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ABBE L. KARMEN

## PUTTING THE HOUSE IN ORDER

Women's Cooperative Extension Work in the Early Twentieth Century

*Maine's Cooperative Extension Service, in addition to its work with farm men, sent female agents into the countryside to teach women the principles of thrift, modernity, and efficiency in the home. How successful agents were at instilling modern principles is difficult to determine, but their experiences, recorded in Extension annual reports, reveal the tensions between women aspiring to professional standards and those whose work revolved around the home. In this article, Abbe L. Karmen explores the biases of the agents themselves and the force of traditional domestic patterns in rural Maine.*

In the early years of the twentieth century, the Cooperative Extension Service of the University of Maine, like others nationally, sent female home demonstration agents into the field to contact women with the aim of updating traditional farm practices through the introduction of scientific principles. As part of a growing cadre of professional women who directed their training to solving women's problems in the home, extension agents believed that they could elevate farm women's attitudes and housekeeping methods to a level equal to that of urban women, who benefited from new technology and labor-saving devices. Home demonstration agents recorded their fieldwork in annual reports, thus providing valuable documentation of Maine women's activities in the early twentieth century. In their reports, agents describe extension meetings and programs, list the number of women who attended, and discuss women's



Maine's farm communities were often isolated from the broader currents of agricultural and domestic change. To bring new techniques to rural areas, the University of Maine instituted the Cooperative Extension Service in 1910, first for men, and in 1915 for women. In both cases, trained professionals encountered resistance based in traditional modes of thinking.

*D. Richard Sturgiss Collection, University of Maine Special Collections Department.*

reactions to the meetings. As many of Maine's home demonstration agents were rural women themselves, the reports suggest the way in which women were divided as some gained new jobs and allegiances away from the home through higher education.

Maine's home demonstration agents were part of a broader home economics movement that developed after the turn of the century. Despite the dramatic changes brought by new technologies, new industries, and new forms of education and communication, society still perceived women's most significant activities as those centered on the home and its maintenance as a refuge from the harsh environment outside its boundaries. This ideological designation of separate spheres did not hold true in reality for all women; nonetheless, the dominant white middle-class culture prescribed the home to be the woman's domain.<sup>1</sup>

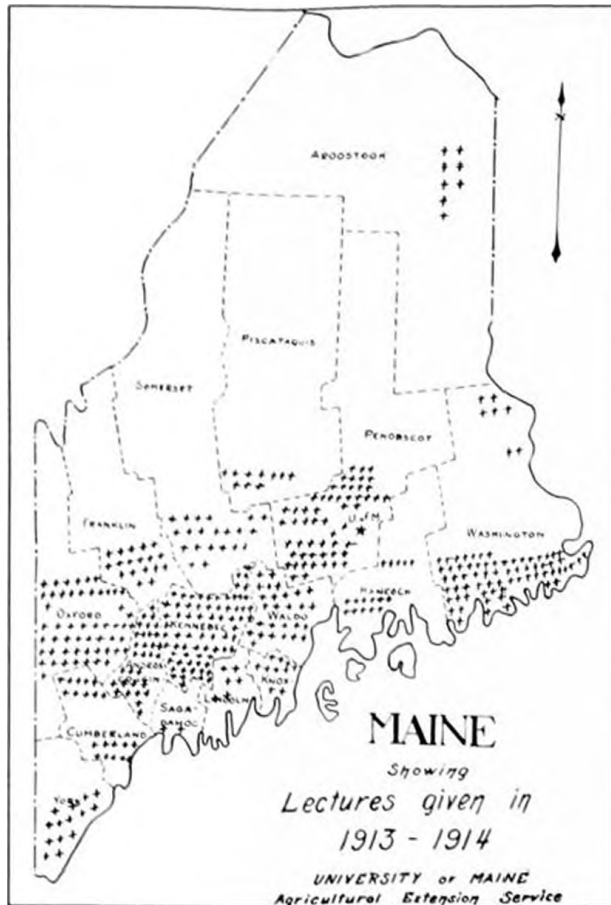
As concepts of scientific management infused other areas of American industry, a cadre of professional women emerged

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whose university and college education and training focused on women's work. Building upon a tradition of women's domestic efforts to maintain the model Christian home, these urban and middle-class home economics experts directed their energies toward updating women's work in an effort to legitimize advances in women's education and participation in the professions.<sup>2</sup> The emerging fields of domestic science, home economics, and domestic training centered upon the desire to bring women into the mainstream of technological development. Many believed that women's work in the home could be made equal in stature to men's work out of the home.<sup>3</sup>

As experts, home economists engaged in work that set them apart from the majority of women they aimed to educate. Despite their focus on the home and on women, home economists sought to improve a world of domesticity in which they did not actually participate. For the most part, they remained single, and those who married, childless. Lacking intimate connections with the home in a traditional sense, yet maintaining a direct bond to the home through their profession, home economists maintained a tenuous position straddling women's private space and men's public space. Home economists struggled to uphold their status as professionals while projecting methods and values onto women with whom they had little in common.

