmore, August 13, 1954, Box 26, Folder 25, NYSCHE Papers.

There is no sense here that she is congratulating her friend on having successfully hidden the nature of her relationship from anyone. Rather the appreciation is for the couple's ability to maintain individuality and togetherness in balance. For Canon, as head of the Household Management department, private life itself, in the form of the practice house, was the stuff of her profession. She planned and oversaw courses that required students to find the kind of balance between personal expectations and teamwork that made for a harmonious home. Vincent celebrated the women simultaneously for the fact that each ran a department and for the fact that their powers did not interfere with their relationship. The equality which the two modeled for others became the ideal for younger friends establishing partnerships with other women. Within the home of their department, Canon and Blackmore were each experts in different fields. They expected their students to become experts in all fields when they started their own homes.

The sense of a department as a home was strong for many of the women of the movement. In a letter to a friend in 1913, Martha Van Rensselaer wrote that "We moved into our new building about two months ago and are like young housekeepers, very much absorbed in getting settled. It is fascinating, if not perplexing, and sometimes irritating."[126] Van Rensselaer portrayed herself and her faculty and staff as a family settling into a new home rather than as professionals opening a new facility. By describing herself as a newly-wed, she expressed her deep commitment to the field itself and the tendency of movement leaders to blur lines between the domestic and the academic as a way of reinforcing the status of their work and of household labor in general.

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[125] Ibid.

[126] Martha Van Rensselaer to Mrs. Carpenter, April 3, 1913, Box 33, Folder 39, NYSCHE Papers.

Even in dealing with state politics, Van Rensselaer mixed the personal and intimate with the professional. Writing to Eleanor Roosevelt after her husband's election as Governor of New York, Van Rensselaer thanked her friend for "the splendid service which you have given our college," by publicly supporting it. She then sympathized with Roosevelt about the coming growth of her public duties, celebrated the consequent expansion of her opportunities for service, and finally cautioned her to take care of herself, suggesting a private vacation and reminding the new governor's wife that "the house in Ithaca may serve as a refuge whenever one is needed" and that "My little Chrysler is at your disposal."[127] Van Rensselaer's concern for Roosevelt as a professional ally was inextricably mixed with her regard for her as a personal friend. The combination was not merely indicative of Van Rensselaer's personality, but of the character of the movement—the home which she offered to Roosevelt as a retreat from the world of politics was simultaneously a hive of activity and the local headquarters for a movement. The letter has another interesting implication. Because the open invitation did not include Mr. Roosevelt, who was a friend of Van Rensselaer's, it suggests that Eleanor was most comfortable, could most truly relax, in the company of other women.

In a letter to a Dr. C.E. Bolton (possibly a trustee of the University), who was to attend a conference at Cornell at which the work of the home economics college was to be discussed, Van Rensselaer wrote, "Miss Rose and I are inviting the group to our house for dinner on Thursday night at 6:30 and will be glad to have you come also. We are not making this a social occasion and inviting the wives because undoubtedly the committee will want to resume their deliberations at the dinner hour and afterwards." For Rose and

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[127] Martha Van Rensselaer to Eleanor Roosevelt November 12, 1928, Box 32, Folder 8, NYSCHE Papers.

Van Rensselaer, having a group to dinner at their private home did not necessarily constitute a social occasion. As long as the wives, those women who were present only as women and not as professionals, were not present, then the event was purely business. [128] The fact that she felt she had to make the distinction plain to Bolton suggests that she was aware that most people did not think of their homes in the way that she and Rose did—as a venue for professional life. The invitation argues against the notion that activities within the home—and particularly perhaps the home of two women—are by nature not "important." Just because we are at home, Van Rensselaer's letter announces, does not mean that we are not working.[129]

When Flora Rose invited a friend to stay with her during the dedication of Martha Van Rensselaer Hall, in 1934, there was scant discrimination between her private home and the new building which would serve as her professional headquarters.

"I shall rejoice in having you as a member of my household and to share my shabby old house with me. . . The equipping of our building is by no means complete. First because our money has given out and second because it takes a longer time to put in the finishing touches that make a difference between a house and a home"[130] The letter echoes Van Rensselaer's earlier conflation of a new building with a young couple's first home. The guest would be staying in Rose's private home, but what she was really there to see was the public home, the new home economics building. Rose wanted the two places to be equally welcoming, equally homelike. This was not just because she had a generous nature, but because making an academic building homelike seemed to her and her colleagues simultaneously to make home life academic.

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[128] Martha Van Rensselaer to Dr. C.E. Bolton, February 28, 1927, Box 32, Folder 7, NYSCHE Papers.

[129] This letter also suggests an interesting way to think of the 'at homes" that upper and middle-class women of the nineteenth century held. At these open-houses, women—both visitors and hosts—performed the "work" of their status which involved newsgathering and social networking.

[130] Flora Rose to Juliet (no last name) January 30, 1934, Box 32, Folder 4, NYSCHE Papers.

Let's Play House

It is clear that home economists did not consciously model all-female households as the domestic ideal for their students. They did, however, by necessity include practice in such households as an important part of the curriculum. Beginning in Illinois in 1909, home economics departments began adding "practice houses" to their facilities.[131] The practice houses were the laboratories for courses in household management. The courses involved a group of students, usually more than four but less than ten, living for a period of several weeks together in a house or apartment that had been outfitted to resemble a real home. During their period of residence, students rotated household roles, some cooking, some cleaning, some working on budgets, some on decoration, and one serving as "hostess." Wherever it was possible, childcare was also part of the course. Some departments, like Cornell's, made arrangements with local orphanages to temporarily adopt an infant. The child was then reared by students who worked as a group. While participating in childcare, students continued to perform other household duties as well as to attend classes and complete assignments for other courses. Motherhood, then, was experienced as compatible (more or less hectically) with intellectual or professional development. Every six weeks or so, the child would acquire a new group of "mothers." Children would stay in the practice home until a family could be found to adopt them, which never took very long. Adopting couples clamored to get the scientifically raised babies. Far from being put off by the idea of a child raised by a collective of female experts, families considered these the best possible infants.[132]

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[131] Illinois also opened a practice apartment, both to make room for more household management students and to address the particular issues of living in an apartment.

In 1928, two professors in the College of Arts and Sciences at Cornell published a poem in the Saturday Evening Post from the perspective of a practice baby. As a child, the professors surmised, he was blissfully happy, "With the lips and eyes of a valentine/ and a smile from the Sunday comics;/ he was the Practice Baby In a College of Home Economics . . 'Oh what a lucky baby I am!'/ He often used to cry,/ 'To have a hundred Mammas/to make me hush-a-by!'" But in adulthood he felt disappointed and yearned for his earlier life, "And now he's grown to be a man,/and grievously he misses/ the care of his Model Mammas,/ their cuddling and their kisses;/and oft he murmurs to himself,/with his scowl from the Sunday comics;/'Do they need a Practice Husband/In the college of Home Economics?'"[133] From the point of view of these two male professors, the practice house served as a sort of harem with a baby pasha. Its entire interest lay in its abundance of motherly young women. A group of home economics students responded with a poem which concluded, "But if *all* the practice house babies/Came back on some future day,/they *might* be model husbands,/but they'd be awfully in the way!"[134] While the students conceded that it might be possible to educate men to be model husbands, they retained the idea that even the best men were superfluous to the functioning of a well-run home.

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[132] There was also much affection for the children in the entire college community. Their pictures were featured in student newspapers and faculty doted on them. In a letter to Amy Daniels, who worked at the Child Welfare Research Station at the University of Iowa, Flora Rose wrote of Cornell's practice baby, "We have had much pleasure this spring and summer in feeding our practice house baby. . . He is now six months old and weighs eighteen pounds. That sounds very heavy, but he is not a fat baby. His flesh is firm and pink, and his eyes a brilliant blue. For a common, or garden baby, we all think him quite remarkable." (Rose to Daniels, February 23, 1921, Box 11, Folder 32, NYSCHE Papers.

[133] Morris Bishop and J.H. Mason, "the Practice Baby," *Saturday Evening Post*, May 5, 1928.

[134] "A Few of the Model Mamas," "The Reply,", *Home Economics Reminder: a quarterly publication by the New York State College of Home Economics at Cornell University*, September 1928, 32, Folder 12, NYSCHE Papers.

In 1928, through her home economics contacts at Cornell, Louise Stanley looked into obtaining one of Cornell's "model babies," for Mabel Willebrandt, who apparently thought of adopting a boy. While the adoption does not seem to have proceeded, the fact that it was considered represents the close links between leaders of the movement. The boy in question would have moved straight from Van Rensselaer and Rose's professional home into Stanley's and Willebrandt's private one, keeping the fruits of home economics training within the circle of its leadership.[135] By "borrowing" infants for the practice house, home economists used the fruits of other women's misfortune to bolster their own professionalism. At the same time, bringing students into contact (if only obliquely) with the consequences of poverty and lack of birth control made students more aware of the world in which they lived and especially of issues faced by women. As self-contained a fantasy as the practice house seemed, it also had the potential to make students begin to deal with adult issues.

For home economics students at African American colleges, the practice house presented entirely different issues. In a 1933 report to the *Journal of Home Economics*, a representative of Straight College, in New Orleans, an African American women's college, explained that the students had "built and furnished a model one-room house for experiments in achieving the maximum of privacy, utility, beauty, and sanitation under conditions incident to family life in one room." The one-room model was selected because the college was "Anticipating the needs of the rural communities where most of [the Straight College graduates] would teach."[136] While white students were encouraged to identify the practice house with their own future home, African American students were learning to make the best of rough circumstances. In this case the home they planned would be a place connected to work for wages, whereas the white student's practice house prefigured one where she worked, unpaid, but for herself.

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[135] Interestingly, Van Rensselaer herself once sought to adopt a boy. While on a trip to Holland, she attempted to discover if there were any orphans connected to her famous family living in Holland. A boy was presented to her by a local orphanage, but she was unsatisfied with the proof of his connection to

At the University of Illinois, students in the practice apartment met for a weekly meeting to discuss all aspects of household management, taking the tasks of housekeeping as a cooperative, rational enterprise. Students were graded not simply on how they performed household tasks, but also on how well they worked with others in their communal enterprise. As one visitor to the practice apartment noted,

> On the final score the student is not rated alone by how well she cooks or keeps house. Among other factors considered are; how well she analyzes the situations which confront the group, uses time to advantage for herself and others by making and following a reasonable plan, cooperates, gives accurate directions, contributes worthwhile suggestions and ideas to the group, keeps accurate records related to income and expenditure and develops satisfactory group relationships.[137]

The ideal homemaker, then, was one who not only managed all household work well, but also could work constructively with others and, perhaps most interesting, make time for her own individual pursuits—her studies. The lessons that such experiences taught young women were strikingly at odds with traditional notions of married life. In the practice house, a woman was a member of a team, rather than solely responsible for

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her family and did not proceed with the adoption. Flora Rose? "Informal Notes About Martha Van Rensselaer: Prepared for Miss Caroline Percival," Box 34, Folder 19, NYSCHE Papers.

[136] Alice Ward Smith, "Adapting a College Course to Racial and Community Needs," *Journal of Home Economics* 25 (December 1933): 875.

[137] No author, Press Release, May 21, 1937, Box 2, Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences Dean's Office Papers, University of Illinois Archives.

all things domestic. She shared tasks with other people who were her equals and she always maintained outside interests, so that her entire persona was not collapsed into the domestic.

At Cornell, this balance between domestic work and activities outside the home was also stressed. Although a faculty member lived in the house, she was there only as a consultant, and turned "the house over to the group for them to solve the problems as they will. Each girl is made to feel that the house belongs to her as much as to any other individual during the five weeks she lives there: it is her home, a place in which to work and plan, to entertain and to have as much fun as possible."[138] Students in the practice house kept up with their other classes while also taking care of the house, briefly experiencing a life in which domestic work was balanced with and rated equal to intellectual development.

At Simmons College, the practice house was named "Pilgrim House," perhaps to suggest to students that housekeeping might be a bold adventure for the individual and that it was connected to social reform. A report on Pilgrim House from 1926 emphasized the centrality of group spirit to the house:

> Pilgrim House has been a great satisfaction to the department. The girls seem to enjoy it in much the same way that they enjoyed playing house when they were little but they are also enthusiastic about the amount they learn especially about the division of work, the cost of food, and the problems of marketing. . .The piano needs to be polished, the floors to be waxed, the dining room furniture fed linseed oil and the student attacks her assignment with a gusto quite unknown before. . . the allowance of seventy cents per person per day for food has seldom been exceeded by an hostess and the general atmosphere is one of good natured rivalry to keep the cost below this amount.[139]

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[138] New York State College of Home Economics, The Practice House, manuscript dated November 7, 1928, Box 32, Folder 9, NYSCHE Papers.

[139] Simmons College, *Simmons College Annual Report of the Department of Household Economy, 1925-1926*, Box 1, Folder 15, Simmons College Archives.

The house was clearly modeled after the ideal middle-class home, in which a piano represented a connection to high culture and art and woodwork was the principle decorative element. Aesthetically, as the report noted, Pilgrim House was modest but respectable. The budget was not "enough to cover needs without very careful buying but was sufficient with care to provide an effective working unit and just enough pretty things to suggest a 'home unit.'"[140] Students would have been involved in the budgeting that created this paradise of moderation in which it was equally important that all function efficiently and that surroundings were "elevated" with a few tasteful details. A report on home economics departments at the University of California from some twenty years later maintained this class aesthetic, noting that practice management houses "should represent modest but efficient and comfortable scale of family living."[141]

Pilgrim House differed from the ordinary middle-class home, however, in one very important aspect—it was a group endeavor. The students were spurred on to do their best at each task because they were in constant competition and cooperation with a group of other students. The collective spirit that made Pilgrim House so interesting for those who were living in it actually made it inappropriate as a "practice" house. The homes which students would likely make as they married and had children would for the most part be solitary endeavors in which each woman performed all duties all the time. As children grew, tasks might be delegated to them, and husbands could sometimes be counted on for help around the house, but the bulk of the domestic work a woman would do would be nothing like the teamwork she had practiced at school.

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[140] Ibid.

[141] *Report of the All-University Committee on Home Economics*, November 22, 1946, W5 Series 3 14:33 1949-57, Berkeley Archives.

The systems established in practice houses were unconscious enactments of the home life that home economists thought ought to be, rather than what was. In the ideal, domestic work was as important as work done outside the house (lectures and other schoolwork for students in the house) and it was performed by teams of equals who rotated roles. Because it was performed by these teams, each member of the team was able to live a life outside the home as well as inside the home, ideally one that both informed her domestic work and was informed by it. This balance between home and the wider world was basic to the home economics movement. The woman whose entire focus was her home and family, exclusive of world and local events and her own personal development, was no more a good housekeeper than the woman who did no housework at all. The movement hoped to rationalize housework in order make this work a more fully integrated part of modern society.

The model of home life found in practice houses was an approximation of the cultural ideal, although administrators never mentioned this. The fact was that it was not feasible to have men living in practice houses acting like husbands. If it had been culturally possible for male students to take these courses, then the revolutionary notion of shared domestic labor might have been modeled within homes such as Pilgrim House. The fact that no female student was given the role of "husband" in the practice houses subtly implied that it was a nonessential role in the ideal home. Home economists did not emphasize this idea—that for the home to truly function at its best and most progressive, it must be run by a team. Men would have to accept domestic responsibilities and recognize women as their social equals if the ideal were ever to be achieved.

There are many possible reasons why home economists did not follow the implications of the practice house to its logical conclusion. Very few of the movement's leaders actually lived with men, so that in their own daily lives the ideal had already been achieved and was therefore not a pressing issue. Another likely reason was that making such demands or pointing out the inherent inequality of separate spheres was radical and would draw the kind of attention that home economists did not want. In need of funding from state legislatures and acceptance by the culture at large, home economists would have been hesitant to state openly the revolutionary implications of their movement. Some may also have been afraid to draw attention to their own relationships by attacking traditional gender roles within marriage. Most likely, home economists of the first generation did not even see the implications of the practice house as a serious platform for action. They may simply have been unable to look at gender roles as alterable, much as their personal and professional lives challenged them to do so on a daily basis.

Home economists of the first generation intended their lives to serve as models for their students, expanding notions about what a woman's life might be. They wanted their students to see that women could be self-supporting, could be professionals in the accepted sense, and could see themselves as professionals within the home. They wanted women to see that they could and should be involved in the economics of their own lives. Women should think of themselves as active participants in modern life, rather than inhabitants of a separate, if purer field of existence. The first generation of home economists were of the generation of women that exulted in the victory of suffrage. They were active in expanding roles for women in society, even helping to create roles of social authority for women to fill. Not one of this generation, however, took the next step of arguing that it was not enough to move women into roles previously reserved for men. For women's liberation to be complete, men had to move across the gender border, too, taking up work and roles previously reserved for women.

Chapter Four: At Home in the World

In 1915, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) opened an Office of Home Economics within its States Relations Service. The Office conducted studies in nutrition and subjects "pertaining to the broader field of domestic economy," including studies of how much energy women expended in daily household tasks. When plans were discussed to transform the office into a bureau of home economics within the USDA, Henry Wallace, head of the department specified that the bureau must be directed by "a woman of executive ability, thorough scientific training, and a broad and sympathetic understanding of what is needed to make such a bureau helpful to the women of the land." Louise Stanley was selected for the position.[142]

From 1915 to 1923, the chief of the office of home economics within the States Relations Service was Charles Langworthy, which suggests that Wallace did not think the position below male dignity.[143] He seems to have felt, rather, that it was important for the movement to be led by a woman in its new phase. It was common sense in this era that that which related to the home related to women more than to men, unless it was a question of the design, construction, or physical maintenance of the structure itself. The guiding spirit of the home was understood to be somehow female. Wallace, Langworthy and the other USDA officials who agreed with them and who hired Stanley suggested by their action that women had an important role to play in the proposed modernization of the home. While sexist in their conflation of woman with home, such men were also *progressive in their belief that women and women's issues belonged in the* USDA. When Stanley accepted the post, she was simultaneously assisting in the gender integration of the government and acknowledging the gender segregation of daily life. Stanley believed that the daily lives of American women, particularly farm women, presented problems that were different from those faced by men and that were worthy of research and analysis. But by presenting herself as a candidate for the job she implicitly rejected the notion of separate spheres.

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[142] Paul V. Bettoes, *The Bureau of Home Economics it's History, Activities and Organization* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1930), 41.

[143] Towards the time, 1923, when the Office became the Bureau of Home Economics, members of the staff began to realize "the importance of economic data in the consideration of home economics problems," shifting focus from the home as center of production to the home as center of consumption. The Bureau was established with a mandate to "investigate the relative utility and economy of agricultural products for food, clothing and other uses in the home and with special suggestions of plans and methods for the more effective utilization of such products for these purposes, and to disseminate useful information on this subject." In a sense, then, the Bureau was established to consider American agriculture from the demand side, while other offices within the USDA considered problems of supply. (Paul V. Bettoes, *The Bureau of Home Economics it's History, Activities and Organization* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1930)).

What is perhaps most significant about Wallace's description of the perfect applicant for the job is that he clearly believed that such a woman existed. He could be certain in this belief because the movement had created such women and widely publicized their existence. Louise Stanley had been head of the department of home economics at the University of Missouri from 1910 to 1923. She had a doctorate in biochemistry from Yale and was a regular contributor to the *Journal of Home Economics* and an active member of the American Home Economics Association. Stanley brought the spirit of academic home economics into the arena of national projects, adding to the government's interest in supply and demand a focus on women's experiences as workers and consumers. With her appointment as Chief, Stanley became the highest paid woman in government, setting a new benchmark for women's achievement. Her appointment linked academic home economics to the funding available through government and also to the status that came with a national office.

While leaders of the home economics movement concentrated on creating and developing departments in colleges and universities, they were equally committed to establishing their field, and by extension themselves, as sources of cultural authority. Because the reason for introducing courses and departments was to reform the relationship between Americans and their homes, the field needed recognition outside academic circles as well as within them. This chapter will discuss ways in which leaders of the movement in higher education worked to win respect for their field from the wider public beyond the circles of higher education. It will also consider challenges to their authority and how these challenges limited the movement's scope.

"You Busted into Cornell"

As Ellen Richards, Isabel Bevier, Martha Van Rensselaer, Flora Rose, Sarah Arnold, and Louise Stanley responded to trends and events of their day they did so with full awareness of themselves as leaders and particularly as female leaders. Each response was both personal and public, each woman standing for herself, for her movement, and for women as a class. This sense of their lives as lives imbued with meaning was shared from the earliest phases of the movement. As each woman developed her own position she consciously expanded the opportunities for women in the field and for women in professional life in general.

In 1934, Cornell held a dedication ceremony for its new home economics building, Martha Van Rensselaer Hall. In her speech on the occasion, Flora Rose told a story which was repeated in many accounts of her partner's life. According to this legend, when Van Rensselaer had arrived at Cornell she had been given as an office a small basement room furnished only with a kitchen table and two chairs.[144] The story became one of the foundation legends of the movement. It seems unlikely that the college would have had a kitchen table rather than an extra desk at its disposal, but the story requires that it be a kitchen table, a female work surface. The table represents both the underestimation of women by the academy—kitchens are the only place they can truly work—and simultaneously the triumph of the movement, that it installed a working kitchen in the academy. The basement room is symbolic of Van Rensselaer's status as a novice, coming into the establishment not even quite on the ground floor, but also of the importance of her task—she is going to make the most basic elements of daily life, its foundations, respected by the higher levels of the ivory tower. In this legend, Van Rensselaer is heroic, entering where she is not overtly welcomed, but armed with a speculative faith in the powers of science and in her own right, as a woman, to share space with men and to participate in the intellectual projects of the era. In 1925, an admirer of Van Rensselaer's wrote to congratulate her on her quarter century at Cornell offering a variation of the legend: "you busted into Cornell with a cookstove under your arm. Since then you have set the country afire with it."[145]

When Flora Rose arrived, seven years after Van Rensselaer, she had been hired as a trained scientist and with the understanding that she would become head of the department. As a scientist with a doctorate, she represented a more traditionally male authority than did Van Rensselaer. Born to a wealthy Colorado family, she had a B.S.