This dilemma, faced by professional women across the country, appears in the records of Maine home demonstration agents. Finding the concepts of thrift, efficiency, modernity, and rationalization absent from women's homes, agents discovered an environment that did not meet the scientific standards of the new home economics movement. They sought to change women's habits and attitudes in order to raise the material condition of their lives. Ironically, as educated women began their push for recognition of the value of women's work based in scientific principles — a recognition long overdue — their own role as educators and professionals deafened them to the voices and needs of the women they aimed to serve. Agents' reports highlight their efforts to legitimize extension work to their superiors at the university and the agents' struggle to uphold the



Cooperative Extension spread scientific information about farming, and later about domestic work, by sponsoring lectures and workshops across the state. This diagram of men's extension work from 1913-1914 reflected to a large extent the patterns of women's work after 1915 as well.

practices of scientific housekeeping with farm women who held a different view of women's work in the home. An examination of these reports provides an understanding of a particular group of women whose experiences mirrored those of home economists elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

The female agents who pronounced themselves so firmly were relatively new to the Cooperative Extension Service. The university had been involved in rural reform since its founding in 1868. Out-migration from rural Maine caused concern among rural educators and reformers who came to believe that improved agricultural education would encourage men to remain on the farm.<sup>5</sup> Faculty members frequently engaged in off-campus work addressing Grange meetings and conducting demonstrations and short classes on agricultural subjects.<sup>6</sup> Farmers' demands for more information warranted the creation of a separate division of extension work within the College of Agriculture in 1910.

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In tune with other states' extension services, Maine's initial program involved men and children but did not include women. Although both men and women participated in agrarian organizations like the Grange, reformers focused on men's conditions because they believed that men were key to the economic survival of the family. Not until reformers realized that women played a significant role in the decision to abandon the farm did they begin to focus on improving women's lot.<sup>7</sup>

In 1915, with the aid of Smith-Lever funds, the university appointed a home economics extension representative, Catherine Platts, to advise farm women on home problems.<sup>8</sup> A graduate of Simmons College, Platts worked with the home economics faculty and explored the strategies and methods of extension programs in other states. She evaluated the conditions of Maine women in small towns and rural districts through surveys, fairs, demonstrations, and public meetings and concluded that there were three central areas to be considered when dealing with rural women. First, women were hampered by custom and lacked adequate standards and proper training for their housework. Second, most needed information through person-to-person contact. Third, the majority needed to accept the idea that the problems of homemaking could and should be studied.

Pioneering extension workers like Platts created a plan that utilized a single lecture/demonstration approach. In the morning session, speakers lectured and demonstrated on particular topics. A discussion period followed. After lunch, participants attempted to complete their own version of the demonstrated procedure. As the program grew, agents introduced extension schools similar to those held for men in agriculture. These lengthier meetings convened for two or three days and covered projects of greater complexity — dress making, for example.

Platts organized the schools according to a laboratory "hands-on" program of teaching and learning. Women, she believed, would get the most out of each meeting by actively working with the subject matter. A local church or grange hall provided a familiar location for the school, and women agreed to pay all expenses except the train fare and board of the instructors.<sup>9</sup> In 1915-1916, Platts began speaking to groups of

women. These early lectures served as a bridge to further activities. Despite her careful assessment of the women's needs, Platts's language — she speaks of the lecture as a “wedge” to pry open the home for further extension activities — indicates her awareness of the potential intrusion upon traditional practices.

University leaders chose the subject of food conservation for the first year's extension work. As World War I drew America into its orbit, government leaders across the nation asked farm families to concentrate on producing crops that could be shipped overseas. Home extension demonstrations accordingly focused on cooking “simple plain foods, no... fancy cookery.”<sup>10</sup> Platts also held demonstrations on canning with the cold pack method.<sup>11</sup>

When the nation mobilized for war in 1917, the Extension Service divided the state into seven districts and assigned to each an “emergency” home demonstration agent. Supported by federal funding, agents instructed women and girls in “practical methods of increasing food production, eliminating waste, and promoting food conservation.”<sup>12</sup> Farm women's requests for help in other areas, such as clothing and health, made it obvious to Platts that Maine women needed peacetime assistance as well.<sup>13</sup> She suggested three lines of work for the Extension Service: clothing, home convenience, and health, including foods and nutrition. Through Platts's efforts, women gained membership to the Farm Bureau, and home demonstration work began on a permanent basis in three counties.<sup>14</sup> By 1923, home demonstration agents were operating in every county except Aroostook.<sup>15</sup>

What exactly did home demonstration agents do? According to Waldo County agent Virginia Lamb, they brought to the attention of the housekeeper inadequacies “which they themselves do not see” and offered solutions bedded in scientific practices.<sup>16</sup> Agents arrived at meetings believing that farm women had little skill in housework. This presumption framed the actions of all agents, and as a result they faced a difficult task: they had to devise “a tactful and convincing way of interesting...women in the fundamental problems affecting rural homes.”<sup>17</sup> They had to convince women that their homes



Home demonstration agents had to sell women on the idea that older methods were inefficient. One of the more popular lessons in improved home management was food preservation. Above, a neighborhood group cans food cooked in a pressure cooker.

*Cooperative Extension photo, Annual Report of the County Agent in Piscataquis County (1933-34), Special Collections Department, University of Maine.*

were inefficient and “sell” them on the importance of accepting extension standards and practices. It was the agents’ responsibility to prove that scientific methods were better than traditional practices. On this premise hung the existence of the program.

In spite of the fact that many agents were themselves from Maine and had some experience with rural life, their education set them apart from the people they served. In most cases, rural women learned their varied skills from mothers and elder relatives. In the early years of extension work with men, farmers had listened to the lectures and watched the demonstrations at county fairs but remained skeptical. The advent of the Agricultural Experiment Station at the University of Maine helped dispel some mistrust, but the stigma attached to “book farming” remained.<sup>18</sup> Home demonstration agents faced a similar challenge with rural women.

Tensions between extension agents and the women they



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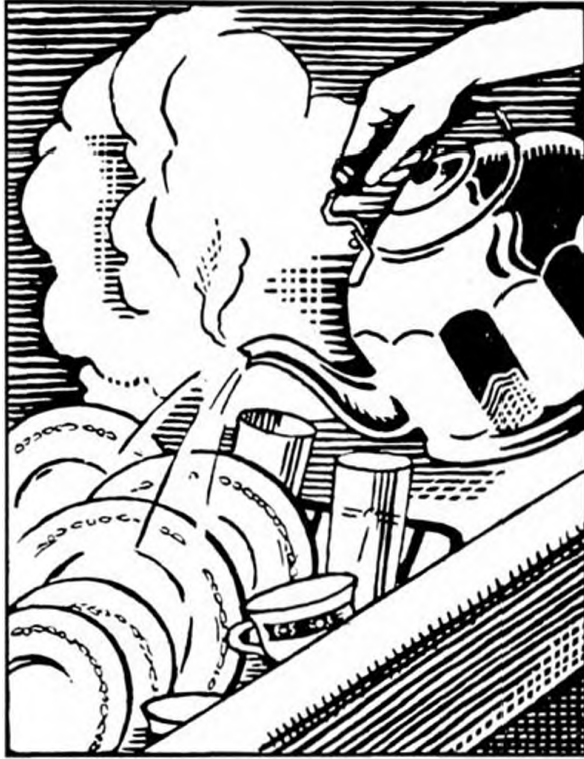
served stemmed from a struggle to define domesticity and the meaning of women's work in the home, a conflict that pitted scientific principles against traditional education. Both groups felt that women belonged in the home, working for the welfare of their families, but for home demonstration agents, housework based on anything other than scientific principles was backward.

Like other professional home economists, home demonstration agents derived the substance of their lives through their educational activities. They were conscious of themselves as independent women, imbued with the principles of science and efficiency. Even though most home demonstration agents were raised in rural Maine, their university background exposed them to different perspectives.<sup>19</sup> Their knowledge about up-to-date methods of homemaking was not always compatible with traditional models of women's role in society and in the home.