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[144] Flora Rose, speech manuscript , Box 14, Folder 37, NYSCHE Papers.

[145] G.W. Wilder to Martha Van Rensselaer, telegram, Box 33, Folder 53, NYSCHE Papers.

degree from Kansas State University and an M.A. in Foods and Nutrition from Columbia. What Rose and Van Rensselaer decided almost at once, however, was that the department needed both of them. Rather than struggle over who would control the department, they saw their differences as assets. It would be ideal, in their estimation, for the department to have at its head both a scientist, representing the male, or professional aspects of domestic labor, and an administrator, someone with a vision of the home and the department as a whole. Rose would draw the respect of the male world of the university faculty while her partner would provide the perspective of women working in homes throughout the state. Both had arrived at Cornell eager to create something new, rather than simply join an existing department. Rose had brought herself to the attention of Cornell administrators by writing to ask if the university had plans to establish a home economics department. Like Van Rensselaer, who created her own major, testing the field on herself first, Rose came to the university with an idea and offered to lead the way. For both women the act of creating a field was also an act of self-creation.

Soon after deciding to share the position of head, the two women moved in together, extending their partnership off campus. The private life that they shared became a model for the public department they created while the work of that public life was never excluded from the private space. One of the most significant contributions home economists made to the academy was this practical fluidity between the inner circle of the university and the outer circle of ordinary life. Faculty meetings were frequently held at Van Rensselaer and Rose's home, making an implicit argument for the home as place of work and university as family home, rather than monastery.[146]

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[146] Friendly as such an arrangement might seem, however, we should also consider that overlapping private and public authority had potentially disturbing consequences for the balance of power

Others in the movement had different experiences of beginnings, but all shared the acute awareness of themselves and their field as female. For Sarah Arnold at Simmons College, the introduction of home economics was not a question of invading a male-dominated arena, since her institution had been founded to educate working women. Arnold herself and Simmons in general represented a shift in thinking about women and employment. Arnold had been the highest paid woman in education while superintendent of public schools in Boston and was made Dean of Simmons in 1902. As a role model she encouraged young women to imagine lucrative and high status careers for themselves. The college's founding philosophy was an acceptance of the traditionally resisted notion that a great number of women needed to work for their livings. By offering training and thereby insisting that the work that women traditionally did in society could be systematized, learned, and fairly compensated, the very existence of Simmons made a claim for women as regular and productive members of the public, commercial sphere.

At a general session of a meeting of the National Education Association, in 1908, Arnold argued that

> The education of women should insure, first, the general schooling which is essential alike to the development of both boy and girl; second – for the sake of the individual, as well as of the community – preparation for self-maintenance, whether this duty is immediately imperative or distantly possible; and third, adequate preparation for the responsibilities involved in the direction of the home.[147]

While she held onto the traditional belief that woman's natural destiny was to marry and rear children, Arnold argued that there were many ways in which this fate

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in a department. Were staff to consider themselves daughters or peers? Was authority impartial or familial? I thank Louis Menand for alerting me to the complexities of this issue.

might be played out. Perhaps for some women, she mused, there would never be children, but instead professional involvement in the care of other people's children, or in the nurture of society more generally. She might well have been thinking of herself in this case, and of her partner, Dr. Mary Hood. Arnold could argue that both she and Dr. Hood served in professionalized women's roles—she as the nurturer of intellect, Dr. Hood as the physical care-giver. Yet general practitioner and college dean were only very recently even remotely acceptable positions for women in American society. Arnold, in the midst of her sanctification of the notion of woman as mother, also endorsed the notion of woman as paid laborer, suggesting that, "it may be that the wage-earning woman will make clear to us that the home-maker is likewise self-maintaining and not dependent, We shall learn, perhaps, to measure her service in the home at its true economic value."[148] While Arnold had a very traditional view of gender difference and of class distinction too, she was also remarkably open to the alteration of such views. As a woman administrator of an all-women college, she understood her role as a highly visible example of the new woman.

For Isabel Bevier, at the University of Illinois, the strong interest of Eugene Davenport, president of the University, in the creation of the department was both a burden—she had high standards to live up to—and a support—he expressed unwavering faith in her ability to meet those standards and to create her own. In 1911, she wrote to Mary Leal Harkness, of Sophie Newcomb college, in New Orleans, that,

> Doubtless the Lord could have made the world differently, but he has given to most women the obligation or opportunity to serve in her own

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[147] Sarah Louise Arnold, speech manuscript, 6, Box 1, Folder 6, Sarah Louise Arnold Papers Series II, Simmons College Archives.

[148] Ibid.

> home or that of another and no woman escapes some of the problems of food, clothing and shelter.[149]

Bevier presented herself as a pragmatist and her field as based in hard-headed realism. Although, like Catherine Beecher, she suggested that women's work in the home was part of god's plan, she did not sentimentalize this idea. As she wrote to Harkness, the world could easily have been another way, but the simple truth was that all women found themselves involved with domestic work in some way at some time during their lives. Given this truth, it made sense to Bevier to give every woman the training she would need to do this work well and rationally. In fact, her insistence on proper training detracted significantly from the notion that women were naturally and uniquely destined for domestic work. In such a case, Bevier might have argued, "the Lord" would have given them brooms for hands. Bevier's argument was not overtly liberationist. She did not try to free women from their cultural bondage to the domestic. True to the ideals of the movement, however, she promised to free the domestic itself from its cultural status as unskilled and trivial.

For Ellen Richards, the introduction of home economics courses at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) came slowly and was intimately tied to her personal development as a scholar. For Richards it was as important to create a separate laboratory space for women as it was for Bevier to work in a co-educational environment. Richards opened the Women's Laboratory at MIT in 1876 because women were not being admitted to the university's labs. Rather than fighting this ban on a large scale as she had done successfully on a small scale when she was a student, she established a separate facility for women. In part this was because she felt that female students needed to work in an environment free of male condescension. She believed that the only way women could feel that they belonged in a laboratory was if they were the only people in it. By making a women-only lab, she domesticated science, simply because women at the turn of the century carried the domestic as a sort of aura into whatever spheres they entered. Alone among the leaders of the movement discussed here, Richards did not support suffrage for women. She argued that women were not yet prepared for full citizenship. It seems peculiar to us now that she felt so certain of women's preparedness to study organic chemistry, but not of their ability to make educated decisions about the political issues of the day. It may have been that Richards tended to caution in her pursuit of women's rights because her own victories had been so hard to win and so partial.[150]

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[149] Isabel Bevier to Mary Leal Harkness, October 31. 1911, Box 1, Correspondence File "1911," Bevier Papers. Harkness had apparently written a letter challenging home economics as not culturally enriching to women students. This would have been a common response from someone at a women's college. Many at women's colleges felt that home economics endangered the inroads women had been able

Living as they did, in a world of professional women, it is not surprising that most other leaders of the movement were suffragists. Each of the women discussed here seems to have been committed to women's suffrage and to have been active to some extent on behalf of the cause. For Van Rensselaer, her position as a public figure, employee of a university and pioneer of a new field all made it difficult for her to express her feelings on the issue. In 1913, Mrs. Claudia Q. Murphy, who was a home economics consultant to businesses and also writer of cookbooks and food history, sent Van Rensselaer a copy of the *Woman Suffrage Cookbook*, which had been published in 1886 and which included

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to make into previously male worlds of academia and the professions by tying their identities to the domestic.

[150] Edna Yost, *American Women of Science* (Philadelphia and New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1943), 18.

recipes and household advice contributed by noted suffragists.[151] Van Rensselaer responded, "Thank you for the Woman Suffrage Cook Books. Upon the principle of 'Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are' I believe we will all be suffragettes if we use these recipes."[152] Even in a private correspondence, Van Rensselaer could not yet openly endorse suffrage.

Suffrage activists who knew of Van Rensselaer largely assumed that they could have her support, but she responded cagily to their overtures. When Katharyn Chamberlain, who was press secretary for a suffrage club, wrote to Rose and Van Rensselaer about their joint promotion to Dean in 1911, she asked "To quote you on woman suffrage. I am assuming you are believers." Van Rensselaer responded that,

> I do not believe that I could give you anything very definite upon the suffrage question. I am getting my knowledge somewhat in hand and have more definite views than I used to have. Some day I shall put it into shape and be able to tell people what I believe. I sometimes do now in conversation, but I have nothing to have printed yet.[153]

She worried that it was not her place, as a state employee, to make political statements. It is likely that she also feared that taking a strong public stance in favor of suffrage would endanger her position in the university and give the public a reason to attack the field she was trying to create. If home economics was led by suffragists, then it must be a liberationist project and therefore objectionable to a great number of people. If she could keep her politics private, she seems to have decided, then she might do more towards actual liberation by getting the chance to develop the field. In later years, Van Rensselaer displayed the same caution when asked to support first Hoover, and then Roosevelt, both of whom were her personal friends and professional allies. She was acutely aware of the importance of a close relationship with state government and very careful as to how she might stay always on the good side of the party in power.

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[151] The book was: Mrs. Hattie Burr, *The Woman Suffrage Cook Book: Containing Thoroughly Tested and Reliable Recipes for Cooking, Directions for the Care of the Sick, and Practical Suggestions.* (Boston: C.H. Simonds, 1886) The cookbook was published to help raise money for the cause of women's suffrage.

[152] Martha Van Rensselaer to Mrs. Claudia Q. Murphy, August 19, 1913, box 33, folder 39, NYSCHE Papers. Van Rensselaer seems to be joking about the food movements of the antebellum period in which vegetarianism was, for instance, liked to pacifism and whole grains to moral purity. It is an indication that she thought of home economics in the context of American social movements.

In 1920, Sarah Splint , a publicity agent and Republican party campaigner, wrote to Van Rensselaer and Rose asking for a statement endorsing Hoover in his run for presidency.[154] Van Rensselaer wrote one letter refusing the endorsement because of her connection to a state institution and then a second letter apologizing for, but not retracting the first. The two letters show a woman acutely aware of her position as a public figure and torn over what it meant to be a public woman. In her first letter she wrote that, "I wish the women might cultivate the sentiment of the people who are strong for the big idea, rather than engage in it as a partisan issue. . . .As a citizen I am for Hoover and what he stands for, whatever ticket he is on." Here she was maintaining the suffragist stance that women would change politics when they got the vote because they would organize around issues, rather than parties, as men did.[155]

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[153] Katharyn Chamberlain to Martha Van Rensselaer, November 21, 1911, and Van Rensselaer to Chamberlain, November 24, 1911, Box 14, Folder 17, NYSCHE Papers.

[154] That Van Rensselaer could have been expected to support Hoover reflects the fact that he was much more progressive than he has long been given credit for. Recent reevaluations of Hoover's career portray him as a man who shared in many progressive ideals, but who in the end lacked the nerve of a Roosevelt. See for instance, George Nash's *The Life of Herbert Hoover, Master of Emergencies* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996) That Hoover was head of the National Food Administration during the First World War is evidence of his progressive spirit and interest in using government agencies to improve the living conditions of ordinary people. As mentioned above, Van Rensselaer and Rose were friends of both the Hoovers and the Roosevelts and do not ever seem to have seen the two men as political opposites. As President, Hoover hosted the Conference on Child Health ,which Van Rensselaer participated in. Hoover also supplied the movement with one of its rallying cries when he declared that "the family is the unit of the nation." (Herbert Hoover "What Men Should Know About Homes" in *The Delineator*, April 1925, 11).

[155] Martha Van Rensselaer to Sarah Splint March 18. 1920, Box 33, Folder 42, NYSCHE Papers.

In her second letter, she threw this caution to the wind, or at least expressed the desire to do so. She began by apologizing to Splint and Lane, "I was exceedingly sorry to write to you yesterday as I did." And then she voiced her frustration with her position as a public figure engaged in reform, yet unable to associate herself too closely with any cause: "I like to feel sufficiently independent to take sides – especially when I am sure which side I am on. . . It takes away one's feeling of freedom and initiative to send a letter such as I did yesterday." As a suffragist, as a woman who had become eligible to vote only three years earlier, and as the head of a department in a prestigious university, Van Rensselaer chafed at the restraints that her exalted position imposed upon her.[156]

Isabel Bevier's diary from 1917 offers interesting evidence of just how closely connected home economics was to suffrage. While attending a conference on food conservation at which both Herbert Hoover and she spoke, Bevier noted an "orgie of meetings, public, private, every kind," which left her "exhausted," but which she also seemed to enjoy. Among these many meetings were one suffrage meeting, which Bevier pronounced "good," and an "Indiana Suffragists Dinner" at which Congresswoman Jeanette Rankin[157] spoke. Bevier noted that Rankin "Seems to enjoy playing the game and play it well." Van Rensselaer, or "Miss Van," as Bevier called her, also spoke at this dinner, although Bevier reported that she was not very good. Bevier noted that Van Rensselaer, who was also attending the food conference, arrived with Sarah Arnold. She also mentioned lunching with "the Cornell twins," so it seems likely that Flora Rose was at the conference, too, and most likely at the Suffragists lunch. Whether or not Van Rensselaer had been completely honest with Splint when she said she had not worked out her ideas on suffrage in 1911, she had certainly become sure enough of them by this point to make a speech in favor of the movement to a large crowd. As home economists became more and more confident in their status as experts and professionals, it became easier for them to forge ties with others working in progressive movements. During the First World War, they joined the many social reformers and activists who saw the crisis as an opportunity for nationwide change toward a more welfare-oriented state.

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[156] Martha Van Rensselaer to Sarah Splint March 19, 1920, Box 33, Folder 42, NYSCHE Papers.

Food Must Win the War

Many of the prominent home economists of the day were involved in the federal government's food conservation effort during the mobilization for the First World War. Home economists saw themselves as uniquely qualified to aid in the war effort for several reasons. Nutritionists within the movement had developed a body of knowledge about food that could be the core of a plan to organize food distribution and rationing. Home economists knew what amounts of protein, fiber, and vitamins the human body required and how to create substitutes for materials that would be needed by the army. They also had vast experience through state extension services with canning and preserving, both necessary to avoid waste during periods of dearth such as were expected to come with the war. They could take some of the hardship out of rationing, thereby making it easier for ordinary people to support mobilization and involvement in the war. Likewise, textile scientists knew the lasting qualities of fabrics and could direct ordinary Americans on what to look for if they wanted their clothes to last through potentially tough times. Most important to their own self-evaluations, however, was the fact that

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[157] Rankin, from Montana, was the first woman elected to Congress. She was a well-known suffragist.

home economists were philosophically steeped in the dogma of conservation. A man's suit, for instance, that was made of good quality flannel and that had been made over into a dress for his young daughter would have been more beautiful to them than a new dress that might have put the family in debt and that might have been made of inferior fabric. It was this commitment to conservation that seemed to fit home economists perfectly for the task of helping America through the privations likely to accompany war.

Because many of the leading home economists worked for state universities, by the time the First World War began they had already developed relationships with state officials as they attempted to win funding for their departments. As already noted, Van Rensselaer and Rose won the allegiance of legislators by serving them feasts. They also visited Albany during budget negotiations and cultivated friendships with the governor, Franklin Roosevelt, and his wife. While Isabel Bevier preferred to keep her distance from the state capitol, she kept careful watch on budget appropriations for the school and forged alliances with state officials through her work in extension services. Women who ran departments at state universities were able to enjoy the authority of state officials at times, and Van Rensselaer was adept at expanding this authority whenever possible. Agnes Fay, who was head of Household Science at the University of California at Berkeley, corresponded directly with state officials, offering the skills of her staff and students. At Simmons, a private college, student interest led the way to participation in war work.

As Elizabeth Perry noted in her biography of democratic party activist Belle Moskowitz, women in the 1920s were not "as powerless as their lack of public office would lead us to think. . . [they] found creative, if unrecorded ways to exercise power."[158] Perry terms this approach "feminine politics," a politics that focused on ideals rather than parties and that operated through a network of personal relationships rather than political office. Moskowitz, interestingly, supported her family at one point in her career by collecting household techniques from friends and publishing them in a newspaper column. Marketing female expertise, she made public the private. As advisor to Alfred Smith while he was governor of New York, Moskowitz combined post-suffrage feminism with an older Victorian era ideal of women as social housekeepers. The apocryphal story of Van Rensselaer and Rose securing money for their department by making legislators enjoy eating creamed cabbage fits into this model of "feminine politics."

In an interview in the early 1950s, Flora Rose remarked that around 1910, she and Van Rensselaer had discovered that income from out of state students in their department was being used by another department. They got the funds transferred to them, which was a boost to their budget, but also a victory for women in the university. They now had control of their own income, Rose said, just as every woman should have. A new building, provided by the cabbage-eating legislators, gave the women an expanded sense of command. Rose connected the moment to modern feminism, arguing that "It made a great difference in our work and everything we did. For the reason that Virginia Woolf said in a title of a book, 'We now had a room of our own and our income.' . . . It would be a wonderful thing if every woman had her own income."[159] That Rose would quote Woolf, one of the most famous feminists of the century, and yet one whose politics were so completely rooted in personal experience, rather than in organized agitation, offers a key to her own understanding of home economics as liberationist. The movement freed women, but not as a platform, rather through the personal experiences it provided.

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[158] Elizabeth Israels Perry, Introduction, *Belle Moskowitz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), xiii.

Academic home economists wanted their students to take the rising status of the field personally. In 1925, to celebrate the official transformation of the department of home economics into an independent college within Cornell the home economics department sent out a memo to all students which read, "Dear Girls, We have planned a luncheon in celebration of our recently acquired collegiate status. Since you are one of us, we want you to come for the good time too. . . Fine eats, clever speeches, and a grand and glorious time."[160] For home economics leaders, it was vital that new generations in the field would see themselves as part of a movement, something that reached beyond their own individual educational experiences to involve all women. By including students in such celebrations, they hoped to instill a sense of pride in professionalism and also, more subtly, in womanhood.

Many years after Rose and Van Rensselaer got their first building, the University of Texas announced the opening of its new home economics building. The structure was simultaneously dedicated as a home for the relatively new field and a celebration of women's history in the state. Opened in 1933, the building included a tablet on the wall that dedicated it "to the pioneer women of Texas who, amid hardships and dangers, preserved in their family life their ancestral culture, broadened it through their experiences, and left it as a priceless heritage to succeeding generations." The building

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[159] Op. cit., Mary Philips interview with Flora Rose.

[160] Staff of the College of Home Economics, Cornell University to students, memo, March 16, 1925, Box 21, Folder 12, NYSCHE Papers.

also housed a museum of pioneer homemaking.[161] Just as Rose later connected the field's physical presence in buildings to its psychological establishment within the context of feminism, the Texas building connected the work of the student to the heritage of the state's women. By elevating the simple domestic environment to something worthy of exhibit in a museum, planners of the building created a deeper context for the field—American history itself. At the same time, the museum and plaque had the potential to minimize the work done inside the building's labs and classrooms by suggesting an unbroken line between the unscientific frontier housekeeper and her professional descendants.

The experience of helping the country mobilize for the war was one of bonding with fellow professionals, all the while acknowledging the special position of female leadership. In December, 1917, Sarah Arnold, of Simmons, wrote to Van Rensselaer that "I have had no chance to tell you how much I have appreciated being with you and Miss Rose in this big and earnest piece of work. It certainly calls for our utmost devotion and our utmost wisdom. I am thankful to be marching with you."[162] In praising her friends, she also praises herself and the field in which they have been so successful at establishing a particular brand of "utmost wisdom."

Home Away From Home

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[161] Lucy Rathbone, "University of Texas Home Economics Building," *Journal of Home Economics* 26 (June/July 1934): 357.

[162] Sarah Louise Arnold to Martha Van Rensselaer, December 31, 1917, Box 1, Folder 37, NYSCHE Papers. At the bottom of the letter, Arnold's assistant, who signed the letter for her, notes that Arnold had just left the office to say goodbye to her brother in law, who was on his way to France, so this may account for the martial mood of her letter.

At the same time that they established bases for themselves in buildings on campuses, home economists were also working to get their message out to those who did not have direct contact with universities. The beginning of the war in Europe had coincided with the passage in 1914 of the Smith-Lever Act, which supplied funding to states for home economics education and extension services.[163] In all of the state universities, home economics departments had already been taking an active role in extension services to farm families who were also served by extension agents from the state universities' agriculture departments. From 1914 on, however, home economists were also given federal support to spread their teachings throughout the nation. When war began, therefore, they already had a variety of methods in place to spread the message of food conservation. Using a variety of methods, they taught Americans how to conserve food, how to preserve food, and how to substitute other sources of protein for milk and meat and other starches for wheat.