Working for the Extension Service gave agents the opportunity to become part of a growing cadre of professional women who focused on educating other women in the home. They did not go home to a family each night, did not share the challenge of raising children, and did not juggle the many tasks facing farm women. They socialized with other single women and enjoyed direct access to the world of the experts. Once married, they gave up their work with the Extension Service.<sup>20</sup>

In their role as educators, home demonstration agents became "expert" home economists. Scientific language and the themes of efficiency, economy, and organization pervaded their reports as they attempted to legitimize the productive quality of women's work with up-to-date methods. They applied scientific principles to projects designed "to aid the homemaker to do a better job with the work which fell her to do."<sup>21</sup> Use of language consonant with Frederick W. Taylor's principles of scientific management underscored the agents' belief in the value of women's work and in their own role as experts.<sup>22</sup>

Flora A. Howard, Piscataquis County home demonstration agent from 1921 to 1927, encouraged women to rearrange their kitchen equipment so as to lighten their labor. Howard felt such changes would help women "systematize" their work. Along the



*Annual Report of the County Agent in  
Kennebec County (1931-1932).*

same lines, she encouraged them to style their clothes to achieve greater “bodily freedom” and “mental ease.” Restrictive clothing, Howard wrote, hampered women’s efficiency.<sup>23</sup>

Lucy Farrington, Howard’s successor, applied the same view of scientific domesticity to her observations. Good kitchen equipment, she wrote, increased efficiency by improving the woman’s “work shop.”<sup>24</sup> When her clients asked for scientific information about foods rather than just recipes, Farrington concluded that they appreciated the “business” aspect of preparing meals.<sup>25</sup> For Farrington, and most home demonstration agents, housekeeping was a vocation, accessible only through proper training.

In 1931, Agnes Masse, an agent in Waldo County for nine years, summarized her work with Farm Bureau women by invoking an image modeled on Frederick W. Taylor’s time-and-motion studies in the factory setting. Noting how improved practices raised homemaking standards, Masse concluded that methods which “save time, steps, and energy of the rural homemaker” were a boon in performing daily tasks.<sup>26</sup> In 1934, Masse recorded her impressions of work done in farm homes:

“unsystematized methods of doing housework, too much clutter and confusion, and too little time for anything but work.” She promoted home management projects that “demonstrate[d] how the day’s activities may be planned and household tasks performed so that time and energy may be used to the best advantage....”<sup>27</sup>

Agents encouraged women to adopt scientific domesticity, but they went beyond this. With strong allegiances to urban, middle-class models, agents designed innumerable projects emphasizing particular standards of behavior, health, and style. Under the guise of raising living standards to improve satisfaction with rural life, they suggested that cultural habits on the farm needed reform.

Piscataquis County agents found health practices among rural women unacceptable. Flora Howard brought doctors and nurses to a “Better Babies” meeting to assess the mental and physical well-being of the children in attendance. Each Mother was informed how her son or daughter “compared with the 100% standard child.”<sup>28</sup> The “Posture and Grooming” project became part of the annual program in the early 1930s. It focused on the attainment of poise, assurance, and self-confidence that resulted from good health and a “consciousness of good grooming.”<sup>29</sup> With this meeting, agents hoped to eliminate “defective” grooming practices.

In addition to presenting standards for personal health and appearance, agents focused on the proper furnishings for the home. The project titled “Table Furnishings” included a demonstration on the correct way of serving food and the chemical methods of cleaning silver. An agent lectured on linens, oil cloths, china, glass, and silver. Women viewed items sent from the central office in Orono that illustrated the proper pieces for a table setting.<sup>30</sup> Agents believed presenting and serving food to be as important as processing and preparing it. The appropriateness of emphasizing china, silver, and linens in rural Maine was not addressed in the report, but it is significant that this finery had to be sent from Orono for the demonstration. Imbued with urban, middle-class models of domestic science, home demon-

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stration agents hoped that rural women, with or without the correct utensils, would learn to appreciate the proper way to set up a table.

Along the same lines, agents sponsored "Home Management" projects to promote "a more satisfying home life."<sup>31</sup> At a typical "Home Furnishings" meeting, women assembled at a home to study the arrangement and style of furniture, wall paper, and draperies. Most often, the hostess removed all of the furniture so that no one knew where it had originally been located. The women then spent the day rearranging the furniture in the living room and the parlor. "Each piece was placed and replaced until everyone was satisfied."<sup>32</sup> By encouraging group consensus over idiosyncratic personal tastes, agents aimed to turn rural predilections away from traditional or homemade adornments, such as the inevitable "hideous crayon portrait of goat-bearded Grandfather Dabster with its heavy gilt frame." Thus, agents hoped to redirect women toward a modern appreciation of decorative arts.<sup>33</sup>

Agents also offered "Music Appreciation" and "Library" projects to elevate popular tastes. Each Waldo County extension meeting began with a concert, to expose attendees to "worthwhile music selections."<sup>34</sup> Likewise, the state library furnished Kennebec and Waldo county agents with books that would encourage women "to read good literature."<sup>35</sup> Whether focusing on the scientific or the cultural aspects of rural living, home demonstration agents tailored their projects to needs that were defined by their own agency.

How successful agents were at instilling modern scientific and cultural principles is difficult to determine. Reporting a total success would put them out of a job; agents needed to demonstrate a continuing demand for their services. Thus annual reports listed accomplishments as well as areas of weakness that agents could target for improvement.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, their comments suggest a greater success with projects not directly connected to scientific domesticity. Most often, agents praised women for cultural advances.

A pattern of success with cultural programs and continuing



Annual reports cited agents' achievements but also detailed their discouragements – to show that their professional services were still in demand. Agent Barbara Higgins reported that families still needed encouragement “to keep their homes and yards more orderly.” Above, Agent Higgins (right) discusses canning with two of the more than 300 farm women she assisted in Waldo County.

*Maine Extension Service, Effectiveness of Extension Methods of Teaching Home Economics (1942).*

resistance to scientific homemaking reflects both the biases of the agents themselves and the force of traditional domestic patterns in rural Maine. Reporting the difficulties – never the failures – in instilling scientific principles of homemaking legitimized the continuation of the agent's work. At the same time, however, agents needed to define an area of success to show that their work brought beneficial results. By stressing successes in the peripheral area of cultural values, agents showed that women were receptive to their work, while at the same time the agents extended their tenure as experts.

Lucy Farrington wrote of “deplorable” conditions in Piscataquis County as a result of families' ignorance of “proper living conditions.” Fortunately, Farrington implied, extension work interested Piscataquis women. Her efforts toward educating them “to use better methods in caring for their homes,

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themselves and their children” were needed and appreciated.<sup>37</sup> This report emphasized the benefits expertise could bring to rural families. Agent Barbara Higgins noted that despite advances, Waldo County families still needed encouragement “to keep their homes and yards more orderly and attractive than they do at the present time.”<sup>38</sup> Continued guidance would be necessary.<sup>39</sup> Higgins and other home demonstration agents accented their beneficial influence over the lives of rural women, but they were quick to point out that there was more work to be done.

Often these conflicting professional pressures brought the cultural gulf between county agents and rural women to the surface. Piscataquis County agent Flora A. Howard noted in typical fashion both the receptiveness and the resistance among her women female audience. They expressed, she reported, an “indifference to anything requiring additional effort” when learning about food preparation. Casual attention to their family’s welfare resulted in meals served “hit or miss with apparently not much thought on the subject.” A lack of “interest, training and headwork” led to “undesirable results”: wasted time, motion, and food; “nervous strain” for the homemaker; unbalanced meals; and a degeneration in the family’s health and the general atmosphere of the home. To Howard, the challenge was to “wake up the women to their part” and educate them about the seriousness of their role.<sup>40</sup>

After five years serving Piscataquis County, Howard confidently wrote about the women whom she watched develop. Her extended presence enabled her, she noted, to share in a lasting relationship with Farm Bureau members, who had become “interested and wide-awake and ready to adopt new helpful suggestions.” As a result of Howard’s efforts, Piscataquis County women selected more appropriate clothes, wore their skirts at flattering lengths, and “put their hat[s] on from the back instead of from the front....”<sup>41</sup>

Howard had succeeded in arousing women during her tenure as a home demonstration agent. Under her tutelage, she felt, they had improved their fashion sense and in the process

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gained a greater appreciation for farm life. In her own opinion, Howard had inspired women to take an interest in their roles. In all her praise, however, Howard omitted any reference to women's application of science to housekeeping.

Agent Lucy Farrington's accomplishments were also related primarily to nonscientific areas of farm life. Women, she noted, had gained a "better sense of the value of good recreation for balanced living, a beginning in the appreciation of music to say nothing of the physical bearings on their welfare."<sup>42</sup> According to Farrington, extension work brought improved living standards, although her comments had little to do with scientific principles. Omitting this aspect of home economics extension work, Piscataquis County agents, like others throughout the state, suggested a continuing need for their efforts in areas related to scientific domesticity.