Among these methods were bulletins, farm conferences, and lecture tours. The most spectacular means used by academic home economists were the demonstration cars, specially furnished train cars, which carried the home economics message throughout a state. Demonstration cars, in operation as early as 1908, arrived in small towns and parked for the day. University-trained demonstration agents, often graduate students, gave talks and demonstrations on domestic topics to audiences gathered by advance press. The more abstract and complicated experiments were left behind in the laboratory, but agents showed audiences how to use new labor saving devices such as the fireless cooker, and how to prepare and conserve foods. Home economists at the University of North Carolina, which claimed "the first domestic science car ever run," removed the seats from half an ordinary passenger car and installed a kitchen with an oil stove, an icebox, a kitchen cabinet, and a "fireless cooker" in the emptied half.[164] Other schools followed this model. Cornell had two cars, one which had been emptied of half its seats and fitted with a demonstration stage, and another from which all the seats had been removed. The second car was used to bring exhibitions of household technology to farm communities.[165] Accustomed then, by 1917, to taking their show on the road, home economists were well prepared to send agents out into the field to teach the wartime gospels of conservation and substitution. By 1919, Cornell's home economics demonstration car had been re-named the "Victory Special," celebrating the fact that conservation efforts had helped to win the war.[166]

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[163] The Smith-Lever act, co-authored by Senator Hoke Smith of Georgia and Representative A.F. Lever, of South Carolina created the Cooperative Extension Service and stipulated that home economics education should be provided for farm women. The act was followed in 1917 by the Smith Hughes Act, which provided funds for state vocational education in agriculture and home economics. Rima D. Apple argues that this legislation was a mixed blessing: "Though the act spread home economics education into school systems across the country. . . the act's implementation undermined some of the basic principles espoused by home economics reformers, particularly scientific research as a basis for the continued development of the profession." (Rima D. Apple, "Liberal Arts or Vocational Training?" *Rethinking Home Economics*, 1997, 86).

For leaders and workers within the movement, the war seemed to offer a golden opportunity to change society. If Americans could be made to adopt the principles of conservation in their everyday lives for the duration of the war, home economists hoped that they might hold onto these values when peace came. By 1918, a member of the Simmons College faculty could write with confidence that "There seems to be no question that a dietetic advisor for agencies engaged in social work will be an accepted policy of such organizations in the near future."[167] In this belief, they were like many other progressives who saw the war as a chance to change American institutions for the better and who were mostly disappointed when the war ended and few of these promises were fulfilled. As Barry Karl observes, progressives "looked to the war to make their point for them, to prove to public opinion... that their prescriptions must be followed... Nothing could be further off the mark. All down the line... progressives simply turned out to be wrong."[168]

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[164] Editorial, "Women's Institutes in North Carolina," *Journal of Home Economics* 1 (April 1909):163. The North Carolina car actually made between three and ten stops a day, while the University of Illinois car made visits of up to five days in communities along its route.(Brochure, University of Illinois Home Economics Extension Service 1917-1918, Box 2, Folder 1917, Bevier Papers.

[165] Flora Rose to Miss M.B. Benson, U.S. Food Administration, June 8, 1918. Box 11, Folder 24, NYSCHE Papers. During the 1930s and 1940s, Cornell also sponsored the Wattmobile, a van that had been customized to bring exhibitions on and demonstrations of electrification to rural areas. ("What Was Home Economics?" on line exhibition, http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/homeEc/5formats/wattmobile.html).

For home economists, the war seemed to promise a boost to their authority. Having spent a number of years in heightened awareness of nutrition, Americans might move into the future with healthier attitudes about food. The adoption of healthier diets was a desirable end in itself, but it was also desirable because it reinforced the authority of home economists. Once people realized the value of understanding nutrition, they would need more nutritionists to advise them. And if people could be taught to turn to their local home economists for guidance on nutrition they might also accept their advice on other aspects of domestic life. War work offered the chance to establish home economics as a national resource and home economists as accessible experts.

Evangelical as they could be, home economists were occasionally able to understand that the changes they were proposing, both for wartime conservation and post-war reform, would be neither popular nor easy. The program of a 1923 reunion of

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[166] *Annual Report of the School of Home Economics, New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 1919-1920,* 33, Box 37, NYSCHE Papers.

[167] Simmons College, *Simmons College Department of Home Economics Annual Report, 1918-1919,* 19, Box 1, Folder 8, Simmons College Archives.

[168] Barry Karl *The Uneasy State: the United States from 1915 to 1945.* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 47.

people who had worked in the Food Administration during the war included a number of satirical songs written about the very programs that home economists had designed and publicized. One titled "O.U. Hoover" described conservation efforts:

My Tuesdays are meatless,
My Wednesdays are wheatless,
I am getting more eatless each day.
My home it is heatless,
My bed *it is sheetless,*
They're all sent to the Y.M.C.A.
The bar rooms are treatless,
My coffee is sweetless,
Each day I get poorer and wiser.
My stockings are feetless,
My trousers are seatless,
My God, but I do hate the Kaiser."

Another song, "When the Day is Done," bemoaned the substitutions required to conserve meat for the troops:

I have eaten a bale
of spinach and kale
and I've never raised a row.
I have swallowed a can
of moistened bran
And I feel like an old brindle cow.
I am taking a snack from the old haystack
In the evening shadows gray,
And I'm glad, you bet,
At least to get
to the end of a meatless day [169]

While it is unclear whether the songs were composed during or after the crisis, it does seem certain that home economists maintained a sense of humor about their mission.

Conservation efforts focused mostly on food, but much attention was also given to clothing. Home economics departments issued bulletins about how to conserve and remodel old clothing and added these subjects to classroom work. American families were urged to remake their own clothing, both to conserve textiles needed for the war effort and to send them overseas through the Red Cross. At Cornell, students of one clothing course "donated all things made or remade to Belgian relief or Red Cross," as part of their semester's work. Their professors wanted them to be have personal experience of the potential importance of domestic work.[170]

Also at Cornell, a course in home design focused on "the skillful use of old materials. . . to make an attractive interior," never allowing an international crisis to serve as an excuse for less-than-lovely home life.[171] The department emphasized what it considered the centrality of home to national life. In wartime, the messages of remodeling and food conservation were essential to conserve materials needed for military use, but home economists hoped these lessons would stick

If women could be taught to see the materials of their daily lives in terms of utility, and, absorbing the gospel of William Morris, to find beauty in utility, then they gained more mastery over their surroundings and took on more powerful roles in society. If every woman, for instance, knew to demand the best quality fabrics, then, home economists reasoned, textile manufacturers would stop producing shoddy goods. Women also would not pine after what was inappropriate for their own lifestyles. Once the war in Europe had been won, a new war against the dictates of fashion could begin. Home economists advocated a kind of class consciousness in which women achieved full awareness of their economic station in life and lived neatly within it. This did not preclude trying to move up in the world, but it was hoped that the aesthetics of

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[169] Program for reunion of National Food Administration workers, 1923, Box 1, Folder 16, Sarah Louise Arnold Papers Series I, Simmons College Archives.

[170] *Annual Report of the School of Home Economics, New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 1917-1918*, 3, Box 37, Folder 12, NYSCHE Papers.

moderation would remain a guiding force even as a lucky family climbed the ladder of success.

While emphasizing the important contributions to be made by ordinary homemakers, home economists also acknowledged that war had removed many women from the home-fires. Martha Van Rensselaer herself left her home in Ithaca to spend a year in Washington working as Director of the Home Conservation Division of the U.S. Food Administration. Isabel Bevier left Urbana-Champaign to work in Washington for two months. She wrote of war work within the department that

> Not all war work is men's work. We have been told a good many times that the battle was likely to be won in the homes, and, acting on that supposition, the Department, both in its regular and in its extension work is doing and has been through all the year, everything that it possibly can to preach and teach, in season and out of season the war service that women may render in the home.[172]

At the time, Bevier was addressing a committee that had proposed moving her department temporarily to provide housing for student aviators. She needed to assert the authority of her field, literally to keep its place in the university. Ruth Wheeler, another member of the department added to this plea that "Many other institutions evidently look to Illinois for help." She was further able to threaten the administration, announcing that, "We can say proudly though humbly that it is going to mean a real hindrance to the country's food work if for six months or even for three the work of the Department is to be interrupted." Home economics had become so important in the crisis, Wheeler and Bevier argued, that to oppose it was actually unpatriotic. That the department was not relocated was an important victory for the authority of the field and for Bevier personally.

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[171] Ibid.

[172] Isabel Bevier manuscript of statement made before committee considering temporarily relocating Home Economics department, Box 2, Folder 1917, Bevier Papers.

By asserting the rights of her field over and against those of a branch of the military—the most male of American institutions at the time—Bevier made a strong, though complicated, statement about the position of women in society.[173]

Other leaders who did not leave their posts took on extra work and volunteered staff and students to take part in conservation efforts. They also considered the changes in ordinary women's lives that might come through war work. Cornell' s course titled "Women in Industry," was in the 1918 to 1918 academic year "devoted to present day conditions and problems of women in industry, stress being laid on the conservation of the strength and vitality of women and children in wartime.[174] The course description employed the idea of woman as resource, something to be used wisely and well that was a recurring theme of the movement. Although the food conservation bureau adopted the phrase "Food Must Win the War," what home economists really believed was that knowledge about food and about domestic life in general would win not only the war at hand, but also prepare the nation for all other crises it might encounter, geopolitical or otherwise.

The Whole World Homelike

The war expanded public awareness of home economics and this greater publicity for the field helped to create new professions connected to it. Home economists also found places for themselves within the emerging consumer culture. Academic home economists frequently published lists of the many career opportunities that awaited their graduates. Such lists justified the training and research they were offering and let the world know that home economics was not just dedicated to creating the perfect housewife. The career lists, which expanded over the years reflected the movement's goal "to make the whole world homelike" as one the superintendent of Home Economics in New York city public schools phrased it.[175] Leaders of the field eagerly imagined a world in which domestic practice and skills were applied and appreciated equally within and without the walls of the single family home. In the interest of simplifying the lives of women who worked in the home, home economists supported the development of efficient substitutes for individual domestic labor. So, a good laundry, a durable pair of stockings, a nutritious lunch away from home for husband and children all seemed not just acceptable, but desirable. And what better way to ensure the quality of substitutes than to have them administered by trained home economists? If the consumer society was going to provide such services, then it was vital that the best possible quality be achieved. And simultaneously the new market in services offered home economists the chance to make money, achieve authority, and share their knowledge with the public.

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[173] Ibid.. By arguing that women's work was as important to the war effort as men's, Bevier implicitly maintained the Victorian era notion of separate spheres, echoing Catherine Beecher's estimation of woman's sphere as in fact, superior to men's.

In 1918, the annual report of the Simmons College Department of Household Economics announced that, "There is an increased desire on the part of the students for greater specialization. This makes itself felt not so much by way of direct expression from the students as by the eagerness with which new specialized electives are chosen

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[174] *Annual Report of the School of Home Economics, New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 1917-1918*, Box 37, Folder 12, NYSCHE Papers.

[175] Mary Williams, "Teaching Domestic Science to Different Nationalities," *Journal of Home Economics* 2 (June 1910): 272.

and the reluctance with which the conventional group of teaching electives is accepted."[176]

Rather than training for careers as home economics generalists who would teach at the primary and secondary level, students were finding themselves drawn to specialties within the field. Perhaps not even knowing what careers their training might qualify them for, students approached their courses as professional preparation for something other than teaching. The field was becoming more attractive in its particulars than as a whole. Among the opportunities for home economists besides teaching were institutional management, nutrition, dietetics, interior design, interior decoration, textile science, clothing design, and child psychology. By 1945, a report by the University of California listed as possible careers for home economics graduates, "home demonstration work, dietetics, institution management, laboratory service, research, commercial production in foods, clothing, and...home furnishing industries, social work, and many others."[177] In addition, it became increasingly common for those who majored in home economics to go on to advanced degrees. While there had been only four universities offering advanced work in home economics in 1919, by 1932, there were 32 granting Masters degrees and one granting a doctorate.[178]

Nutritionists and dieticians became regular members of staff at institutions such as hospitals, schools, prisons, and the military. Later, in the 1960s, NASA hired home economists, among them Beatrice Finkelstein, who designed meals for the Apollo missions. The home which the public, professional world was supposed to be made to resemble was, of course, not the home of yesterday, but the hyper-efficient and intellectualized home of tomorrow. Home Economics graduates ran cafeterias in corporations and public and private institutions, bringing to workers, students, patients, and inmates, a modernized version of all that was potentially good about home life. Hot nutritious meals were provided in a setting that was sanitary and congenial to conversation and relaxation. And while patrons ate meals based on home economics research, they relaxed in interiors designed by other home economists. In these environments, the visitor's spirits might be subtly elevated by the inclusion of organic forms in decoration or a few tasteful prints upon the walls. Home economics graduates also ran their own businesses, opening the tearooms that served working men and women in cities and large towns. These establishments could be innovative—introducing a wide array of patrons to healthy food and standing in for other women, whose work lives kept them too busy to stay at home preparing meals for themselves or others. Tearooms made it safe for working women to eat outside the home by providing atmospheres of respectability unlike the saloons where many men took their meals away from home. Martha Van Rensselaer and Flora Rose opened their own tea room just outside of Ithaca, and although they did not run it for very long (they sold it in 1913), they seem to have thoroughly enjoyed the experience, dedicating themselves to making the establishment a comfortable place for a wholesome meal.

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[176] Simmons College Household Economics Department, *Annual Report of the Household Economics Department*, Box 1, Folder 7, Simmons College Archives.

[177] *Report of President's Committee on Home Economics Principles and Recommendations*, May 23, 1945, Berkeley Archives.

[178] Editorial, "Graduate Students in Home Economics," *Journal of Home Economics* 25 (March, 1933): 223.

Major corporations also hired home economists to work in test kitchens and other laboratories, consulting on the creation of domestic products such as laundry powder and electric mixers. In 1929, Marjorie Heseltine, who was director of food research at Halls

Brothers Company, in New York, wrote about home economists in business for the *Journal of Home Economics.* When her company wanted to send out "educational" leaflets about its products, she wrote,

> A large proportion of the printed and pictorial material. . . is prepared under the direction of a woman with home economics training. There are still a few firms which do not consider it necessary to consult an accredited home economist in the preparation of school material but their number appears to be decreasing. [179]

Hesetine went on to say that "Home economists may be surprised to learn that their very names have a certain commercial value according to their professional status."[180] Heseltine's emphasis on the "accredited" home economist and her reference to status reflect the growing sense of workers in the field that they were professionals. Historian Carolyn M. Goldstein sites another corporate home economist, Mary Philips of the North American Dye Corporation who saw "the home economist's presence as a 'wedge' in the corporation.'" Goldstein quotes Philips arguing that the home economist in business "would be 'a powerful force for betterment and uplift,' and, she implied, would temper the hold that corporations had on American domestic life."[181] Even when privately employed, home economists like Philips took their public roles seriously.

Spreading the Word

For home economists, an integral part of creating and augmenting their cultural authority was finding a place for themselves in mass media. Training home economists to go forth and work in business and in schools was not enough. American women who read magazines and newspapers or who listened to the radio could also partake in the revolution of the rationalized home. During the war, efforts to publicize the work of the field became increasingly successful as home economists were asked to create bulletins for state and national agencies. For the first time, the home economist appeared as a national figure, an expert to turn to in a time of crisis.

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[179] Marjorie M. Heseltine, "Commercial Education Material Used by Home Economists," *Journal of Home Economics* 21 (June 1929): 419.

[180] Ibid.

[181] Carolyn M. Goldstein, "Part of the Package," *Rethinking Home Economics*, 279-280.

Complementing the flurry of wartime activity, for instance, Cornell's home economics department announced that "Lectures on publicity and the preparation of material for the press were given to open up other avenues for reaching the public."[182] Publicity designed to distribute the message of conservation simultaneously spread the word that there were experts in the field. The design department was employed in making conservation propaganda posters, while nutritionists in the department busily sent "Victory Menus" out to local newspapers.[183]

By the end of the war, home economists were adept at using a variety of media to spread the philosophies and practices of their movement as well as the equally important message that a new class of experts existed. They hoped that the lessons of the war—meatless and wheatless days, re-made clothing, and thrift of all kinds—had transformed the nation into an audience receptive to their teaching. Heads of departments and professors as well as graduates all contributed to the growing field of home economics literature.

Many wrote for the *Journal of Home Economics* (JHE), which was started in 1909 as the official journal of the American Home Economics Association (AHEA). The journal carried technical articles on subjects such as biochemistry, nutrition, and design as well as more theoretical pieces about the mission of the field. Proceedings of each annual conference were published in the JHE and it contained regular reports from colleges and universities about activities in home economics departments across the nation. The Journal also regularly published bibliographies of literature in the field, celebrating the emergence of a body of knowledge available to all. As frequently as possible, the Journal printed photographs of buildings constructed for home economics departments and laboratories within buildings. Each new lab and each new building represented the field's growth as a respected entity within the academic community. The buildings were not just practical additions to the campus; they were monuments to the movement's success.

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[182] *Annual Report of the School of Home Economics, New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 1917-1918*, Box 37, page 3, NYSCHE Papers.

[183] Victory menus included substitutes for meat and wheat and provided recipes that used preserved vegetables and fruits.

The first edition of the JHE included articles on "Cost of Board on Minnesota farms, "Domestic Art Subject Matter for Secondary Schools," The Dietician in Tubercular Sanitoria," and a review of contemporary literature in the field as well as an overview of the Lake Placid Conference from 1899 to 1908. The next year, the Journal included an article on famous gourmand Brillat-Savarin (celebrated within the JHE pages as a proto-home economist), a description of travelling cooking schools in Germany, a discussion of ways to prevent typhoid fever epidemics, and a discussion of the diet of Mexican laborers in the U.S. The interests of JHE writers, and presumably of its readers (often the same people), ranged far and wide.

The journal served another important service in creating a sense of community and social significance by publishing memorials to prominent members of the movement. By reading about the accomplishments of women in the field, home economists on campuses across the country could share a sense of themselves as part of a larger project. When Ellen Richards died suddenly in 1911, the journal dedicated an issue to her memory. She was celebrated as the founder of the movement, and her early death gave other home economists a chance to reflect on how far they had come in the brief period between the first Lake Placid conference and this sad moment. Richards' virtues were celebrated as both individual and communal. In her appreciation of Richards' life, Isabel Bevier wrote that "it was the habit of her life to fashion old truths into new forms, to keep pace with the wheels of progress."[184] This personal mission was shared by the leaders of the first generation who attempted to improve the lives of women in the present and future by focusing on their traditional roles.

By writing for magazines, newspapers, and radio shows, home economists simultaneously reached wider audiences with their messages and created new careers for women. Radio stations usually aired home economics shows early in the day so that lessons could be absorbed into that day's arrangements. For example, a casserole described after breakfast could be served for dinner that night. These shows were sometimes delivered as advice from experts and sometimes presented as dramas. Home economics programs offered courses in radio and print journalism to prepare their graduates to write such shows. Ruth Van Deman, spokeswoman for the Bureau of Home Economics spoke weekly on National Farm and Home hour, a radio show and most academic home economics departments had their own radio shows on the college station. By 1929, Miss Justine Hemphill was visiting the Bureau twice a week to gather material for the Housekeeper's Chat radio program which had begun in 1926 and by 1935 was broadcast on 200 stations in 48 states and Hawaii. The purpose of the shows, as a USDA spokeswoman phrased it was "to give homemakers useful information on the scientific practice of their job." [185] Even before the depression, when radio shows became an important way of getting information to needy families, there was a sense of urgency to these dispatches. They were presented as modern and up-to-the-minute, rather than ageless wisdom. Listeners were encouraged to think of the domestic realm as a dynamic space, intimately connected to the world beyond the threshold. By bringing news about the home into the home over the radio, these programs made the home newsworthy and public. KOAC, the radio station of the University of Oregon at Corvalis, broadcast a number of home economics shows, including "Hows and Whys of Housekeeping," "Facts and Fancies," which debated myths of housekeeping, and "A Half Hour in Good Taste," on social usage, or etiquette.[186] In 1932, Cornell's radio station, WVBR, ran a series about Deborah and William Domecon (short for Domestic Economy), a young couple starting out in their first home and caring for their first child. The show was a sort of info-soap opera in which the young people faced down the ordinary crises of married life and learned valuable lessons about domestic management.

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[184] Isabel Bevier, "Ellen Richards," *Journal of Home Economics* (June 1911): 214-217.

For their part, magazines began hiring staff home economists in the 1920s. Magazines like *Good Housekeeping* built test kitchens and printed the sensible advice of domestic experts on everything from scouring powder to squash casserole to sibling rivalry. In 1908, Theodore Dreiser, editor of the *Delineator*, wrote to Isabel Bevier in Illinois to ask if she would like to write an article for the magazine or for *The Designer* or *New Idea*, two other magazines he edited. The *Delineator* was a woman's magazine that combined fiction with fashion and domestic advice. Dreiser wrote that Bevier had been recommended to him as "someone who is interested in the sociological progress of

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[185] Helen Crouch Douglas "Broadcasting Home Economics Talk," *Journal of Home Economics* 27 (November, 1935): 568.

America, and particularly in matters which concern the development and well-being of the oncoming generation of Americans." Dreiser particularly wanted Bevier to write about the practice house at the University. He wanted information about a specific project underway in her department, but also recognized her appeal to the public as an authoritative voice on issues of modern life.[187] No record of her reply exists. When she did write for magazines, Bevier tended to write about her own department. Such articles legitimated the movement as newsworthy and possessed of its own history.

From 1921 to 1926, Van Rensselaer wrote the home economics column for the *Delineator*. In her column, she tested recipes as well as giving out general advice on subjects such as household safety and home decoration. Since each column carried not just her name, but also her institutional affiliation, Cornell and its department of home economics received free advertisement from the arrangement. The department also received validation as a cultural authority, just as the magazine enjoyed the reflected glory of a professional home economist on the staff. Women's magazines and home economics departments thus bolstered each other's authority in women's lives throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

Women's Magazines began to call their test kitchens "institutes" of home economics and to adopt the professional tone of academics. Household Magazine's institute, the Searchlight, was a single family home, "directed" by Harriet Allard, and her staff, who performed tests on household products and recommended to Household's readers only those that they approved of. The women who created recipes or designed ideal rooms for magazines were presented to readers as trained specialists, rather than

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[186] Ibid., 563.

simply ordinary women willing to share their own secrets acquired through experience. Magazine home economists were understood to be career women, rather than friendly neighbors.[188]

Perhaps dearest to the hearts of home economists were the extension bulletins produced by university agricultural extension services. In these bulletins, home economists were experts on all they addressed. They did not have to compete with advertising or fiction or share their authority with women not trained in home economics. The main audience for extension bulletins was rural. Home economists focused much of their attention on farm women, partly because farm women lived in the least "modern" conditions of any women and partly, perhaps because the farm still seemed idyllic. Americans were nervous about the modern era, troubled by the growth of cities and the very trend towards the scientific that many simultaneously embraced and advocated. If the farm home could be enlightened without being ruined, then it might offer a meaningful alternative to the troubling new urban lifestyle of (presumed) anonymity and dissociation from production and nature.

It is important to recognize, too, that in the homes of farm women, home economists faced much less competition than they did in the homes of urban women. Urban women were exposed to more advertising, to shops full of the latest goods, to more print media, and simply to more women leading more varied lives than were rural

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[187] Theodore Dreiser to Isabel Bevier, September 10, 1908 and September 17, 1908, Box 1, Human and Community Development Department Correspondence, University of Illinois Archives.

[188] In 1925, Van Rensselaer and Flora Rose collaborated on an article "When George and Mary Wish to Marry," for the *Delineator* in which they gave advice to newlyweds about how to run their first home. They concentrated much attention on finances, arguing that money troubles caused gender strife. The article is remarkable for the fact that it was written by two women who had never been married, but who shared a home with each other. Rose and Van Rensselaer earned the same salary. Rose refused to earn more, although her higher degrees entitled her to. The two women, then had the kind of economic equality within their household which none of their readers was likely to have.

women. They could accept authority wherever they chose, or create it for themselves. Whether the home economist arrived in a rural community through her words in a bulletin or in person as a demonstration agent, her authority experienced fewer challenges than it might have in a city.

Although all home economists who were associated with colleges and universities lived a life much more urban than rural, they often maintained an active nostalgia for rural lifestyles. And yet, because they themselves were "new women," they could not simply accept the ways of country people, but felt compelled to change these ways, to make them modern, even, as Susan Matt argues, urban. Matt describes a loosely based movement active in the second two decades of the twentieth century that advocated a new kind of rural reform. Rather than joining the ranks of those who bemoaned the population shift to cities and tried to find ways to keep young men and women on the farm, this new generation advocated bringing the best of the cities into the countryside. Their idea was to help rural communities keep up with modernizing American culture.

Matt describes these reformers as "drawn from the ranks of the new urban middle class," and argues that they

> Seem to have felt a certain satisfaction about their own way of life. They believed that education and comforts that they themselves enjoyed represented progress. They were eager to share these breakthroughs with the benighted country folk.[189]

She specifically places home economists in this group who were "dedicated to improving rural life, often [bringing] urban technologies, fashions, and decorating schemes with them." And she notes that "they also brought novel outlooks with them."[190] Certainly, home economists who visited rural communities or who entertained local farmers at the farmers' institutes held on land grant campuses were aware of themselves as representatives of a different and, from their perspective, better way of life than that lived by most farm dwellers. They attempted to serve as examples to others as well as to directly instruct women of their states and in their courses in the new ways. These new ways, however, were completely bound up in the values of a very small subset of American culture—urban, educated, politically liberal, and disciples of William Morris. Because the approach was so unilateral, rather than collaborative, it had the potential to denigrate the lives of the uninitiated, farm women, particularly.

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[189] Susan J. Matt, *Keeping Up With the Joneses* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 118.

[190] Ibid., 101.

Matt argues that by offering lectures such as "The Well Dressed Woman," in 1924, Cornell's Extension Program agents,

> Rather than merely responding to country women's desires, actively worked to create them. They hoped that by introducing farm women to urban standards of living they would incite discontent and dissatisfaction with old habits and lead women to pursue more modern modes and ways of life.[191]

Matt notes that by offering farm women something different, something which extension agents believed to be better for them, such reformers "were also creating new desires and occasions for consumer spending."[192] Because home economists like those at Cornell, who gave demonstrations on "How to Buy Ready-Mades" as well as "Successful Homemade Clothes," could not recognize any degree of condescension in their own actions, they became unwitting enablers of consumer envy.[193]

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[191] Ibid., 122.

[192] Ibid.

[193] Although Matt does not discuss this, the suggestion of the lecture's title that one could make "unsuccessful" home made clothes, indeed that without instruction one was likely to do so, recognized the problems that rural women had achieving the same aesthetic ideals as urban women. The title is typical of a certain attitude, too, in which, urban-based reformers assumed not just that rural women were working in

In fact, home economists urged all women who worked in their own homes to pay attention to dress, but not specifically in order to make them more regular consumers of ready-made goods. They encouraged women to think of themselves as professionals and to dress the part. Although on the one hand, this may have meant applying urban standards of fashion to rural women, it was also a project designed, however crudely, to increase women's sense of their own self-worth. Through the 1910s and 1920s, it was common for home economics departments to require their students to wear uniforms to laboratory classes. In the 1917 – 1918 academic year, Simmons College Department of Nutrition required students in "cookery laboratory" classes "to wear simple white, washable, cotton or linen waists or dresses, white aprons, and shoes with rubber heels. Each student should have a small hand towel and a pair of holders." The request included a small swath of material to ensure that all students conformed to the same standard. These uniforms, which combined aprons with lab coats, were supposed to give students a sense of the seriousness of their work and their own potential expertise.[194]

Of course there is a fine line between self-confidence and arrogance, and home economists crossed this line constantly. The very nature of their project made it impossible for them not to. Because they styled themselves as experts in a field which was supposed to have no experts—a field in which each woman was supposed by her very birth to be adept—they often seemed to overturn the only authority ever granted to women. Home economists arrived in a woman's household and told her that everything she and her revered ancestors had ever done was incorrect. Not only was it incorrect, but

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inferior circumstances with inferior goods, but also assumed that rural women themselves knew and felt painfully the differences.

[194] Cookery Laboratory memo to incoming students, Box 3 Folder 4, Simmons College Department of Nutrition Records, Simmons College Archives.

by continuing to do things in the old ways, women were actually a drag on society, keeping it stuck in the dark ages, rather than moving it forward as business leaders and scientists were doing.

Naturally, such an attitude could not go unquestioned, and resistance to the self-proclaimed authority of home economists was most prevalent among rural women. Marilyn Irvin Holt discusses sources of possible tension between extension agents and rural women in Kansas in her *Linoleum, Better Babies, and the Modern Farm Woman.* Holt finds that home economists adjusted their expectations and approaches to suit the experiences of rural women. She writes that "certainly the experts and home economics professionals attempted to transmit a defined viewpoint to farm women, but whether they succeeded is an open question."[195] Kathleen R. Babbitt, writing about the popularization of nutrition education, notes that "If extension home economists had hoped to attain a certain status as experts in nutrition through their work as rural home demonstration agents, they were sorely disappointed." Particularly during the First World War, farmers and their wives distrusted interference by people they associated with the government. Babbitt quotes a New York farm woman who complained that "we do not need to have new (and some of them are entirely absurd and impracticable) recipes handed out to us by people who never baked a loaf of bread in their lives."[196] The agents who visited farm communities were often quite young. Some were students working their way through home economics programs, but most had probably baked at least one loaf of bread. What the angry farm woman might have sensed, however, is that the extension agent would have learned to think of herself as an expert on bread because she had considered it analytically, while the farm woman felt that her own expertise came through experience.

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[195] Marilyn Irvin Holt. *Linoleum, Better Babies, and the Modern Farm Woman*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995. 42, 64. Holt's work focuses on the farm women who served as audience to many of the projects of the home economics movement in its first phase.

[196] Kathleen R. Babbitt, "Legitimizing Nutrition Education," in *Rethinking Home Economics*, 148.

Martha Van Rensselaer was aware of the possibilities for and problems of condescension In1932 she wrote to Mabel Millman, an extension agent of the Home Bureau, to criticize Millman's treatment of farm women: "The next time you write a circular letter, can't you go over it and see whether you have been preemtory [*sic*] and whether you are talking to a fellow woman and not to one working under you."[197] Van Rensselaer advised communication across class lines using the language of gender experience. One had "fellow" women who lived out their roles at all economic levels of society. In her own journal, Van Rensselaer recorded her meetings with farm women through her extension work, commenting on class differences:

Home for Sale

Another force, stronger by far than farm women with ruffled feathers, rose to challenge the authority of home economists in the 1920s. The rise of consumer culture at first seemed to offer unique opportunities to spread the word, but home economists soon found that it obscured their authority and even co-opted the very rhetoric that defined the movement.

Around 1900, producers of consumer goods began to use advertising and market research to create markets for items. Advertising began to feature not simply claims of effectiveness and desirability, but of a product's powers to transform its user's lifestyle. Indeed the notion of lifestyle began to emerge during this period in advertising. Instead of simply announcing that a washing powder, for instance, did the job, pictures and text began to claim that using it would actually create a happier, more harmonious, perhaps even more exciting life for the woman who washed her dishes with the powder. Advertisers of domestic goods began to play with ideas of class mobility and glamour.

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[197] Martha Van Rensselaer to Mabel Millman, April 13, 1932, Box 33, Folder 26, NYSCHE Papers.

William Leach, in *Land of Desire*, argues that,

> From the 1890s on, American corporate business, in league with key institutions, began the transformation of American society into a society preoccupied with consumption, with comfort and bodily well-being, with luxury, spending, and acquisition, with more goods this year than last, more next year than this.[198]

Leach damns the consumer society thus created as a "culture of desire that confused the good life with goods."[199] Many of the first generation of home economists might have reluctantly agreed with this assessment. They both helped to create important aspects of consumer society, such as the "expert," and resisted the manipulation of desire to cloud notions of necessity. Leach finds fault with consumer society because, he argues, it homogenizes happiness by bringing "to the fore only one vision of the good life and push[ing] out all others."[200] Home economists, of course, had their own very specific notion of the good life, one in which subtlety, utility, and moderation were the organizing principles and operative virtues. This vision was in conflict with the emerging consumer culture at many points. Home economists fought the forces of consumerist modernity with their alternative vision whenever they had a chance.

In *Fables of Abundance*, his history of advertising in America, Jackson Lears also argues that the new consumer society encouraged Americans to abandon traditional values. He argues that the rise of advertising was part of

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[198] William Leach, Preface, *Land of Desire* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xiii.
[199] Ibid.

> Wider transatlantic currents of cultural history: the disenchantment of an animistic worldview with the rise of Western science; the spread of market exchange beyond traditional boundaries of time and place; the growing dominance of an individualistic model of controlled, unified selfhood; the triumph of bureaucratic rationality in the factory system and the modern corporation.[201]

Home economics was part of this shift, encouraging women to see their homes as workplaces and their furnishings as equipment which should be kept up-to-date through an ever-skeptical awareness of current market trends. Home economists wanted to create educated consumers; they had no problem with women identifying as consumers, so long as they remained in control of markets and did not let advertisers or producers make their decisions for them.

As Marilyn Irvin Holt writes in her study of home economics programs in Kansas,

> [Home economics] Graduates found professional work as nutritionists, designers, and researchers in the expanding food and clothing industries. . .Added to these possibilities were positions with manufacturers who wanted their new lines of washing machines, stoves, or electric sewing machines demonstrated to retailers and prospective female buyers; product demonstrations by a professional home economist improved sales.[202]

While they enjoyed the value that manufacturers placed on their word, home economists were uneasy about consumer culture in general and about their ability to maintain control over the field.

The movement was fully committed to the new managerial society and to the applications of scientific principles in place of folk ways in most situations. But home economists also held onto the past, in that they advocated a home-centered world, in which the lures of the market were never stronger than the ties of family and place. In fact, they saw these connections as potentially strengthened through the application of

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[200] Leach, *Land of Desire*, xv.

[201] T. J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 2.

managerial and scientific principles to the domestic sphere. Theirs was a nostalgic modernism, one which sought to correct the weaknesses in traditional life so that its strengths—moderation, community-focus, an organic design aesthetic—could be made all the stronger.

Writing of the emergence of consumer culture Susan Matt finds that between 1890 and 1930 "it became acceptable for middle-class men, women, and children to envy and pursue the possessions of the rich." This shift from cultural emphasis on the virtue of being content with one's lot in life, Matt argues "was significant because it was part of an emerging emotional and behavioral style that supported the expansion of the consumer economy."[203] For home economists, this transition was problematic. On the one hand, they encouraged homemakers always to seek the most modern and efficient products, but on the other hand they decried imitation of the wealthy. As Ellen Richards argued, in her analysis of class and diet (discussed in chapter one), the wealthy had no better idea of what was good for them than did the poor. Values existed independent of the economy and of class. Good bread was good because it was nutritious and good furniture showed its virtue in its simplicity and usefulness, rather than in its association with elites.

Furthermore, home economists often took an interest in how goods were manufactured and encouraged their students to take an interest in the conditions of labor. Attention to the working conditions of the person who made the product one purchased might easily complicate envy, making an object less desirable because of the guilt attached to it. For instance, in 1910, Martha Van Rensselaer wrote to her friend, the muckraking journalist William Hard suggesting that he write an article about women who

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[202] Marilyn Irvin Holt, *Linoleum, Better Babies, and the Modern Farm Woman 1890–1930*, 55.
[203] Matt. *Keeping Up With the Joneses*, 2-3.

worked in department stores. She told him that she and Flora Rose had each separately encountered a manicurist at Gimbel's department store in New York who talked about the low wages women in the store were receiving and the fact that some were turning to casual prostitution to supplement their incomes. The woman, Van Rensselaer said had been "thinking strongly on these matters... and says she has enough material to write a book if she only knew how.... It strikes me that it is the great subject of the day."[204] Van Rensselaer hoped to get this story out, to give a public voice to the plight of women who worked to provide luxuries for other women (including herself and her partner.) Nonetheless, home economists wanted women to think of themselves as consumers constantly on the alert for something new and helpful. They wanted their consumers, however, to control the market and to have a particular aesthetic and morality which did not fit comfortably with the use of envy as a lure. Home economists struggled, generally unsuccessfully, against the force of the emerging consumer culture.

Cultural studies scholars such as Stuart Hall and Stuart Ewen have, since the 1970s, drawn our attention to the audiences of mass production, positing greater agency for audiences in the creation of mass culture. Influenced by this interest in audiences, historians such Lizabeth Cohen, have begun to question the seemingly one-sided relationship between advertisers and consumers, arguing that consumers will ultimately not buy a product they do not want, no matter how enticing its advertising.[205] As Regina

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[204] Martha Van Rensselaer to William Hard, December 24, 1910, Box 33, Folder 31, NYSCHE Papers.

[205] I am thinking particularly of Cohen's discussion of working class and African-American resistance to mass produced middle-class culture during the Great Depression, "Encountering Mass Culture," in Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Also see Thomas Frank's discussion of the relationship between consumer and advertiser "hip as hegemon," in Thomas Frank, The Conquest of Cool (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997) 17-26. The interest in audience agency stems from and is part of studies of mass and popular culture that emerged in the 1980s.

Lee Blaszczyk writes of domestic goods firms at the turn of the nineteenth century, "Consistently. . . these firms learned an important lesson: whether for reasons of price, utility, or style, women refused to buy items that they did not really want—no matter how much money producers had spent on enticement."[206] Producers, people have begun to realize, have had to pay as much attention to the actual needs of consumers as to *possibilities for creating demand. Because home economics emerged at the same time* that modern advertising and marketing practices did, home economists had an opportunity to insist on a more democratic economy. If consumers were educated, and home economists intended that they should be, then faulty products would soon be discovered and shoppers would avoid them. Surely manufacturers, many of whom had already acknowledged the prominence of the field by soliciting endorsements, would know this and be careful to serve the interests of the consumer. As early as 1909, a writer in the JHE was exhorting home economists to teach their students "the responsibility of the consumer for the grade of goods offered in the market." If consumers organized, "by cooperation it should be possible in a few years to drive out of the stores ornate cook stoves, tin and glass utensils with rough edges. . . and pitchers that can not be washed inside."[207] Of course this is not at all how advertising developed. The advertising agent's loyalty is to the manufacturer, not the consumer.

But, as Regina Lee Blaszczyk finds in her study of the Corning Glassware Company's introduction of Pyrex, companies often did feel that the consumer's needs ought to dictate production. Furthermore, many of them guessed that home economists could help them to identify and understand these needs. When Corning wanted to branch out from its industrial glassware line to create a domestic product, Blaszczyk writes, they turned to well-known home economists for help. In 1913, the company hired Mildred Maddocks, home economist at the Good Housekeeping Institute, a laboratory connected to the magazine, to test their glass kitchenware. The kitchenware line had actually been inspired by the wife of a Corning chemist who had asked her husband to bring home something glass in which she might cook. He famously brought her "the sawed-off bottoms of two battery jars." When Maddocks approved of the new cookware, the company took it to Sarah Tyson Rorer, editor at *Ladies' Home Journal*, and well-known domestic expert, for her endorsement. Blaszczyk writes that "by honing in on home economics, Corning's managers hoped to learn more about the women who were, in great numbers, taking domestic science classes." In other words, Corning, as a manufacturer, attempted to capitalize on the emergence of home economists as domestic authorities both by using their expertise to develop a product and using their rhetoric of the modern home, to make money.[208]

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[206] Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 13.

Home economists had established roles for themselves and helped to create new roles for trained women within the new economy. Directors of home economics departments forged professional relationships with manufacturers that helped them both to establish the field as socially authoritative and to understand forces at work in the market, especially innovation and salesmanship. These relationships implicitly encouraged students to think of themselves as the equals of manufacturers.

Manufacturers supplied goods to home economics laboratories at reduced prices and many times for free. Goods included everything from ovens to yeast to sewing

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[207] Editorial, "Control of Market," *Journal of Home Economics* 1 (March 1909): 74.
[208] Regina Lee Blaszczyck, *Imagining Consumers*, 208-248.

machine needles. Professors assigned students to work with these materials, producing analyses of each dish or dishwasher as well as performing tasks directly connected to course work. A student, then, took on the tasks of the movement's ideal woman—she observed her world with a critical eye. The kitchen was not merely a natural extension of her own self, but a collection of goods produced in a market, each one vying for her approval.

Isabel Bevier wrote to the Ideal Manufacturing Company of Detroit in 1909 to ask if they produced a stove with glass doors. She was obviously interested in making it possible for students to observe foods in the process of cooking, something which was not possible with the heavy iron doors of stoves of the time. A representative of the company wrote back to explain that they did not have such an item and that, "We cannot say that we are satisfied that an oven with a glass in the door is practical. As a matter of fact we don't think so. However, there is plenty of room for improvement along the lines you mention."[209] Bevier, of course, was ahead of her time, but the exchange is also important because it reflects the sense that home economics leaders had of themselves as innovators.

Earlier in 1909, Bevier wrote to the American Vacuum Cleaner Company to set them straight on how manufacturers should expect to deal with home economists. The company had refused her request of a sample of their product. Bevier responded,

> I feel bound, from your letter, to draw two inferences. Either you are not in the habit of doing business with state universities or you do not wish your cleaner placed in a position where it may have the benefit of being called to the attention of hundreds of intelligent women. We have 175 young women in our classes and constant visitors in the department. When the Experimental House is opened, as it will be during our School for

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[209] The Ideal Manufacturing Company to Isabel Bevier, January 11, 1909, Box 1, Human and Community Development Department Correspondence, University of Illinois Archives.

> Housekeepers in the month of January we are likely to have a hundred visitors a day. . . I thought if you knew the facts in the case you might be willing to do what hundreds of other firms have done.[210]

She then listed some of the discounts and gifts that the department had received from other manufacturers. By suggesting that the company had not done business with other state universities, Bevier was referring to the fact that it had already, by 1909, become a common practice for companies to supply departments with their goods. She offered the department as a showcase for the vacuum, suggesting that the company would receive free advertising for its product, although she does not offer to endorse the product overtly. In fact, what she was saying was that the vacuum would be tested in the department's practice house and if it performed well, this performance would be noticed by a wider audience. She already had a sense of her department as a source of authority for women of the state. The practice house would be something like the city on a hill, an example to all those many who would be looking to the university at Urbana-Champaign for just such guidance. She was offering the company a chance to provide the vacuum on the hill. She suggested, also, that home economists wielded such authority that the vacuum company would find it needed them even more than they needed it.[211]

In 1908, the American School of Home Economics, a correspondence school based in Chicago, advertised its bulletin titled "The Modern Home: Money and Labor Saving Appliances." The title made explicit the movement's belief that the ideal home could, to a degree, be bought. An educated woman would be able to choose the correct tools for her work and, ideally, markets would respond to both her knowledge and her needs in order to present her with "modern" products.

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[210] Isabel Bevier to American Vacuum Cleaner Company, January 2, 1909, Box 1 Folder 1909, Bevier Papers.

[211] Ibid.

Manufacturers themselves solicited professional home economists—those on faculty and those who wrote for magazines—to endorse their products, seldom with the desired results. Academic home economists seem to have felt a sacred trust to remain neutral and skeptical publicly. When Standard Brands Incorporated gave money to Agnes Fay Morgan, head of home economics at Berkeley, to perform experiments on their bread, they accepted the fact that she required that "her name and connection would not be given any publicity."[212] And in 1920, when Sarah Splint, the same publicity agent who had urged Van Rensselaer and Rose to support Hoover, offered to send a representative from the Knox Gelatin company to Cornell for demonstrations, Van Rensselaer politely refused. She explained that the dean of the college did not think it right for a state institution to have such relations with private companies. And, she added, "Miss Rose and I have discovered that we should be careful and are glad to conform to this ruling. The Dean is exceedingly generous about these things and gives his judgment as impartially as possible."[213]

In 1908, however, perhaps before this lesson was fully learned, Van Rensselaer's name was used by the U.S. Fireless Cooker Company to endorse its product in sales pitches to other heads of departments. Isabel Bevier's papers include a letter from the company claiming that,

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[212] John Killian to Robert Underhill, August 30, 1935, Folder 1932, Berkeley Archives.