Kennebec County agent Helen Clark, like her fellow agents Howard and Farrington, laid out the path along which her work would continue. She accepted the idea that Farm Bureau women were slow to implement aspects of the program. Under such circumstances, Clark's responsibilities were to insure that ideas continued to "creep into" farm women's lives.<sup>43</sup> If women continued to think about benefits derived from extension work, agents were assured of a continuing place in their lives.

Read carefully, the reports also reveal the subtle forms of resistance to scientific housekeeping among rural women. When agents recorded difficulties, they blamed women's character or their decisions, not the ideas or methods of the Extension Service. Some thought that farm women failed to embrace the program out of ignorance or lack of motivation. Virginia Lamb, who worked in Waldo County for only four months, believed that women were opposed to change. She wrote to her superiors that planning seemed to "scare" many. Others, she thought, were unsure of their "mental abilities" or "too lazy to try."<sup>44</sup>

Agent Barbara Higgins noted that Waldo County women were encumbered by insufficient child care, money, time, and transportation, but Higgins also pointed to their "lack of desire" to attain the Extension Service's goals. Margaret L. Childs, agent

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in Kennebec County, observed that the “average mother does not yet ‘think’ and ‘plan’ in carrying on her work.” Childs attributed this to a “lack of thought, desire, and conscious effort” – and to a lack of money.<sup>45</sup> Childs, like other agents, labored to transform the “average mother” into a model housewife. She was far more interested in urging women to adopt scientific domesticity than she was in adapting extension principles to fit rural conditions.

Like Barbara Higgins and Margaret Childs, agents often cited lack of money as an obstacle to implementing scientific domesticity. Most likely, their assessment was accurate. To most agents, however, personal shortcomings were as much to blame. Reading the home demonstration reports, it becomes clear that agents faced a two-dimensional challenge as they worked with rural women. They sought to legitimize their position as experts in domesticity while they also fought to maintain the need for their efforts. Their actions were not unlike those of home economists across the country.<sup>46</sup> Although their experiences were not altogether unique, the record of their efforts allows scholars to better understand an important aspect of women’s experiences as they joined the ranks of other professionals.

The agents’ commitment to scientific methods blinded them to the realities of women’s experiences. Throughout their reports, agents’ faith in the superiority of their methods never flagged. Indeed, their refusal to restructure their program to meet the realities of women’s lives underscores their need to maintain their stature as the experts and the educational framework that allowed them to work out of the home. Their work supported the concept that married women should stay in the home, applying scientific principles to housekeeping, while single, university-educated women belonged in the world of professionals. Resistance to the scientific practices they espoused challenged agents to greater efforts in pursuing scientific domesticity.

In addition to updating home management practices, agents enforced their own cultural standard upon rural women. In this respect, they were aware that science was not the only means to





Extension lessons exposed farm women to new cultural standards as well as to scientific home management practices. In 1927 Alice Hammond (right) and Evelyn Graves (left), from Sidney, demonstrated felt-hat making, first in their home town and then at the Eastern States Exposition in Springfield, Massachusetts.

*Annual Report of the County Agent in Kennebec County (1926-1927).*

improving life on the farm. Attention to fashion and home decoration clearly connected women's work in the home with their centrality to that domain. Indeed, none of the projects addressed work outside the home. Except for 4H work with children, Cooperative Extension's vision of women's productive lives, their contribution to the maintenance of rural society, was in the home. Agents adopted uncritically the perspective that nonprofessional women were confined to the home.

At least one question remains: what about the farm women? How did they respond to this intrusion upon their housekeeping practices? Was it appropriate to their vision of women's work on the farm and in the home? Although agents' reports do not record the views of rural women directly, the pages are filled with hints of the struggle between the two groups. In their efforts to implement their scientific methods, agents encountered an

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interpretation of women's work that varied from their own.

The up-to-date methods and fashionable ideas that agents offered through their projects could be very appealing to women. Although the excitement of learning a new perspective appeared to invite participation, women may not have adopted these new ideas in their own homes. This is not to say that women derived no benefits from the Extension Service, however. Extension work created a reason for women to journey off the farm and meet with one another. Just as their husbands left the farm for agricultural meetings, women could schedule their housework to take a day or an afternoon to meet with other Farm Bureau members. Social networks developed and strengthened as women took advantage of the opportunities provided by the Extension Service. Some of the advantages gained, however, were not those offered by the home demonstration agents.

The socializing that was so integral to the development of extension work could also hinder agents' dissemination of scientific principles. As a result of the popularity of home demonstration meetings and the inability of agents to meet this demand, the state created an "in-between" meeting, run by a local project leader. Women gathered without the home demonstration agent and created their own projects, many of which were not based on current scientific practice or in line with the particular cultural styles adopted by the Extension Service. Using this "in-between" structure, local women interacted with their neighbors and created the kind of meeting they wanted. Projects like lamp shade stenciling and basket weaving, for example, had roots in local interaction, individual expression, and rural craft traditions – not in the principles of home economics.<sup>47</sup>

The state leadership disdained these craft making activities and tried to disassociate their agents from projects that were not directly connected with scientific domesticity. In the late 1920s, state leaders' reports to the extension leadership at the University document efforts to reinforce the primacy of scientific methods and to dissuade county agents from participating in handicraft projects that would "clutter up homes already too full

of impractical, unbeautiful knickknacks."<sup>48</sup> State leaders' attempts to rechannel these meetings underscored their desire to hold fast to the true path of home economics extension.

Home demonstration agents tried to accomplish many things as they worked with women. They sought to educate farm women in the ways of scientific domesticity and elevate cultural standards on the farm. At the same time, they tried to make a place for themselves in the rural landscape, not as farm dwellers but as professionals. In this, they not only shaped the future of rural women's experiences but also continued the struggle to legitimize women's work out of the home.

## NOTES

I would like to thank Richard Etulain, Tom Gentry, Jon Hunner, Mazie Hough, Virginia Scharff, and Dorthy Schwieder for their comments on this paper.

<sup>1</sup>See Mary Ryan, *The Cradle of the Middle Class: Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of Experts' Advice to Women* (New York: Doubleday, 1978).

<sup>2</sup>See Catharine Beecher, *The American Woman's Home* (1869; reprint, Hartford: Stowe-Day Foundation, 1975); and Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy For the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School* (1841; reprint, New York: Source Book Press, 1970); Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1976).

<sup>3</sup>See Roberta Frankfort, *Collegiate Women: Domesticity and Career in Turn-of-the-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 1977); Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good*; Isabel Bevier, *Home Economics in Education* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lipponcott Company, 1924).

<sup>4</sup>Extension reports are located in the Special Collections Department, Fogler Library, University of Maine. For this paper, I examined reports from Kennebec, Piscataquis, and Waldo counties. Because titles varied, references to extension reports will include only the county position of the agent and the year. Box numbers for county reports will be given in the first citation.

<sup>5</sup>David C. Smith, *The Maine Agricultural Experiment Station* (Orono: University of Maine Life Sciences and Agriculture Experiment Station, 1980), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup>Clarence A. Day, *Fifty Years with Cooperative Extension Service of Maine* (Orono: University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service, n.d.), p. 4.

<sup>7</sup>The emphasis on conditions of rural life was part of the larger Progress-

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sive movement of the early twentieth century. In particular, President Theodore Roosevelt's 1908 Country Life Commission sought to preserve an agrarian way of life that to many Americans was vital to the nation. See Herbert Quick, "The Women on the Farms" *Good Housekeeping* 57 (October 1913): 426-436; Betty Carol Clutts, "Country Life Aspects of the Progressive Movement," Ph.d. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1962; Cynthia Sturgis, "'How're You Gonna Keep Them Down on the Farm?': Rural Women and the Urban Model in Utah," *Agricultural History* 60 (Spring 1986): 182-199.

<sup>8</sup>The 1914 Smith-Lever Act required the state and the federal governments to finance cooperatively an educational program that disseminated information produced by land-grant colleges.

<sup>9</sup>The state paid these expenses.

<sup>10</sup>State Home Demonstration Agent [hereafter SHDA] Report, 1915-1916, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup>This method decreased the chance of spoilage by cooking or sterilizing the canned material after it was placed in the jar.

<sup>12</sup>SHDA Annual Report, 1919-1920, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup>SHDA Annual Report, 1919-1920, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup>In 1917, men in Hancock and Kennebec counties felt that extension work could be more effective if they had a separate organization that cooperated with the Extension Service. They created the Farm Bureau, an organization that served both the farmers and the Extension Service. Farmers controlled its administrative structure, and dues-paying members elected the executive board and county representatives. In 1919, the Maine Legislature passed the County Extension Act recognizing the Farm Bureau as the official organization within a county to cooperate with the Extension Service. Women in Kennebec, Cumberland, and the combined Androscoggin and Sagadahoc counties had their own home demonstration agents.