[213] Sarah Splint to Martha Van Rensselaer, September 1, 1920, Van Rensselaer to Splint September 19, 1920, Box 33, folder 42. NYSCHE Papers. Gelatin was a popular ingredient in many of the recipes of the era. Because it enabled cooks to create semi-sculptural dishes, it offered home cooks an opportunity to be "fancy" with their food—making each meal a visual as well as culinary event. Gelatin also probably appealed to many middle-class cooks because it made possible on an affordable scale the aspic jellies associated with the upper class.

> Miss Van Rensselaer of the Department of Home Economics, Cornell University, is very much interested in the "U.S." Fireless Cooker and has been good enough to suggest that we send to teachers of Domestic Science, the enclosed description of it. She writes that "Every Home Economics Laboratory in the country ought to become familiar with the "U.S." Fireless Cooker in order to help housekeepers to understand a modern improvement."[214]

The fireless cooker, which kept food hot in an insulated chamber, represented an important advance in kitchen technology. With wood stoves, which must be stoked continually, it is very difficult to control temperature. Ellen Richards, founder of the movement and MIT chemist, had been an advocate of an early version, the Aladin stove, but professional home economists seldom, if ever, endorsed specific brands. They preferred to focus attention on new techniques or technologies, encouraging women to experiment in the service of creating ideally personalized work environments.

Attempting to achieve cultural authority for themselves and their movement, leaders did not want their fortunes tied to specific products. As much as they welcomed free samples and discounts, they needed to be seen as independent, objective researchers and analysts. This was not simply a question of pride, but also an attempt to lead by example. Home economists shared a mission to make women aware of their power as consumers. The rare use of Van Rensselaer's name aside, they strove to teach American women to be ever skeptical of the claims of advertisers and to demand the best possible products from manufacturers. In Bevier's case, this meant asking for something that had not even been invented yet.

Sarah Splint herself, the publicity agent, was evidence of the rapidity with which the movement had established itself as a source of cultural authority. She and her business partner Elizabeth Scott, opened an agency in New York City which they described as, "a modern and essential service for advertising agents and manufacturers of women's products." The point seems to have been to connect the people who wanted to market goods to female consumers with women who could write about these goods in women's magazines. Splint seems to have been a freelance writer and editor on domestic issues. She wrote cookbooks and household management books for Crisco and served as the food editor at McCall's Magazine during the 1930s. As consultants, Splint and Scott thereby supplied manufacturers with advertising which was not free—they collected fees themselves—but which did not have the look of advertising. Instead of a blatant attempt by the Knox Gelatin company, for instance, to ply its wares, one would read an informative article by a professional home economist (ideally) who might offer several useful recipes and suggest that Knox gelatin be used in them.[215]

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[214] U.S. Fireless Cooker to Isabel Bevier August 19, 1908, Box 1, Human and Community Development Department Correspondence, University of Illinois Archives.

Splint's more famous peer, Christine Frederick (1883 – 1970), became a national authority on the homemaker as consumer, consulting with advertising firms on how to reach women consumers most effectively. In 1929, she published *Selling Mrs. Consumer*, "a manual for advertisers and manufacturers," because she believed that "the trinity of consumer/distributor/producer' had helped raise the standard of living for all Americans." Frederick wrote for women's magazines and turned her own home into an experiment station, complete with rationalized test kitchen. Although she had not trained in home economics, she, like Splint and Scott, represented the early success of the movement which made it possible for women to have careers in business by presenting themselves as links to a particular market—women. Frederick, however, had more allegiance to business than to women, encouraging faith in advertising and denigrating the intellect of ordinary women, rather than agitating for higher standards of truth in the field or helping to create more skeptical consumers.[216] As Carolyn Goldstein finds, Frederick's pro-business approach angered other home economists who felt their duty lay in the education of the consumer rather than the producer.[217] Because of an uneasy relationship with business interests, home economists were not always in harmony with the professional women their field had helped to create.

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[215] Engraved card, undated, Box 33, folder 42, NYSCHE Papers.

At the same moment that manufacturers were offering home economists roles as authorities, they were already co-opting them[218]. As Katherine Parkin writes in "Campbell's Soup and Traditional Gender Roles," companies like Campbell's picked up on the liberationist rhetoric of the era in order to sell more soup. Parkin quotes a 1919 Campbell's soup advertisement addressed to homemakers that acknowledged that, "you probably know a great deal more about diet and food-values than your grandmother knew. Every intelligent housewife studies these questions now-a-days." Although Parkin does not make the connection to the home economics movement, Campbell's was clearly referring to the new rhetoric of modern domesticity. The ad spoke to young women who had taken home economics courses in high school, at least, if not in college. It recognized that women had been offered a new way to think about themselves in their homes—as experts. The company tried to sell its soup as a marker of modern domesticity—freedom from the traditional task of making soup from scratch. Parkin notes, too, that Campbell's emphasized the cleanliness and efficiency of its kitchens, even going so far as to imply that the corporate kitchens could produce better soup than could a home kitchen. This claim also depended on women's exposure to the notions of professionalizing household tasks. Just as Ellen Richards, MIT chemist and home economist, had felt unashamed to let experts mend her husband's clothes, so should the modern woman feel she was doing the correct thing in letting a huge corporation make her family's soup.[219]

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[216] Janice William Rutherford, *Selling Mrs. Consumer* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2003) 146, 147. Rutherford's biography of Frederick provides a brief discussion of home economics as part of the context in which Frederick emerged as a national figure, but primarily portrays Frederick as a self-created expert.

[217] Carolyn Goldstien "Part of the Package," in *Rethinking Home Economics*. Especially see pages 274–275.

Corporations such as Campbell's began creating positions for their own staff home economists, equipping them with test kitchens and experiment budgets. For academic home economists, this was a mixed blessing. The creation of these roles meant more jobs and higher salaries for their graduates, which created more justification for their departments to exist. Clearly they were not just training women to be housewives, but were actually expanding the opportunities available for women in business and supplying the corporate world with trained workers. But on the other hand these corporate home economists did not enjoy the perfect freedom of the university laboratory. They had to endorse the products of their employer. Although they would have had a role in creating these products, they would have had to collaborate with corporate marketing agents, who might have had limited interest in nutrition. For such a woman to be known as a home economist both bolstered the field's authority, by making it a legitimate occupation with social authority, but it also weakened the field by abandoning many of its core values.[220]

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[219] Katherine Parkin, "Campbell's Soup and Traditional Gender Roles" in Sherrie A. Inness, ed. *Kitchen Culture in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 63, 58.

[220] For a recent example of the corporate sponsored expert, see a 2002 TV advertisement for Reynold's aluminum foil in which two women identified as home economists and wearing lab coats appear in a family's kitchen to teach the man of the house how to cook food in aluminum packets. I will discuss this further in my conclusion.

The public's acceptance of the industrial expert easily expanded to include domestic experts, but as a group, Americans were not as willing to accept the more radical messages of the movement, including its aesthetic and its emphasis on moderation. Consumer culture itself battled handily against old ideas of modest living by providing goods at all prices that promised to make consumers feel like members of the affluent classes. Fashion outran consumer education without much of a contest and throughout the 1920s Americans spent their money on increasing variety and numbers of consumer goods. As they bought their way into debt, they trusted their impulses far more freely than the words of any domestic scientist speaking from the cool of an academic laboratory.

Ellen Richards offered an early warning against consumer culture and urged home economists to recognize and advertise their own unique abilities to battle trends. In 1909, she spoke to the annual conference of the American Home Economics Association. This was the first year they met under their new name and Richards attempted to impress upon the membership the significance of the stance they were taking. She told her audience that "At present we feel our homes are covered with a flood of commercial ideas. When these are drained off we have full hope that the best kind of home will emerge." The best kind of home, Richards argued, was one in which daily life was based on ideals, rather than on constant change.[221]

Home economists were organizing "an authoritative association" to instill these ideals in the next generation of Americans. In this work, Richards told her peers, "We are stemming a tide. I hope we are not sweeping back the ocean with a broom—a broom of fashion, of commercial exploitation, of mercantile temptation."[222] Richards warned her cohorts in the movement to beware that their commitment to the most rational and modern methods was not subverted by the cult of the new that made companies dedicate ever greater budgets to marketing and advertising departments.

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[221] Ellen Richards speech, no title, *Journal of Home Economics* 1 (February, 1909): 24.

Despite the best efforts of the movement, however, Americans continued to be swept into a future in which desire for consumer goods seemed to matter more than the ideals that home economists tried to instill. When the Great Depression struck in 1929, home economists were probably among the least surprised or alarmed people in the nation. Although the years since the war had been a period of growth and positive publicity for the movement, the lessons of conservation and rational living were clearly being disregarded. In 1931, an editorial in the JHE mused on the field's prescience

"In trying to find 'thoughts for thrift week' a year ago, the JOURNAL [*sic*] spoke of the anomaly between the idea of thrift and the prevalent business philosophy that prosperity depended upon free spending and wondered whether the stock-market break of November, 1929, would make careful spending look more important. . . January, 1931 finds the advocates of wise spending no longer like prophets crying in the wilderness, but in general favor as public speakers and teachers."[223] The depression, horrible as it was, gave home economists another chance to convince Americans that radical new thinking about the domestic environment was the only way for ordinary women and men to exert control over their own lives. Or, as the JHE editorial put it, "for this slight beneficent breath of the ill wind, let the upholders of old-fashioned thrift give heartfelt thanks."[224]

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[222] Ibid., 24–25.

[223] Editorial, "Thrift Week and the Employment Crisis," *Journal of Home Economics* 23 (January 1931): 57.

[224] Ibid..

Chapter Five: "It's Up to the Women"

In 1933, a Washington D.C. newspaper reported that

> The White House family will lunch today on a "low cost menu" from Cornell University's school of home economics. There will be hot stuffed eggs with tomato sauce, mashed potatoes, prune pudding, brown bread and coffee. Mrs. Roosevelt has promised Miss Flora Rose, head of Cornell's Home Economics Department, to use a full week of low cost menus. The idea is that this may publicize the menu and help housewives all over the country to plan moderate-priced meals. . .[low cost meals] will pre ordered for the family, when no guests are present.[225]

The announcement was a home economist's dream-come-true. The movement had gained access to the most important kitchen in the country and its message was being spread by one of the most famous women of the century. The meal itself was a model of conservation. By substituting eggs for meat, brown bread (made with rye flour, cornmeal and graham flour) for white and dried fruit for fresh, the menu saved money while providing important protein, fiber and vitamins. It would have served equally well as a war time meal, meatless, wheatless, and using preserved fruit.

For home economists the depression and war had much in common. Both offered a chance to augment cultural authority and equally to affect the domestic habits of the nation. Convincing Eleanor Roosevelt to model conservation menus was important not just because she was the president's wife, but also because she was a member of the elite. If a balanced and thrifty meal was good enough for one of America's first families (who also happened to be the "first family") then it would surely be good enough not just for the struggling poor, but also for the ambitious middle class and even the wealthy. In order for the messages of nutrition and frugality to spread, they must be phrased in such a way as to overcome the power of fashion. In a home economist's ideal world, such meals were good enough to be served to company, no matter how lofty. Despite the fact that Roosevelt drew the line at serving economy meals to foreign dignitaries, her public use of the recipes made home economics an affair of state.

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[225] No author, "Roosevelts Are Eating 'Low Cost Menus' to Publicize Plan and Aid Housewives," unidentified newspaper clipping, with hand written "Washington, D.C..," March 21, 1933, Box 19, Folder 18, NYSCHE Papers.

The depression offered home economists another chance to achieve the goals for which they had striven during the First World War. This time it could even be argued that the nation had arrived at its crisis by not following home economists' advice. The Depression might be seen as a cruel, but nonetheless effective teacher. Home economists mobilized against the privation of the period, but not necessarily against its lessons. In 1933, Annette Herr, a home economics teacher, claimed that because of the depression, "the education work in home economics is due to become one of the most important activities carried on in the interest of society."[226] While the field had been important before the crash, Mary Sweeney wrote in 1932, it had become somewhat caught up in the rise of consumer culture, for "in the years when wages and incomes were steadily rising, standards of living could be progressively improved by additions to income." In other words, Americans could buy their way into the modern era simply by acquiring (so-called) labor saving devices. The crash brought this blithe progress to an end and revealed the field's true potential: "Today the situation is entirely changed. At present people are coming to realize that improvement or even maintenance of standards of living will depend upon increased maintenance of scientific information and the application of trained managing ability."[227] Herr and Sweeney both saw the depression not as a temporary set-back, but as a permanent change in the American economy. As such, it required an adjustment in thinking about economic life in general. Americans were going to have to learn the lessons that home economists were so eager to teach them—how to think of the home rationally as an enterprise, rather than emotionally as a haven. Reflecting on "The opportunities and responsibilities of home economics in the present situation," Frances Swain encouraged home economists "to do our part in an education which shall prevent a recurrence of such periods of uncontrolled spending as we saw in 1929 –1930 and the following road of leanness, out of which we hope the road is turning." For her part, Swain insisted that consumer education was the key to national economic stability, but also that this would not be meaningful or effective without public attention to the conditions of labor. Supply and demand must be analyzed and understood publicly if destructive cycles were to be avoided in the future.[228]

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[226] Annette Herr, "Readjustments in Home Demonstration Programs to Meet the Present Economic Situation," *Journal of Home Economics* 25 (April 1933): 290.

The mobilization of home economics resources to deal with the crises of the Great Depression and the war marked the beginning of the end for the first phase of the movement. As practitioners marshaled their forces to face the crisis, the field was already in a period of transition that would move it away from the ideals of the first generation. This chapter discusses the work which home economists did during the Depression and suggests reasons why the messages of the movement's first generation were diluted by the 1950s. By the time the Second World War had ended, cultural shifts in American society had emptied home economics of its missionary zeal. Although the field continued to grow and to thrive, its parts became more socially accepted than the whole. While no one would be surprised, for instance to hear of a student majoring in nutrition or child development or interior design today, most people would find the idea of a home economics major amusing. The field is one that people associate with baffling high school courses in which aprons were sewn or sauces made with no seeming connection to the world beyond the classroom. Cultural reactions to the Depression, the emergence of the post war consumer culture, and changes in gender role ideology all caused rifts in the field that shifted its central themes and popular reception.

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[227] .Mary Sweeney, "Responsibility of Home Economics Teachers in their Communities in the Present Economic Crisis," *Journal of Home Economics* 24 (October 1932): 880. Sweeney was principal of the Merril Palmer School in Detroit, a home economics high school.

What happened to home economics was not unusual for a movement born in the progressive era. In fact, home economics fared quite well if compared to other movements that flourished in the first thirty years of the twentieth century. Unlike socialism or the peace movement, home economics did not lose any ground after the Second World War. Students continued to enroll in its departments and career opportunities for graduates continued to grow. What the movement lost was its fervor, its "movementhood."

The Cold War made life difficult for progressives, particularly on college and university campuses. Home economics may have owed its survival in this era to the fact that it could so easily be misunderstood as a reactionary trend. A nation in search of security might welcome the notion that young women in college were learning nothing more subversive than how to coax their families' fickle appetites. The subject seemed safe. As the first generation of home economists retired or died, the pioneering spirit

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[228] Frances Swain, "Opportunities and Responsibilities of Home Economics in the Present Situation," *Journal of Home Economics* 25 (November, 1933): 747.

faded with them. Innovators still worked within the movement, but they were explorers in specific fields rather than champions of a social ideal. The project of making women's work in the home more efficient continued, but the project of raising the social status of this work did not. Home economics provided women with professional roles outside the home, but failed to get the public to accept unpaid work in the home as truly professional.

As the feminist movement of the 1970s began in the 1960s, many departments changed their names to reflect the fact that they had become professional training schools and that homemaking had never achieved the status of a profession, as the founders of the movement had so dearly hoped. A woman who was a home economics major at Cornell in the late 1950s remembers feeling bemused by the requirement that she make a cherry pie as part of her training in early childhood development.[229] Without the comprehensive vision of the early movement, its remnants (left overs?) may well have seemed regressive, anti-feminist even. In the last hurrah of the first wave, however, as they battled the Great Depression, home economists experienced a gratifying sense that the world needed them.

The Era of Adjustment

The field flourished in this period not simply because its practitioners saw the chance to be heroic in response to the Depression, but also because the 1930s were an era of international interest in the rationalization of social life, for better and for worse. In 1931, I. Thomas Hopkins of Teachers College at Columbia University declared that home economics education now faced "The greatest opportunity of its whole history." In an era of "adjustment," Hopkins warned, it would only succeed if it offered youth a vision of "new home in a new social life—constructive, pragmatic, dynamic."[230] His language was that of a futurist, perhaps even a collectivist, striving to remake society along lines inspired by industry.

The term adjustments reflected a vision of modernity in which massive social changes swirled around ordinary people and threatened to engulf them unless they made adjustments to their traditional ways of living. Modernity was something always nipping at one's heels, not a force to be shaped, but one to be reckoned with. Men and women had to learn not to hold their ground, but to think of themselves almost as processes, ever changing in adjustment to the continuous changes of their era. In the same 1931 articles, Hopkins predicted that "The decline in the importance of academic subjects, the increase in emphasis upon the education of the whole individual, upon conscious adjustments to changing social life, and the dependence of society upon the home for biological and social purposes are hopeful signs."[231] Home economics, in Hopkins' vision, was part of a movement that lead away from education that focused on learning about the past to a new education that prepared individuals to negotiate the future.

Home economists had attempted to forestall the depression long before it ever came. They held "thrift weeks" on campus and encouraged local farmers and townspeople to follow their lead, concentrating effort on saving money and materials through a conscious analysis of ordinary family habits. In 1920, Martha Van Rensselaer wrote to Mrs. George Hewitt, who was President of the New York State Federation of Women's Clubs to offer some ideas of subjects that the clubs might want to discuss.

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[229] In private conversation with me.

[230] I. Thomas Hopkins, "Prospects for Progress in Home Economics Education," *Journal of Home Economics* 23 (February 1931): 123.

> I have been strongly impressed with the fact that to ask a person what has been done in the East to reduce the cost of living , is to ask something which can only be answered in a negative way. I think I know what can be done, but it is a slow process. The psychological moment has only just arrived to accomplish anything so far as education of the spender is concerned. People have run away from thrift without knowing what kind of beast was pursuing them. They are interested in the cost of living and if it is called something beside thrift they are interested in means of spending an income.[232]

She was writing to Hewitt, hoping to involve other women because she believed that

> The women of the country can keep up a constant agitation against extravagance, and a concerted action to release labor for essentials and cut off the non essentials. . . With decreased production and increased consumption our standards of living will abruptly break if production and consumption are not corrected. The women of the country are in a position to change this situation.[233]

Van Rensselaer thought that if the gospel of moderation could be spread it might combat what she saw as the problems of consumer culture—wastefulness and lack of control. People could and should be taught to have modest desires, to resist the lures of advertising and want only what they needed. She also wanted people to see themselves as consumers who were part of the larger national and even international economy. In a list of questions to be handed out a homemaker's conference in 1919, she included "What bearing has the national debt on the family's use of money?"[234] In a letter to Van Rensselaer in 1928, Louise Stanley wrote that

> In a study of marketing and distributing costs, home economics has a contribution to make. Many products are now being supplied to the home in quantities and in forms which add unnecessarily to their price. If there were better understanding of the factors which may be charged to marketing and distribution costs, it would be possible to shift demand accordingly.[235]

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[232] Van Rensselaer to Hewitt, June 15, 1920, Box 14, Folder 1, NYSCHE Papers.

[233] Ibid.

[234] Martha Van Rensselaer, Farmers' Institute Homemaker's Conference questions, 1919-1920 manuscript, Box 11, Folder 31, NYSCHE Papers.

[235] Stanley to Van Rensselaer, November 23, 1928, Box 11, Folder 28, NYSCHE Papers.

Both women clearly saw the interests of consumers and of the national economy pitted against the interests of producers. Both believed that consumers could and must be educated to take greater control of the market.

In a pamphlet, "Thrift Program 1921-22" prepared for the Department of Applied Education General Federation of Women's Clubs by the Savings Division of the Treasury Department; *Office of Home Economics and of Extension Work, States Relations* Service, Dept of Agriculture and the Home Economic Education Service Federal Board for Vocational Education, this ideal of home economics was set out in terms which almost anticipated the depression:

> The Condition of the times is demanding that the American woman put her personal and household affairs on such a business-like basis that every penny possible may be saved and that her money may be used to the best purpose for herself and her country's welfare. Most of us know too little about investment, safe and unsafe; about banks and their functions; about our great Federal Reserve System; about raising revenue for national, city and municipal expenses; about legal transactions; about the management of our financial affairs.[236]

To remedy the common lack of knowledge, the pamphlet suggested that women's clubs offer courses on banks, the federal reserve, taxation, bonds, the IRS, thrift for children, investment strategies, and "Women and the law," a course in "Simple legal transactions which occur in every day life and which every woman should know."

In thinking about this future, home economists were alert to the international context of their movement. The month after Hopkins' article was published in the JHE another article in the same journal remarked that "Judging from the literature and correspondence that come our way, Germany is the country in which there is the greatest development of interest in household efficiency as an essential factor in national efficiency and hence as an essential item in the educational program." The article went on to note that the German government was encouraging interest in domestic science through the National Board for Scientific Management and that there was a large market in serious journals and magazines for women on domestic subjects.[237]

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[236] Pamphlet, Box 1, Folder "Misc Mim Material, 1917-1923" Office of Home Economics Papers.

In 1934, Anna M. Cooley, a writer for the JHE who had attended the fifth International Congress of Home Economics held in Berlin, reported back glowingly to her colleagues. The congress, hosted by the Third Reich, was held "In a beautiful room in a beautiful building. . . it was decorated with swastika flags, palms and flowers and presented a gay scene with five hundred delegates assembled. . . One is very conscious in Germany today of the united effort of all women working under the Reich for a better Germany."[238] That Cooley considered swastikas no more sinister than any other element of flower arrangement represented the common perspective of the era, in which the full implications of National Socialism in Germany had yet to be understood. Her interest in the closeness with which German women and their government seemed to be working was perhaps a point of envy.

This interest in the German model, in which home economics projects were well supported by the state reflects the fact that the field was amenable to centralized governmental programs. American home economists would have hoped to be part of a large scale federally directed rationalization of social life, complete with revaluation of female gender roles. What actually happened in Germany under Hitler was a reactionary return to imagined traditional gender roles. The trinity of "Kinder, Kuchen, Kirche" made a woman's kitchen a holy place, but also a prison. The domestic was valued as essential to society, but was understood as adhering only to private homes and as the only legitimate option for women.[239]

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[237] Editorial, "German Developments in Household Management," *Journal of Home Economics* 23 (March 1931): 262.

[238] Anna M. Cooley, "Fifth International Congress of Home Economics," *Journal of Home Economics* 26 (December 1934): 622.

The Nazi regime removed women from the sphere of paid labor in order to support their belief in the home as haven. Bonnie Anderson and Judith Zinsser quote a Nazi song in which German women's domestic labor is celebrated in a way that limits other possibilities for them: "We want to have wives again,/Not playthings decorated with trifles./No Woman in a foreign land has/The German wife and mother's gifts." [240]State sponsored interest in home economics, if it did not pick up on the liberationist possibilities of the movement, could condemn women to a kind of half life. Communism, on the other hand, did seem to fulfil some of the goals of the movement, as it institutionalized formerly private domestic functions. Cooperative living and public nurseries were both ideas that American home economists advocated. Indeed, both were recreated by academic home economists on college campuses. After space for a practice house, the most eagerly desired facility was the day nursery in which home economics students cared for the children of local working women.

The roles of women and of home economics in the range of emerging new social orders were topics of much concern for home economists during the 1930s. Both in their relief work and in public statements about the future of the nation, home economists seemed to agree that the nation, particularly its economy, simply could not return to the way it had been before the crash. In 1934, Chase Going Woodhouse, the director of the

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[239] See Daniel Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1998) for a discussion of the international connections between reform movements from the Progressive Era to the New Deal.

[240] Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, *A History of their Own Volume II* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1989), 213.

Institute for Women's Professional Relations, wrote in "Home Economics and the New Social Philosophy" that, "western civilization stands at the fork of the road." She noted that different nations had taken different directions down this divided path. Some had opted for communism, "the extreme left," while others "have chosen the extreme right, walking down it backwards with their eyes on the past." She found that America was "Not historically nor temperamentally likely to chose the left. And the women, at least, seeing where Fascism has placed their sisters, will hardly choose the right." Unlike her colleague who attended the meeting in Berlin, Woodhouse saw the Reich as an enemy of women's political citizenship. In the balance, she found the New Deal a satisfactory middle road, indeed a particularly female one and, as such, a triumph for home economists. Woodhouse wrote that women,

> Are not so tied to the past as are men. We have not been so much a part of the ruling and privileged groups directing big business. The philosophy behind the recovery program is more women's philosophy than men's and even more the philosophy of the home economist who has been teaching a forward-looking interpretation of family life.[241]

Reversing the traditional stereotype of women as the more conservative gender, Woodhouse argued that because they had enjoyed so few of the fruits of power, women were more open to social experimentation.

The Logical Channel

Earlier in the depression, home economics writers had been less than satisfied with the connection between their work and that of the government. In 1930, an article in the JHE noted that the field was not being taken as seriously by members of the national government as it might be. The Bureau of Home Economics had, in that year, been given an appropriation of some $137,281. The amount was larger than any previous funds and was almost three times the original $50,000 budget the Bureau had started with five years earlier. The mark of disrespect was not in the size of the budget itself, but in the fact that it was the smallest amount appropriated for any bureau and was less than one third the size of the next largest bureau budget. As a writer in the Journal argued, the Bureau was,

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[241] Chase Going Woodhouse, " Home Economics and the New Social Philosophy," *Journal of Home Economics* 26 (August/September 1934): 401.

> Suffering not from opposition but from indifference tinged with ridicule. Most men think of the home as an individual affair. . . the very idea of putting any domestic concern on a par with real business seems to tickle masculine risibles as surely as a bit of profanity or a reference to the Volstead Act.. . . Another thing that gives home economics hard sledding is the masculine superstition that women were born with the ability to keep house and train children and that wanting help is all folderol.[242]

For dedicated home economists, the persistence of this attitude was disheartening. The general public seemed to be responding well to the field, but legislators represented a particularly unenlightened obstacle to its success. Only a year later, the mood had changed and a writer for the Journal could confidently announce that "Before this is published, home economists will probably have been approached directly for aid in the educational campaign which forms part of the program of the President's Emergency Committee on Employment." Legislators might scoff that women's work was innate and in no need of investigation or funding, but the president himself knew better. The article went on to say that,

> As was the case in the food conservation campaign during the war, [home economists] were recognized as a logical channel for such parts of it as deal directly with the individual family and its expenditures. They are qualified to help both in planning relief work for those actually in distress and in pointing out how other families can direct their buying to "move

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[242] Editorial, "The Work of the Bureau of Home Economics," *Journal of Home Economics* 22 (January 1930): 116-117.

> the goods" whose purchase will do most to overcome unemployment in a given region and to use market conditions to their own best advantage.

Home economists, in other words, stood ready to save the American family from starvation and to rescue the American economy from collapse. The Journal writer's claim began modestly enough—the home economist was trained to deal with the family, but then went on to suggest that since the consumer was central to the economy, the people who educated this consumer could make or break the nation's economic future. Poor purchasing practices would mean an extended depression. Timely direction from trained experts could re float a sinking ship.

When Lilian Gilbreth, industrial engineer was appointed to head the women's department of President Hoover's Organization on Unemployment Relief, the JHE editors pointed out, she "turned at once to the United States Bureau of Home Economics for the special informational ammunition needed in the present emergency." Furthermore, the American Home Economics Association cooperated by aiding in assembling lists of home economics teachers and others who could be enlisted for the effective use of this ammunition.[243] The martial metaphors—"home economics teachers form a first reserve"—recalled what many must have remembered as the finest hours of the movement when home economics first won national recognition as an emergency resource during the First World War. In November, 1929 Florence Taft Easton, writing a food column for *Household Magazine* introduced her readers to "economy soup" made with the water left over after cooking fish and "conservation soup" which she identified as “a hangover from the war days.”[244] Easton’s reminder of the war suggests that she recognized the severity of the crisis as few around her did. Making connections between the Depression and the war suggested that the depression was something that the country needed to go through, that, like war, it was character building. This theme reverberated through much of the home economics writing of the period.

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[243] Editorial, "The Employment Crisis and the Home Economists," *Journal of Home Economics* 23 (January 1931): 57

In an article in the June 1930 issue of Household, “What Marriage Does to Women” Clara Savage Littldale told the story of an acquaintance who had lived a rich and decadent life with her husband before the crash. Her husband having lost everything, the woman then went out to work to support her children and to pay for the sanatorium where her wrecked husband had to go to live. Looking back on her life before the crash, she (supposedly) told Littledale that, “We were disgustingly worthless, foolish and worse. Thank heaven the crash came and with it the chance to prove that we had some moral fiber left.”[245] The culture of abundance that prevailed in the 1920s, at least in popular imagination, had been at odds in many ways with the guiding philosophies of home economics. The crisis of the thirties in some sense vindicated these philosophies and offered home economists the opportunity—the duty—to save the day.

In 1929, Flora Rose had written excitedly to Louise Stanley about work going on at Cornell that would later prove useful in emergency work: “I wish you were going to be near here this summer and could see what Miss Canon is doing with cost-of-living studies. She has six or eight young women in the field for two months and we are getting some interesting results."[246] Even before the depression began, home economists were focusing on the family budget as a place for reform.

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[244] Florence Taft Easton, “Some Left-Over Discoveries,” *Household Magazine* 29 (November 1929): 31.

[245] Clara Savage Littledale “What Marriage Does to Women,” *Household Magazine* 29 (June 1929): 4.

Paul H. Nystrom, a Columbia professor, argued that Americans would have to learn to live on much less than they had been. This change must come not just temporarily in order to ride out the crisis of the 1930s, but permanently in order not to repeat it. Home economists must work through academic education and consumer education programs to change patterns of consumption. Consumers should be induced to care about quality more than about style. This was not just a matter of interest for shoppers, but a national issue. As Nystrom wrote in the JHE, "the educational work in home economics is due to become the most important activity carried on in the public interest. An educated consumer, the adman's nemesis, could be the nation's hero.[247]

By 1930, Mathilde C. Hader, executive secretary of Consumers' Research Inc, an association of consumer researchers, felt certain that the hour had come for educated consumers to fight back against the powerful interests of producers and distributors. Because the government was more likely to "reflect the attitude of the most aggressive groups in society," the "passive consumer," needed her own champion. Hader argued that "the home economist, through her close contact with the homemakers of the country is in a particularly strong position to hasten this development." She did not base her claim solely on the assertions of home economists themselves, but argued that "that this is widely recognized is apparent from the attention paid to her by manufacturers, advertisers, and distributors, who, in a more or less subtle manner, compete for her favors." In other words, the proof of home economist's importance in society came from the eagerness of business interests to coopt "her" authority. Despite Hader's faith in them home economists were not able to maintain this authority with businesses. Producers and distributors may continue to use "experts" in their advertising campaigns, but their attention is fully turned upon the domestic consumer herself, rather than on the expert as intermediary. The expert is a prop.

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[246] Flora Rose to Louise Stanley, July 17, 1929, Box 8, Bureau of Home Economics Papers. Record Group 176, National Archives and Records Administration.

[247] Mary Anderson, "The Economic Status of Wage Earning Homemakers," *Journal of Home Economics* 24 (October 1932): 864.

The concentration on niche marketing which expanded enormously in the years after the Second World War which Lizabeth Cohen records in *A Consumer's Republic*, bypassed the home economist as authority entirely, so that the consumer-producer relationship could be unmediated except of course by advertising agents.[248] Cohen refers to the American Home Economics Association as being at the center of what she terms a second wave consumer movement that occurred during the depression. The first wave, according to Cohen, was part of the progressive movement of the years leading up to the First World War. For home economists, I would argue, there were not two waves, but rather one swelling movement supporting consumer education that was more and less assisted by outside movements at various times from 1900 on. Home economists saw both power and responsibility for women in their position as consumers. As Cohen argues, the 1930s was a particularly good era for consumer advocacy as the depression focused national attention on the role of the consumer in the economy. Although the New Deal famously did as much to preserve capitalism in America as it did to ameliorate the results of its chaotic tendencies, consumers, as Cohen shows, did end up with representation in the national government. This representation, through such entities as the Consumer Advisory Board to the National Recovery Administration was supposed to balance the needs of the consumer against those of business. Despite this interest in consumer protection, however, the model of the consumer-producer relations that emerged from the Second World War, as Cohen explains, emphasized the consumer's responsibility to maintain the economy, rather than the producer's responsibility to the consumer herself.

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[248] Mathilde C. Hader, "Consumers' Research and the Home Economist," *Journal of Home Economics* 22 (April 1930): 293-294.

It took some time, however, before home economists realized that their rhetoric and authority had been co-opted by industry and they continued to work with advertising agencies in the hope of supplying a positive (truthful) influence. Business was also still eager to work with home economists as particularly knowledgeable intermediaries between producer and consumer.

If government agencies sometimes seemed too lackadaisical about home economics as a social good, businesses were eager to make use of their authority during the crisis.[249] In 1934, by Dan Gerber of the National Association of Advertisers commented that of the advertising firms he had surveyed, "every organization heard from expressed satisfaction with its home economics department. . . and quite a number were able to cite specific examples of increased sales directly traceable to it." He saw the corporate home economist's role in the new economy as "the position of ambassador and liaison officer to the housewife, first to interpret her needs and then to assist in the development of plans and methods for gaining her attention and confidence." Gerber did not actually offer to meet the housewife's needs. That was the goal of academic home economics. The advertiser's interest was in finding out how to speak to homemakers in a language that they would respond to. That advertising agencies were using trained home economists rather than psychologists to interpret between women and business represented a brief moment in the history of both fields when home economists were the recognized authorities on women's lives, at least in relation to consumer culture. Garber reinforced this understanding when he wrote that, "I confess that one very worth-while product was actually crammed right down my throat by the head of our home economics department. I still think it was rather underhanded—she finally won me by enlisting the aid of my wife." Although Gerber gives home economists credit for being experts on women and their patterns of consumption, he deflates their authority in his final comment by suggesting it all comes down to the kind of female power that men have insisted women wielded for centuries—the personal, non-political, and emphatically unorganized. Yet in the end it is because the home economist spoke "woman," as it were, that she was able to communicate with Gerber, through his wife, some information which he eventually found profitable. It is implied that the fault was partly in Gerber himself, who did not yet consistently listen to women as experts.[250]

Demands and Opportunities

By early 1933, as the JHE confidently announced, "There is every indication that alert, progressive home economists everywhere are alive to the demands and opportunities of the situation." Home economists were indeed involved in many projects to alleviate the suffering of the depression. Activities they engaged in included consulting with state agencies to create budgets and dietaries, offering free classes to adults, preparing pamphlets on conservation, making lunch for students, teaching students to

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make lunch for relief project workers, helping families to plant subsistence gardens, leading groups in remodeling old clothes and making new clothing, underwear, and table linen from feed sacks. The were also combating the tendencies that had led to the depression by teaming up with department stores to create window displays of "inexpensive but satisfactory toys," for children. They were working in every venue not just to meet demands, but also to reduce desires.[251]

As Sophonisba Breckenridge, a University of Chicago professor of household administration, noted, the depression was the field's best advertisement.[252] She wrote that "in spite of a vivid appreciation of the disaster resulting from the depression, it must still be a source of the greatest satisfaction that we are facing a future in which the outlines of domestic, social, and economic security can be discovered." She claimed that many of the social reforms of the New Deal might well have come about through the agitation of home economists without the intervention of the crash, but that the depression might equally well have occurred without "the ray of comfort" that was home economics."[253]

Despite the eagerness of home economists to contribute their expertise, however, they frequently had trouble convincing many politicians and manufacturers of their importance. In 1932, the JHE encouraged a letter-writing campaign to support the Bureau of Home Economics in the annual budget squabbles. The Bureau was under attack in Congress and also in popular media for the expense of printing its bulletins. Defenders of the Bureau pointed out that the bulletins were prepared in response to requests from

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[250] Dan Gerber, "The Home Economist in a Business Firm," *Journal of Home Economics* 26 (January 1934): 20-22.

[251] Author Lucy H. Gillett, "Using Home Economics to Make the Most of What We Have," *Journal of Home Economics* 25 (March 1933): 208-212.

[252] Breckenridge was the first woman to receive a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. She got her degree in Political Science and helped to establish the school of Social Work at Chicago.

citizens, but also suggested that the criticism was about more than money. As a writer in the JHE suggested, private enterprise really disliked the Bureau because its bulletins made consumers more intelligent and wary.[254] In 1932, the American Home Economics Association division of food and nutrition had formed a committee on ethics related to advertising. In an announcement in the JHE, the committee argued "the need for a closer bond between advertiser and home economist." The connection was needed because although companies had been improving the accuracy of the information in their ads, and "many organizations have installed research labs and departments of home economists where tests are conducted which actually prove the worth of their products," deception remained widespread.[255]

Defenders of the Bureau also charged that,

> Some of the critics of the Bureau maintain that common sense and traditional experience are all that are needed to answer any questions about homemaking and that the federal government is exercising unjustifiable paternalism in assuming to dictate how its citizens shall feed and clothe their families. Anyone who knows the homemakers of the country knows that they disagree with both these opinions.[256]

The attack, apparently brought by legislators who opposed funding the Bureau appears to have involved two, intertwined arguments. On the one hand, the Bureau was spending money to teach women something they already knew—simply because they were women. This argument was both sexist in that it conflated woman with domestic knowledge, and disrespectful of the field which had worked so hard to establish itself as one of necessary expertise. It must have seemed particularly hard to endure such criticism

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[253] Sophanisba Breckenridge, "Home Economics and the Quest for Economics Security," *Journal of Home Economics* 27 (October 1935): 490.

[254] Editorial, "Charles F. Langworthy," *Journal of Home Economics* 24 (May 1932): 443-46.

[255] Author Margaret Chaney, "Truth in Food Advertising," *Journal of Home Economics* 24 (August 1932): 705.

at the very moment that their expert wisdom seemed most needed by the population in general.

On the other hand, this critique suggested that home economics was an overbearing, anti-democratic project. In fact, home economics did have a great potential for cultural insensitivity. The field posited right and wrong ways to function within the home and these ways were very much tied to white middle-class protestant culture. Apparently, what the critics mentioned in the JHE article were angry about, however, was not the tendency of the field to be part of the Americanization movement, but simply the idea that anyone, from any background, should be told by the government how to run their household.

Of course home economists did not consider their work repressive. From their perspective, they simply observed the problems of modern life as they related to the home and attempted to provide solutions. The JHE writer insisted that the Bureau existed because there was a constant and vocal need for it. And this demand for the Bureau did not just come from homemakers. As the JHE writer pointed out, corporate interests such as cattle ranchers and cotton growers were eager to have the bureau print bulletins explaining how to buy a cut of meat or how to "make cheap and nice cotton curtains."[257] It was clear to home economists, and, they argued, to consumers and producers, that the field had an important role to play in the national economy, but the federal government seemed slow to recognize this and support the work of home economists.

In 1933 Rose wrote to her friend Louise Stanley, to discuss getting home economists involved in relief work in New York state: "I do not know what to make of

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[256] Editorial, "Popular Publications of the Bureau of Home Economics," *Journal of Home Economics* 24 (May 1932): 444-45.

the situation in our state. So far as I know no meeting has been called." Rose then wrote to "Mr. Schoellkopf, who is the Commissioner of the Board, which disperses relief in this state," to let him know that she hoped that any board appointed would have a representative from Cornell. Scheoelkopf was Chairman of the New York State Temporary Relief Administration (TERA). The situation as it stood seemed ill-advised to her:

> So far no women have been included in their deliberations with the exception of a dietician whom they have employed in the New York office. If I see you any time soon I would like to talk to you about that situation because I think it holds up much that might be done that would be of benefit to NY State.

Home economists —women— were ready, willing, and exceptionally able, Rose implied, but their talents were being ignored. The old problem, the problem which had inspired the movement—that women's talents were being wasted—continued in this period when their talents were so particularly needed.

In another offer of help to the (TERA) in New York, Rose wrote that in the previous summer—1932—Cornell's extension service had

> Received S.O.S. calls from all parts of the state for help with food preservation lessons, when the vegetable surplus was at its seasonal height. The force of home economics teachers at the College and resident at county seats was overwhelmed with requests for help in ways of preparing and using subsistence garden foods not only in canning, but in the planning of the daily meals as well.

Despite the flood of work, the college offered its faculty and staff to public service "because it has an organization and personnel which it believes is peculiarly suited to be of assistance in this emergency." In asking for the support of the local TERA, Rose supplied a list of college juniors and seniors "who have been given special training for

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[257] Ibid., 446.

volunteer service and who stand ready to act as assistants in their home communities." The department would even give up its students temporarily, allowing them to take home the important lessons they had learned in their home economics training. It is significant that Rose only offered upper division students as soldiers. She was only going to offer girls who were experts and she firmly believed that it took at least two years of training to reach a useful level of expertise. For the critics who believed that all women learned the depth and breadth of their craft at their mothers' knees, such a stipulation would have seemed absurdly overcautious.[258]

Frederick I. Daniels of the New York State TERA responded to Rose to thank her for all her offers and to warn her that funds were limited and "I am afraid that the T.E.R.A. may not appear as generous as is your Department."[259] He could only offer to pay demonstration agents for certain pre-approved tasks such as supervising canning. Undaunted, Martha Eddy, of the College of Home Economics answered Daniels in Rose's absence to pledge that ""The College staff, the county and city Home Demo Agents, and the home economics trained home bureau women of the state are ready to work with you on any program that will help to meet homemaking needs of the homes of the state at this time."[260]

In other states, collaboration between academic home economists and federal relief programs was proceeding along various tracks. The California state Emergency Relief Administration office asked that Ruth Okey, one of Berkeley's top home economists, be "loaned to us in an advisory capacity" to serve as "expert for California" on domestic conservation matters. The Works Progress Administration, meanwhile, provided workers to assist in Berkeley nutrition labs where Agnes Morgan, head of the department, was conducting experiments in canine nutrition. In Massachusetts, Simmons College offered a six week training course in nutrition for students to work in the Social Security Administration. The program was both praised and publicized by Marjorie Heseltine of the Children's Bureau.[261] In addition, students in an introductory housing course visited Works Progress Administration housing in the area.

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[258] Flora Rose to Frederick I. Daniels, June 2, 1933, Box 19, Folder 15, NYSCHE Papers.
[259] Frederick I. Daniels to Flora Rose, June 6, 1933, Box 19, Folder 16, NYSCHE Papers.

By 1934, home economists recognized their own influence reflected in some facets of New Deal projects. A committee of AHEA members reported that the National Recovery Administration (NRA) codes designed to protect the consumer, though not as thorough as they should be, were striking the right note. Two problems with the codes were that the NRA was rushing to publish them, rather than taking time to consider their theoretical framework and that the ideas they involved were very new and perhaps not yet entirely digested. As an article in the JHE argued, "The whole idea of the consumer as partner with owner-management and labor in a business enterprise is a new one. . . which has little or no organized interest behind it. The wonder is not that it has received so little attention but that. . . it has received any attention at all." A major thrust of home economics work during the depression was in consumer education. Overall, the article reported, people in the government seemed to be catching on to the need for such education: "The home economists who have been following the code hearings most closely are surprised at the extent and rapid increase of intelligent, sympathetic interest shown by at least some NRA officials, especially those in the Consumer's Advisory Board." Home economists were told that they had a particular friend in Paul H. Douglas,

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[260] Martha Eddy to Frederick I. Daniels June 6, 1933, Box 19, Folder 16, NYSCHE Papers.

chief of the board's economic education division. He showed his friendship by acknowledging their expertise. Douglas had asked the AHEA to supply a list of all home economists available for national service. It seemed they were being called up at last..[262]

In this same year, a home economist felt entitled to exult that

> One of the fine outcomes of the depression has been the awakening of the public to . . . a realization of the splendid contribution home economics is really making to home and family . . . It has pointed the way to girls and women, and in many instances to boys and men, for making permanent the new ideas developed through the education program forced by the "hard times."[263]

That the depression could have "fine outcomes" at all was an interesting idea. Home economists were not advocates of leisure, after all; rather they worked to reduce domestic labor in order that women might do more work as citizens. For the Pollyannas of the movement, privation was merely an inspiration to creative substitutions and experimentation. In 1933, for instance, nutritionists at Cornell first served Milkorno, a substance they had invented to help needy families stretch budgets without sacrificing nourishment. Milkorno was equal parts corn meal and skim milk with one part salt for each part of the other ingredients. It was used as a polenta-like porridge or sweetened with raisins for desert and could be added to ground meats as a stretcher. Milkorno was served to Eleanor Roosevelt and other dignitaries in attendance at the annual Farm and Home week at Cornell in 1933. The following year, the college introduced Milkwheato, and then Milkoato. The Cornell Research Foundation, which had the rights to Milk-o

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[261] Department of Home Economics, *Annual Report of Department of Home Economics*, 1937-1938, Box 3, Folder 27, Simmons College Department of Nutrition Records, Simmons College Archives.

[262] Editorial, "The Consumer and the NRA," *Journal of Home Economics* 26 (January 1934): 30-31.

[263] Adelaide Baylor, "Reappraising Values in Home Economics," *Journal of Home Economics* 26 (August/September 1934): 405.

family licensed them in 1934 for use by the public. As one newspaper noted, manufacturers could now produce them "in sufficient volume to feed millions of relief agency beneficiaries."[264] According to a Cornell press release in 1934, the Federal Surplus Products Corporation purchased twenty-five million pounds of milkwheato for use in relief. Because the products could be used as substitutes for flour in baking and provided milk supplement for families who might not have been able to afford milk, they could be very useful. Home economists expected their use to be recognized and exploited long past the crisis of the Depression. For researchers at Cornell's laboratories, the Depression had framed the question—how can starch be stretched and costly protein delivered in one product?—but it did not foreclose the options for the answers. It seems likely, however, that because they were introduced as a response to the Depression, milkorno and its siblings became associated in the public imagination with hardship, rather than with modernity. They were not regarded as the food of tomorrow, but rather as the foods of shame, and as quickly as consumers could return to the old ways, they did.

More than any other public figure, Eleanor Roosevelt joined home economists in their mission to convince American women of their social importance. As well as actually serving milkorno at the White House, she published *It's Up to the Women* in 1932. The book was a guide to Depression living, but it went beyond emergency measures to provide a commentary on class in America and to advocate moderation as a way of life. Roosevelt suggested that the homes which were more likely to retain their solidarity in crisis were those in which women had been accustomed to work. Roosevelt employed the rhetoric of tradition-based and idealized "woman power." Remembering that her grandmother had often told her that "You are a girl and I expect you to be more sensible and more thoughtful than your brothers," she modernized the sentiment:

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[264] Untitled, undated newspaper clipping , Box 19, Folder 15, NYSCHE Papers.

> I do not mean for a minute that we should go back to the ideas of that generation or that women should return to the old status. I am merely pointing out that women, whether subtly or vociferously, have always been a tremendous power in the destiny of the world and with so many of them now holding important positions and receiving recognition and earning the respect of the men. . . it seems more than ever that in this crisis, "It's Up to the Women!"[265]

While home economists saw the Depression as a moment for domestic experts and visionaries to shine, Roosevelt took the notion one step further and suggested that now was the moment for women to prove their true worth in society. Just as suffragists had partly won the vote through the strengths of women's contributions during the First World War, women might achieve higher status in society through their leadership in dealing with the current crisis. At the same time, Roosevelt's call to the women of the nation also reinforced older gender ideology which held that men and women had different talents and particularly that women's strengths were most often found in the domestic sphere. Like many of her friends in the home economics movement, Roosevelt accepted the connection between women and the home as natural, rather than culturally constructed. Roosevelt's feminism, indeed the feminism of the era, was complex, rooted as much in the past as it was inspired by visions of the future.

In her book, Roosevelt offered sample budgets and menus that had been supplied to her by Flora Rose, who was a nutritionist as well as director of the department at Cornell. The transmission of this information from the academic world to that of ordinary women through the first lady reinforced her argument about the potential of woman power. That she was using data supplied by female researchers was almost as important as the fact that she was supplying it at all. Roosevelt encouraged her readers to seek out "any menus prepared by a Home Economics college," to "see if it is possible to buy one's supplies more economically and have a nourishing and balanced diet at a lower cost," further legitimizing not just Rose's work, but the work of the entire field.[266] Her own use of the White House as a platform for social reform emphasized the emerging roles for women in public life.

In *It's Up to the Women*, Roosevelt explicitly drew connections between the domestic work performed by women, the national economy, and international politics. Concluding a section on working conditions for women she declared that

> If we women who are usually the ones most concerned in keeping peace, whether it is peace between nations or peace between the employer or employee, do not concern ourselves with working conditions as they affect the social conditions of our day, then we can hardly expect that any advance toward a satisfactory solution of these problems will be made in the future.[267]

In the foregoing section, she had argued that domestic work should be professionalized in order to make it more attractive to workers and that "the business of running a house can and should be organized on a regular business basis and the sooner we accept this necessity, the sooner some of our employment problems will end."[268] Like Van Rensselaer, Roosevelt believed that rational organization of the domestic workspace was a vital step towards permanent national economic stability.

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[265] Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, *It's Up to the Women* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1933), 262-3.

[266] Ibid., 43.

[267] Ibid., 236.

[268] Ibid., 235.

In 1935, she put these ideas into practice when she reorganized the White House kitchen according to home economics principles of efficiency. Ruth Van Deman of the Bureau of Home Economics wrote that

> The new White House kitchen of course embodies the modern ideas about grouping equipment into work centers to save waste motion and keep the different jobs moving along in smooth sequence. . . no one questions that it was the sympathetic understanding of what goes on in a kitchen on the part of one in authority upstairs which led to the remodeling of the White House kitchen below stairs.[269]

Such a project would have involved careful analysis of work patterns in the kitchen—what sort of task was performed where, when, and by whom—and discussion with the people who performed the work.. Roosevelt's remodeling may be understood as connected to her husband's public commitment to the working man. Eleanor Roosevelt spread the gospel of home economics by rationalizing the White House kitchen, but the reorganization also expressed, as Van Deman noted, empathy for the people who worked there. Roosevelt, as a member of the patrician elite, was not likely to have had much kitchen experience herself. Her inspiration for the renovation, then, came from her connections to home economists, particularly those at Cornell. Her own and her husband's particular politics flavored the gesture as well. The remodeling of the White House kitchen, seemingly unimportant, actually expressed the political strategy of this interesting political couple; they would be publicly seen to use their own advantages—education, social connections—to make life better for those who did not share their advantages. In addition, the remodeling may be understood as a transitional event in ideas about gender in the twentieth century. Following traditional gender thinking, it made perfect sense that Eleanor, rather than Franklin, was concerned with the domestic side of

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[269] Ruth Van Deman, "U.S. Kitchen No. 1," *Journal of Home Economics* 28 (February 1936): 93.

White House life. At the same time, the reorganization was a scientific, managerial project brought directed by a woman, Eleanor Roosevelt, with the consultation of other professional women—America's home economists. The 1930s seem to have presented American women with many of these opportunities to shift roles as they became bread winners, worked for the government, joined political movements and attended colleges in increasing numbers. Home economics at this point in its history was part of this general shifting. While very few boundaries were actually crossed, or, more importantly, erased, the era, and the movement in particular, was notable for the possibilities raised and, during the next two decades, unfulfilled. While Eleanor, for instance, was able to engage in domestic and international political discourse as no first lady before her, Franklin did not, correspondingly, involve himself directly in the planning of menus or the reorganization of the kitchen. Nonetheless, during this period, home economists were particularly interested in making it culturally possible for men in future generations to cross into the domestic sphere.

Boys Would Be Girls

At the dawn of the depression, many home economists felt that they had achieved a level of social authority that might adjust cultural understandings of womanhood itself. As S. Agnes Dunham, Superintendent of Home Management in Boston, wrote in a JHE article about home economists, a woman "has a definite reason for existence outlined emphatically and briefly in one word – citizenship." When her childhood ended, a woman "should be ready to support herself, to conduct her personal affairs with increasing wisdom, to take part in the life of the community, and to make a definite contribution to the progress of society." The definition of womanhood Dunham gave was pointedly free of gender roles. If the woman were a home economist, Dunham added, she should be prepared to play the role of leader in each situation she encountered. Dunham admitted that in most cases, she would be interacting with other women, but argued nonetheless that she would need a broad range of knowledge in the ways of urban, rural, and suburban life as well as exemplary personal and professional ethics. The title of the article "Myself Incorporated," reflected the growing sense among home economists that the properly trained woman, whether an academic, salaried employee, or unwaged wife, could and should be considered a professional.

The growing emphasis on woman as professional coincided with an emerging interest in crossing gender lines in home economics education. Writers to the JHE described experiments in teaching male high school students homemaking skills and advocated family education for college men and required courses in nutrition to be given through physical education departments. For three weeks in 1930, male public school students in Muncie, Indiana, attended home economics courses while female students attended "industrial arts" courses. As Ella Hollenbeck, publicity chairman for the Home Economics Department of Muncie City Schools noted, "boys will be boys – sometimes, and sometimes girls would be boys and boys would be girls. At least there are times when girls and women wish for the ability to do some kinds of work ordinarily done by men, and certainly all men sometimes find themselves so hungry they would gladly cook their own supper."[270] Hollenbeck made no mention of the fact that the depression was beginning to destabilize gender roles as many women went out to work and men found themselves unemployed and taking part more actively in domestic life. For her and for other writers, it was not the depression that brought men into the kitchen, but the full development of the field.

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[270] Ella Hollenbeck, "Home Tinkering for Girls and Home Economics for Boys," *Journal of Home Economics* 22 (August 1930): 659.

T.A. Starrack, an Associate professor at Iowa State University, in Ames, wrote that, "boys are now clamoring for admission to home economic classes." He thought that this might be because of "woman's newly found freedom, her demand that man bear his share of the work of the home," but preferred to think that it was because home economics educators "have done your work so effectively as to demonstrate its values." In other words, men were doing housework because they were accepting the teachings of home economics, not because the depression made it necessary for everyone to pitch in for a family to get by.[271] In 1925, Lita Bane, who was a professor of Home Economics at the University of Illinois (later to become head of department and Associate Editor of Ladies Home Journal), wrote, "I believe we will increasingly draw boys and men into our classes." She made this assertion in an article titled "Major Objectives in Home Economics," and connected it to the need for home economics teachers to encourage research habits in their students that would lead to a lifetime of continuing education in the field. If more people were aware of what was going on in the field, she reasoned, more men would become interested in it as a field of study.[272]

A 1931 report to the JHE on home economics courses for male students at California State University at Long Beach revealed how such courses differed from those designed with female students in mind. The course was titled "Family Adjustments" and was given through the Sociology department rather than the home making department because "the sociological aspects of the home rather than skills are emphasized." Where women were being trained to be both analysts and practitioners, men were expected to play the role of objective observer in the home. Before the course was offered, a questionnaire was sent out to male students to find out what topics might interest them. Among the proposed topics were "legal points which safeguard a home," which presumably covered the business of home ownership as well as the more esoteric "Man must vision the ideals he wishes to realize in family life and consciously bend his efforts toward reaching these ideals." Some topics did not directly relate to home life, such as "the names, cost, and wearing qualities of standard woolen and worsted materials used for men's suits and overcoats," suitable for the style-conscious bachelor, while others, such as "something about table etiquette, home etiquette," insisted on a new understanding of the home and workplace as linked. This linkage, evident also in the suggestion of a course in "the application of art principles to the planning and furnishing of an office or home, as knowledge of color, line, spaces, proportions, etc." reflected the ideal prevalent among home economists of the era that the world outside the home was as much in need of domestication as the domestic was in need of modernization. It is not likely that many professional men of the day concerned themselves very much with the décor of their offices (except, of course, for psychoanalysts) so the suggestion that this might interest male students really seems like a reach made by women in the field.

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[271] T.A. Starrack, "Homemaking Course for Boys," *Journal of Home Economics* 22 (June 1930): 451.

[272] Lita Bane, "Major Objectives in Home Economics," manuscript, Box 2, Agricultural, Environmental, and Consumer Sciences Dean's Office Papers, University of Illinois Archives.

The Long Beach course relied much on the popular notion of "adjustment." While Unit I addressed the issue of getting along with people and Unit II concerned the history of the family as an institution, the other four units of the course dealt with "adjustments" such as "Adjustments in Family Finance," "Adjustments due to age differences," and the vaguely ominous "20th Century Family Adjustments." Clearly, one of the adjustments on the table was the adjustment of gender roles to allow men into the domestic.

In 1932, Cora Wendell, writing in the *Journal of Home Economics* explained that Americans were in the midst of a "changing order," which was having a profound affect on home life. Family bonds might grow stronger because of the crisis, or they might dissolve altogether. It was becoming increasingly important, then, for every person to have self-support skills. Because of this, she saw growing consensus for teaching home economics to young men. She argued that

> It is a well-known fact that many boys "cook their way through college," and that many others prepare their meals in their own rooms or apartments during the four years of college. Any high school system which fails to give boys the rudiments of good nutrition and a workable knowledge of food selection is missing an opportunity to help boys meet the present-day problems.

Wendell also advocated courses for men in "Home Crafts," "Applied Economics," and "Problems in Everyday Living." Except for the probable nature of the home crafts course—more heavy labor than decorative arts—all these courses were part of the regular curriculum for women.[273]

So dedicated was Mary Gertrude Arbogast to the equalizing potentials of the field that in 1933 she composed a "creed" for home economics teachers that included the words "I believe that I should encourage and assist any effort to spread the gospel of home economics, under whatever name, to boys and men, since ideal home conditions can only come through the intelligent cooperation of all members of the family." For Arbogast, who was superintendent of home economics in Troy, New York, the ideals of home economics education were simply not achievable unless men were part of the equation.[274]

In 1939, the JHE published an article by Zella Dayne Forsyth and F. Howard Forsyth, of the University of Minnesota at St. Paul, in which the pair wondered if there might be a rosier future for gender equality in marriage. The Forsyths, elaborating on her MA thesis, observed that "The equalitarian family has been to many an attractive picture of the new father and mother emerging from the past decades of feminism and cultural change to take their places side by side as equals in the experiences of marriage and child rearing." In this ideal, "the older patriarchal emphasis is to give way to mutuality." Setting out to find how close American homes had come to the ideal, they discovered that changes had occurred, but not through the influence of progressive thinking. The intervention of consumer culture was apparently more powerful than all the bulletins on home economics philosophy that workers in the field could produce. The Forsyths concluded that, "Homemaking is in some respects already moving toward equalitarianism," but not because of "feminist agitation," rather because so much of the work that was traditionally done at home by women has been taken over by the growing service sector.[275] So while some home economists began the potentially revolutionary work of introducing men to the domestic sphere, others focused more on the changing relationships between women's work and the larger economy. Not only was "women's

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[273] Cora Winchell, "Revelations in Home Economics Education," *Journal of Home Economics* 24 (May 1932): 425.

[274] Mary Gertrude Arbogast, "A Creed for Home Economics Teachers," *Journal of Home Economics* 26 (February 1934): 35. Arbogast died in 1933 and the Journal published her creed posthumously.

[275] Zella Dayne Forsyth and F. Howard Forsyth, "The Trend Toward Sex Equality in Homemaking," *Journal of Home Economics* 31 (April 1939): 249.

work" entering the profit sphere, women themselves were also going out to work in increasing numbers.

Girls Would Be Boys

In "The Economic Status of Wage-earning Homemakers," Mary Anderson discussed the demographic and cultural shift in women working for wages outside the home. Anderson argued that, "Women are not necessarily displacing men as workers. It is a question of division of labor, of adjustment of the sexes to the work of the world." In other words, there was no work that was by its nature male or female; the accepted gender of labor roles shifted over time. She admitted that in the current crisis, "Women have taken some jobs from men," but put it into the larger context of labor history in which during "the development of home industries into factory processes, men first took these jobs from women, and today machines are taking jobs from both."[276] Anderson defended women's work, stating simply that "A woman's so-called 'pin' money is often the family coupling pin, the only means of holding a family together." She had no idealistic interest in keeping women at home to protect the family haven, rather, she called on her colleagues to serve as consultants to the working woman. "In aiming at better homes," Anderson reasoned,

> And happier, healthier families no group is so well prepared to lead the way as are the specialists in the field of home economics. Their understanding of home problems, their ability to evaluate women's services, their efforts to balance family budgets with family incomes, all cause them to realize that strengthening the economic status of wage-earning homemakers is a vital step toward greater economic security of the family.

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[276] Mary Anderson, "The Economic Status of Wage Earning Homemakers," *Journal of Home Economics* 24 (October 1932): 864.

Anderson's argument was based on a realistic notion that women's involvement in the workplace was not just a temporary adjustment to the depression, but was rather an integral part of the modern economy.

Reflecting the tenacity of Victorian era gender roles, Anderson herself suggested in her conclusion that if the family wage could be raised, many women would be able to stay at home. Nonetheless, she does not seem to have been disturbed in general by the idea that in reality women would have to work and the family would have to absorb this change in traditional roles. Home economists, because they operated in the world of daily realities, rather than abstract ideals, could help society make the adjustment. Of course, this is what home economists were ultimately not able to do with any organized success. Courses in family psychology and child development notwithstanding, college education tended more and more toward the professional and away from the personally practical. One reason for this shift was that corporations who staffed their divisions with college graduates had more money to give to these colleges than did homemakers.

Some forty years later, the women's history and women's studies courses of the 1970s would raise the same issues Anderson had, drawing attention to the fact that while many women worked, the archetypal employee for whom the work world was designed was male. When Anderson wrote, home economics seemed poised not only to help out the nation in a time of trouble, but actually to change the tenor of American education. If other disciplines followed the lead of home economics, Cora Winchell argued in 1932, they would "humanize and vitalize the work of their courses that they will apply more definitely to the actual needs of home living." Home education might lead the way towards education that, without being solely vocational, was based in the real, rather than in the ideal.[277] Home economics would teach students to look at home life analytically, as well as training them to work in various fields connected to the home.

Inez Richardson, who was part of the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection, explained why the home economist was so suited to educate Americans in the nature of real life. Richardson wrote that "the professional preparation of the home economist cuts across the natural sciences and the social sciences so she is well equipped to interpret in understandable terms the facts that the experts have put in language not clear to laymen." The home economist, then, was the agent of reality; in the service of humanity, she made an expertise from mediating between the theoretical abstractions of the academic world and the needs of real women and men.[278]

"Thrift is UnAmerican"

In the spring of 1934, a public ceremony marked the dedication of the Martha Van Rensselaer Hall at Cornell University. Home economics luminaries from around the country had been invited and many were on hand as Flora Rose made a speech honoring the life of her partner and placing their work in the context of its times. She told the assembled crowd that

> By some strange chance. . .[the building] is being dedicated at that moment in history when, through the faulty management of economic and social affairs, the very conditions which it is its purpose to foster, namely the care, protection, security and enrichment of life, are threatened in a more wide-spread and serious way than ever before in the history of civilization. May we not perhaps under these circumstances suggest that a building such as this one, which arises in response to simple human needs, may be indicative of healing forces which society has been developing

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[277] O.C. Carmichael, "Home Economics in Higher Education," JHE 24 (October 1932): 852. Carmichael quoted Winchell.

[278] Inez G. Richardson, "The White House Conference on Child Health and Protection," *Journal of Home Economics* 24 (October 1932): 875.

> within itself and which will mobilize to aid in curing its ills and in re-creating it?

Rose's claim that home economics was a collection of "healing forces," was very much a sentiment of the first generation. Women of her cohort saw modernity as a dangerous business—full of potential benefits but also chaotic and with a tendency toward thoughtless destruction. The field of home economics as they imagined it would serve as a constant tool for adjustment. It would apply some rules to modernization and make sure that the best results were achieved in each shift into another mode of working or living. The particular arena of adjustment that they interested themselves in, of course, was the home, but they meant this focus to be a beginning, a base, a model, even, rather than an exclusive practice. People were going to understand adjustment through their everyday lives first, home economists reasoned, and then take this knowledge into other realms of experience—the marketplace, education, political organization.

What Rose could not see from her vantage point in 1934 as she reflected back on the life and work of Van Rensselaer, was that the field was already moving away from this holistic sense of itself as a collection of elements united in one common interest. Sub fields of the movement were becoming well established on their own, some, like hotel management, were soon to break away to form new departments. Consumer education, always a movement on its own as well as an early focus of the movement, flourished outside the academic setting. And, as Margaret Rossiter details in "The Men Move in," her contribution to *Rethinking Home Economics*, the atomization of the field in the post war period was accompanied by an increasing number of men working in the field. While it might be seen as a sign of the movement's success that men were being appointed to professorships and becoming heads of departments (often without adequate preparation in the field, Rossiter argues), it also meant the end of the movement as a possible channel for changing women's roles in society. The fact that a man could become a professor of nutrition or family psychology certainly helped raise the status of these fields, but it did not simultaneously raise the status of the many female home economics graduates who applied their education to their daily lives. In the end, professionalism remained a notion tied to rank and salary. Because they were so successful in creating themselves as experts and professionals, home economists of the first generation failed in their ultimate goal of spreading the wealth of status to all women.

The post war culture of abundance also changed the way in which home economics could function as a cultural agent. The war ended the depression and ushered in an era of prosperity. Americans seem to have been eager to forget the hard times they had recently endured. Anything that reminded them of the depression, such as lectures on the value of thrift, or recipes for wheatless meals, seemed tainted with the shame of having been poor. The central messages of the home economics movement's first generation, then, came into direct conflict with post-war culture. It became the citizen's first duty to participate wholeheartedly in the busy market economy, to buy all the new things that would keep the economy strong and which differentiated America from European countries, emerging more slowly from the ravages of war. In a bit of circular reasoning, America was strong because Americans shopped and Americans could shop because the nation was so strong. The seemingly endless supply of new products was the mark of capitalism's success. To participate in this free market economy was to fight communism by endorsing its opposite. Shopping became a patriotic act. Women were again told that they could save the world, that it was "up to" them, but the message urged them to put their trust in products, in the ingenuity of manufacturers, rather than in themselves or in domestic experts.

In 1956, Sociologist William H. Whyte declared that "as a normal part of life, thrift is now un-American."[279] The ideal home was now identified by its gadgets, rather than its rational organization. While home economists were great advocates of having the best possible tools for domestic work, they were not in favor of newness for its own sake. The beauty-equals-usefulness mantra that they had repeated for decades now seemed eclipsed by the dogma that new-equals-good. This new dogma tied the private experience of home life more closely to the national economy than did the William Morris ideal. By always buying new things, a woman was supporting the economy. In a sense, this stronger connection was something that home economists had always hoped to forge, but its realization in the 1950s came with a different ethos than that imagined by pioneers such as Richards and Bevier. Home economists had wanted women to understand their work in the home as part of the larger economy, to take an interest in the means of production, including labor conditions, and to both borrow and lend ideas from and to business, industry, and the professions. The relationship as first imagined was to have been mutual. Educated women would hold manufacturers to honest advertising and would be articulate about the products they needed. The relationships that producers created in the 1950s were much more one-sided. Valiant American industry supplied the trusting housewife with a magical new appliance or food product and she did her part by buying it, using it, and replacing it promptly when the next model was introduced.

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[279] William H. Whyte, "Budgetism: Opiate of the Middle Class" *Fortune* (May 1956) 133, quoted in Elaine Tyler May, Homeward Bound (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 162.

Advertisements might pander to her, but she was not really supposed to think of herself as an expert. Skepticism was not an attractive quality in a woman.

This new model of woman as passive consumer was part of the more general shift in gender role ideology. Women had entered public life in greater numbers during the 1930s, working for wages, attending colleges, holding posts in government projects. Because these changes had all happened during, and in some cases as a result of the economic crisis, they were tainted in the cultural consciousness with the grime of the depression. American culture demanded a "return" of women to the home, as if the nation in its entirety could regress to a peaceful childhood when mother waited at home with a plate of cookies. Women and domestic life were re-cemented in popular culture and the kitchen, which had seemed a way into public life for the first generation of home economists, became for many women a prison. When Richard Nixon waxed rhapsodic about the American home at the famous kitchen debate in Moscow in 1959, he was boasting of a nation where the housewife had all the latest gadgets at her finger tips, not where she got an advanced degree and designed them herself.

Conclusion

Pat and Betty and Martha Stewart: Home Economics Now

In a series of television commercials for Reynold's Wrap aluminum foil that began appearing in 2000, a pair of lab-coated women appeared onscreen and identified themselves as Pat and Betty, home economists. Their coats bore the Reynold's company logo and they offered suggestions about how to cook with tin foil. A web site, the Reynold's Kitchen, features Pat and Betty and their extended tips on how to use the company's products around the house. Despite what one might think, given television advertising's habit of using actors to play experts, Pat and Betty really are home economists. The web site provides their professional biographies and both have degrees in the field as well as many years experience working in test kitchens and, in Pat's case, for state agencies. The two women were invited to appear on commercials for the company when its advertising agency "decided to change the focus of" Reynold's Wrap advertising to emphasize the product's versatility.

I was very surprised to see the two women on my television set and wondered what their sudden appearance might mean, for Pat and Betty are obsolete signifiers. There was a time from the 1930s probably into the 1950s when the home economist was a cultural figure. Certainly, she was not as widely recognized as the Fuller Brush man, but she had a post on the staff of major women's magazines and she taught courses in public high schools and she served on government advisory boards. Now, however, the home economist has passed into the mists of collective memory. Pat and Betty made me think about what impact home economics has had on popular culture. How has it survived outside of the Family and Consumer Science Programs, the Colleges of Human Ecology? What difference has it made to our culture?

Americans still expect and accept advice from professionals who are home economists, but they think of them as nutritionists, interior designers, family psychologists, and textile chemists. By the time the American Home Economics Association changed its name to the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences in 1994, most home economics departments had long since changed their names to rid themselves of the word "home." Cornell's College of Home Economics became the College of Human Ecology and the University of Illinois's home economics department is represented by several departments within the College of Agriculture, Consumer and Environmental Science. At Simmons College, the department no longer exists, although Simmons students may still take major in Nutrition.

Home economists still exist, but for the most part they work under many other names. Most people associate home economics with a high school class they may have been required to take in which they were offered obscure wisdom about cheese sauces or rolled hems. Because home economics as a unified topic has lingered longest in secondary schools, this is the image that remains. As Rima D. Apple, professor of Human Ecology and Women's Studies at the University of Wisconsin, writes, "rather than training girls in critical thinking and urging women to reach outside the domestic sphere, twentieth century home economics in the public schools taught a narrow spectrum of domestic tasks."[280] Indeed, when I began this project, almost every one I mentioned it to immediately associated it with an unpleasant and confusing high school experience.

When home economics is in the news these days, it has to do with high schools exclusively and continues to be misunderstood as simply cooking and sewing. In the wake of 1970s feminists' rejection of the domestic, the field also continues to be seen as a plot to keep women out of the professions. In a brief radio interview with Joan Jacobs Brumberg, Cornell historian and professor in the College of Human Ecology, Robert Siegel of National Public Radio asked "are we reading, in the Home Economics Archive, the documentation of the subjugation of 19th- and early 20th-century women or is there some feminist nugget in here, too?".[281] Brumberg replied that there was "in part," a "feminist nugget," and that what was important about home economics was that it modernized women's lives, but the fact that Siegel asked the question indicates that the field is still assumed to be anti-modern.

Even under its many new names, home economics still struggles to define itself against negative expectations. Virginia B. Vincenti, a professor of Family and Consumer Sciences at the University of Wyoming, describes the field as "in an almost continual state of rethinking itself."[282] In 1984, when Marjorie Brown, a professor of home economics at the University of Massachusetts, was asked to help prepare a report on the field she criticized home economists for what she saw as a too friendly relationship with manufacturers and "challenged the profession to ask itself constantly, 'Whose interests do we really serve?'"[283] The conflict which the first generation encountered between the project to establish themselves as expert academics and their mission to improve the lives

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[280] Rima D. Apple, "Liberal Arts or Vocational Training?" *Rethinking Home Economics*, 1998, 94

[281] Robert Siegel radio interview with Joan Jacobs Brumberg, July 31, 2003, National Public Radio Record Number 200307312005.

[282] Virginia B. Vincenti, "Home Economics Moves into the Twenty-first Century," *Rethinking Home Economics*, 301.

[283] Ibid., 304.

of ordinary women continues to trouble their heirs. Vincenti herself calls for change, arguing that "until our culture becomes less gender-biased, we will continue to have many societal problems that result from the marginalization of women, their ideas and values."[284] In other words, by sidelining women and "women's work," our culture shortchanges itself.

Pat and Betty, the Reynold's Wrap home economists do not appear on our TV sets to tell us about the ongoing identity crisis and commitment to social change in the field of home economics. They do not represent a sudden cultural yearning for the wisdom of Ellen Richards. They come to sell us tinfoil. Pat and Betty are a revival of the ideal home economists of an earlier era, but with an odd twist because that ideal has been out of circulation for so long. Rather than making seem like agents of the modern their lab coats and advanced degrees actually give them a retro charm. They put the kitsch in kitchen and this is probably where their value as advertising characters lies.

Another aspect of the Pat and Betty ads that struck me as odd was that they are shown teaching a man how to cook. In fact, more and more adds for domestic goods are directed at men. While this would seem to be a good thing, an encouragement to men to think of themselves as participants in domestic work, it is actually a sign of a movement away from valuing the work done in homes. Ads directed to men feature products that require absolutely no assembly or cleanup. Pat and Betty, for example instruct a young man on the wonders of cooking with aluminum foil—you just wrap the food in it, bake it, and then toss out the foil. And in the heretofore uncharted territory of male laundering, a detergent company offers men little pouches of detergent to toss into the wash. Presumably, measuring out washing powder is one of those mysterious things, like breastfeeding, that only women can do. Similarly, Nestle offers men and boys "hot pockets," a kind of pasty/calzone item which is kept in the freezer and heated in the microwave. It is advertised as a meal in one, not even requiring utensils, those fussy feminine implements.

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[284] Ibid., 319.

Men, of course, are not the only people being offered simplified domesticity. Advertising domestic products to men is possible because of a wider trend to convince both women and men that housework of all kinds is "too much," and that no one has time for it. Soups that one drinks straight from the can are advertised (by Campbell's) as the perfect solution for women who are too busy to stop for lunch. As these same women are probably also too busy for breakfast, several companies offer them sippable yogurts while Kellog's provides cereal bars with a pudding-like layer of milk built in. No bowls, no spoons.

The message remains that housework is women's work and advertising continues to insist that a woman's social status depends on her ability to keep her house smelling like apple pie or ocean breezes rather than dogs, cigars, and sweat—the male world. But advertisers have picked up on the idea that women think of themselves as busier than ever, or at least that this idea can be used to sell more products. Whether women today are actually busier than their mothers were is hardly the point. What matters is that we live in a culture that values busyness for its own sake. Those who are not constantly on the run between activities (preferably a variety of money-making and physical improvement) are suspect. Feeding into and off of this culture, advertisers assure consumers that they are sympathetic to the plight of the modern woman, almost always coded as a mom. She wants to do the best for her kids but she just doesn't have time.

Simple processes like roasting a chicken or making a cake are presented as Herculean labors. The subtext can be described as consumerist-feminist: "Who has time to be Betty Crocker anymore? We have active lives to live." In reality, manufacturers do not want people to make their own pot roasts or use baking soda as a scouring powder because they want to sell dinners and cleansers. What is happening in advertising, then, is not that men are being treated like women, not that it is becoming acceptable for men to engage in domestic work, but that women are being treated more like men—people who have no time for domestic tasks.

There is still an important difference in the portrayal of gender roles in advertising around domestic goods. A detergent is not sold to men and women in the same way. The little pouches of detergent marketed to men might at first seem to suggest that men are simply too stupid to do their own laundry. The real message, of course, is that men are a sort of gender aristocracy who have much more important things to do than clutter their minds with domestic knowledge. A man does not need to know how much soap to put in the dishwasher because there are women, and now major manufacturers, to figure it out for him. Although women are being appealed to now as impossibly busy people, the responsibility for domestic work is still upon them. This is part of their busyness. When men do the laundry it is not because they are super dads but because they need clean clothes and aren't married. When men microwave foods like hot pockets it is to feed themselves, not provide a "home cooked" meal for their family. Even in the instances where a man is shown preparing dinner for his family his way is made easier by prepared foods. In an ad for Hamburger Helper, when a wife jokes that her husband's "cooking" (adding pre-packaged ingredients to meat) is something she could get used to, he reacts with a frightened look. The message is that male involvement in domestic work is only ad hoc, not a question of identity. The nutritious breakfast, the white shirt collar, the "mountain fresh" bathroom are still all markers of a woman's success at achieving her gender. It is now also a marker of her gender that she feels oppressed by all that is expected of her—housework and personal fulfillment can not coexist easily.

Curiously, women can now escape temporarily from the stress-laden torments of household responsibilities by relaxing with some domestic arts and crafts. Martha Stewart has established a business empire by teaching women (her assumed audience) to concentrate on the decorative aspects of life. Stewart's name and aesthetic are more pervasive in discussions of modern domesticity and in the market for domestic goods than any other person's today. Her wide appeal comes from the fact that she promises her audience the ability to live beyond their means through the power of do-it-yourself cuisine and decoration. In the process, she firmly separates science from the home. First generation home economists might have admired Stewart for making such a good living through marketing domestic expertise, but they would probably have bewailed her disinterest in science and labor. The domestic projects she models on her television show and in her magazine focus on making things pretty rather than efficient. Stewart never appears in uniform and there is no sense that she is experimenting with anything. She offers her audience a way to climb the class ladder, if only aesthetically. Each object a woman makes under Stewart's remote tutelage gives her home "class." She knows this because Stewart herself is classy. Calm, blond, irreproachably Yankee, Stewart cultivates an air of old money. Her crafts are not about showing off how much money one has. Instead, they are about an imagined and constructed quality known as graciousness.

Graciousness is the opposite of the frenzied female lifestyle that advertisements portray. The gracious lady always has time to make her own soup and to sit and eat it out of a lovely china bowl. She probably wove the place mats herself. Many of Stewart's projects have a homey quality, but this is there to make them seem "traditional," rather than folksy. The craft activities are designed to make it possible for middle-class women to acquire many of the decorative touches that wealthier women may inherit or buy.

Stewart shares with the first generation of home economists the goal of making a profession out of domesticity, with one very important exception: Stewart's goals are limited to her own career. She has made a fortune out of presenting herself as the single most reliable expert on "gracious" domesticity, rather than presenting ways in which other women (and men?) can use domestic arts to advance their own careers. Her message is not that any home can be professionalized, but that it can be prettified. Indeed, the prettiness she encourages is subtly offered as an escape from the professional. Nothing she makes is necessary. All of her projects require us to disconnect from our workaday lives in order to calmly apply decoupage to plain glass bud vases. Her lessons in arrangement serve the purpose of a kind of collective occupational therapy. This is done in the interest of achieving graciousness in our homes to contrast with the assumed busyness of our non-craft oriented lives.

Stewart's persona as businesswoman never intrudes into her domestic classroom. She doesn't talk about board meetings, market shares or insider trading, but gives the impression that she is always just puttering about the house efficiently creating beauty with every step. She never wears a uniform and there is nothing experimental about anything she does. For her primarily female audience, she represents yet another set of impossible goals. Her steely calm never cracks as she challenges her audience to be never frazzled and always dexterous.

To her credit, Stewart attempts to convince her audience that there is pleasure in domestic work, that just being at home and concentrating on domestic life can be "a good thing." She is able to make so much money doing this, however, precisely because of all the other market forces telling women that they don't have time for homemaking. Attention to domestic aesthetics and to food made "from scratch," becomes a hobby, something like fly tying or model building, rather than a vital part of every day life. We make braided rugs out of old towels or hand blown Easter eggs following Martha's instructions (to cite two recent projects from her magazine) to "reconnect" with some romanticized version of womanhood when women's lives were themselves decorative, rather than actually productive or participatory. Of course the joke is that Stewart is a very modern businessperson who makes her money marketing nostalgia in the form of do-it-yourself projects.

I say that it is to Stewart's credit that she tries to sell domestic work as pleasurable because I think that this was one of the best things that the home economics movement had to offer American culture. Home economists of the first generation wanted women to take both pride and pleasure in their domestic work. And because domestic work could be a source of these emotions, they saw no reason why men might not also enjoy its practice. They assumed that domestic work could be satisfying because they believed it had universal value. I also think that there is a measure of independence to be gained in domestic knowledge. Unlike the first generation of home economists, I am not satisfied to let the culturally constructed connection between women and the domestic stand, but I also do not see the abandonment of domestic knowledge as a feminist act in itself. To cook, to make, or at least mend clothes, and to maintain an active curiosity about our domestic environment seem to me skills that make us more fit for modern life, not less so. By achieving a basic level of self sufficiency as to our daily lives, we maintain a measure of independence from forces of the consumer economy. Simply put, if you can sew a button on your shirt, you don't have to rely on a dry cleaner to do it for you (or a department store to sell you a whole new shirt). If you can make your own soup, you don't contribute to the mass homogenization of tastes and you take some control over your own diet. Much of domestic work may even provide opportunities for self-expression. That said, I am a terrible housekeeper and would rather never dust again in my life. Yet I do it because I know that despite my loathing it is perfectly easy to do and something that I can do on my own without even the latest implements. A piece of an old t-shirt does the trick.

The culture that home economics was created in response to has changed, but this culture has not yet become more amenable to the movement's message. Domestic work is still unvalued except, in the case of Martha Stewart, as a hobby. Ordinary women are encouraged to think of housework as an albatross. Ordinary men are not encouraged to think about it at all. Women's connection to food and to home is generally portrayed as both natural and a burden, one which can be lightened (with new improved products), but not one which can really be shared with men. There is some movement now towards increasing male involvement in child-rearing and this may lead to an increased connection to the domestic as, presumably their close relation to children is how women got stuck in the household to begin with.

When home economists set out to change the world, they did so within the confines of their culture. They attempted to make both women and men believe that domestic work has intrinsic worth and that knowing the best methods connects a person more powerfully to the world around her. They failed in this goal partly because advertising professionals saw that money could be made by exploiting the notion of housework as drudgery and partly because they themselves were not ready to shift half the burden of domestic work onto men. The first generation wanted to raise the status of domestic work and domestic workers so they made a modern, professional, analytical science out of all that related to home life. They stopped short, however, of calling for an end to the pervasive conflation of women with the domestic. They made domestic work, "fit" for men to do—serious and scientific—but did not then insist that men do it.

The culture in which the first generation lived and worked could not conceive of domestic work as something to be shared and enjoyed equally by both men and women. The work was so deeply gender coded that even the people who revolutionized it in every other way could not think of insisting that it was gender neutral. Home economists of the first generation did not emphasize the socio-political aspects of their thinking. They believed that housework was something that had to be learned in order to be done well. Its secrets were not lodged in a woman at birth nor could she just pick it up effectively at her mother's knee. They even went so far as to offer home economics classes to boys and men, but they did not take the next step of pushing for domestic work equality.

In part they did not see the need for this step because so many of them did not live with men and so did not experience this inequality first hand. They balanced professional and domestic lives but when they encountered sexism it was much more likely to be in the context of the work world than at home. Another factor in determining the limits of the politicization of the home economics movement was that the idea of married women in the paid workforce was still new and the numbers of women with families who worked still relatively low. The idea that women would pursue professions just as many men did was also new. As we know, this idea still causes cultural confusion, mostly because the work world was designed for male heads of families who relinquished all child-rearing and housekeeping responsibilities to women in an age-old pattern of gender partnership. As Alice Kessler Harris argues so persuasively in *In Pursuit of Equity*, gender ideology has very often obscured conceptual possibilities as well as limiting opportunities day-to-day. Of course, it is pure speculation to suggest that had the conceptual restrictions of their times been removed, home economists of the first half of the century would have argued loudly and persuasively for change in gender ideology. It is impossible to imagine precisely because it did not happen.

I think that there can no longer be any doubt that leaders of the first generation of the home economics movement intended their work to expand professional and social opportunities for women. Although, as Sarah Stage commented in 1997, "Historians have for the most part dismissed the home economics movement as a force for expanding women's options," this oversight has been significantly repaired by the collection of essays that Stage herself edited with Virginia Vincenti. In addition, the expansion of the field of cultural history has begun to allow us to understand more and more of human experience as actually "political," in ways that we did not recognize before.

Cultural history is also responsible for a growing acceptance of the ambiguous. I am thinking particularly of the work of Karen Halttunen and Ann Fabian who explore tendencies in American culture without coming to judgement. The contributors to *Moral Problems in American Life*, a collection of essays on changing notions of morality and American culture also lead the way for historians who want to see the past as it saw itself and then to consider the sources and limits of an era's self-knowledge.[285]

A movement need not be either radical or conservative to deserve attention. Historians who interest themselves in chronicling shades of gray suggest that it is perfectly possible to be both liberationist and restrictive at once. My own sense of the home economics movement is that many of its leaders experienced the movement as liberationist in their own lives. By creating it they created themselves, establishing positions that were at once outside and also compatible with traditional gender roles. Because they did not have the category of gender to work with in the same way that we have today they were only able to express the liberationist potential of the home economics education in limited ways. They could and did envision women making new roles for themselves in the professional world and believed, too, that they could change the valuation of women's work in the unpaid domestic sector. Because they focused all their efforts on changing the lives of women, rather than on attacking gender categories, however, their work was limited in its success as a vehicle for critique of society.

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[285] Karen Halttunen and Lewis Perry, Editors, *Moral Problems in American Life* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

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