<sup>15</sup>The counties of Knox and Lincoln combined as did Androscoggin and Sagadahoc. Each were served by one agent. Aroostook women received whatever they could from the county agent and his assistant until funds from the Capper-Ketchum Act provided for a home demonstration agent in 1928.

<sup>16</sup>Home Demonstration Agent [hereafter HDA] Annual Report, Waldo County, 1935-1936, p. 9 of Lamb's report, Box 180.

<sup>17</sup>SHDA Annual Report, 1931-1932, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup>Wayne D. Rasmussen, *Taking the University to the People: Seventy-Five Years of Cooperative Extension* (Ames: Iowa University Press, 1989); Alfred Charles True, *American Education, Its Men, Ideas and Institutions: A History of Agricultural Extension Work in the United States, 1785-1923* (1928; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1969); Smith, *Maine Agricultural Experiment Station*.

<sup>19</sup>The University of Maine Alumni Directory lists the home towns of all graduates.

<sup>20</sup>The records of the Extension Service did not reveal where any of the agents lived. Most likely, they followed the practice of single, female University

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faculty members and lived in a boarding house or dormitory or rented lodgings from a local family. Since the central office for all agents was located in Orono, they most likely ventured from that location on a regular basis. In annual reports and extension histories, the primary reason given for leaving the job was marriage. A few women continued to work briefly after marriage, most likely in an emergency capacity until their position could be refilled.

<sup>21</sup>HDA Annual Report, Kennebec County, 1938-1939, p. 107, Box 172.

<sup>22</sup>For information on Frederick Winslow Taylor's influence on home economists, see Gail Cooper, "Frederick Winslow Taylor and Scientific Management" in *Technology in America*, edited by Carroll W. Pursell, Jr. (Boston: MIT Press, 1990).

<sup>23</sup>HDA Annual Report, Piscataquis County, 1921-1922, pp. 36-37.

<sup>24</sup>HDA Annual Report, Piscataquis County, 1922-1928, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup>HDA Annual Report, Piscataquis County, 1930-1931, p. 50.

<sup>26</sup>HDA Annual Report, Waldo County, 1930-1931, p. 102.

<sup>27</sup>HDA Annual Report, Waldo County, 1933-1934, p. 72.

<sup>28</sup>HDA Annual Report, Piscataquis County, 1921-1922, p. 108.

<sup>29</sup>HDA Annual Report, Kennebec County, 1930-1931, p. 84.

<sup>30</sup>SHDA Annual Report, 1926-1927, pp. 34-35.

<sup>31</sup>HDA Annual Report, Kennebec County, 1930-1931, p. 86.

<sup>32</sup>SHDA Annual Report, 1928-1929, p. 45.

<sup>33</sup>Day, *Forty Years*, p. 239.

<sup>34</sup>HDA Annual Report, Waldo County, 1932-1933, p. 89.

<sup>35</sup>HDA Annual Report, Waldo County, 1931-1932, p. 82; HDA Annual Report, Kennebec County, 1932-1933, p. 80.

<sup>36</sup>In this paper, the reports of agents who had been in their counties for at least three years were used to illustrate the balance between reporting successes and using failures to justify continued extension work.

<sup>37</sup>HDA Annual Report, Piscataquis County, 1927-1928, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup>HDA Annual Report, Waldo County, 1935-1936, p. 1 of Higgins' report.

<sup>39</sup>HDA Annual Report, Waldo County, 1936-1937, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup>HDA Annual Report, Piscataquis County, 1923-1924, p. 53.

<sup>41</sup>HDA Annual Report, Piscataquis County, 1925-1926, p. 46.

<sup>42</sup>HDA Annual Report, Piscataquis County, 1932-1933, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup>HDA Annual Report, Kennebec County, 1922-1923, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup>HDA Annual Report, Waldo County, 1935-1936, p. 1 of Lamb's report.

<sup>45</sup>HDA Annual Report, Kennebec County, 1930-1931, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup>Kathleen R. Babbitt's investigations in New York State detail similar interactions between agents, farm women, and extension supervisors. See her "Changes in the Countryside: Rural Women and New York State Cooperative Extension Service, 1870-1940," Ph.d. dissertation, State University of New York at Binghamton, in progress.

<sup>47</sup>On this struggle see also Abbe Karmen, "Miscellaneous' and 'In-

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Between': Different Views of Domesticity in Home Economics Extension Work," paper presented at the Fourth Conference of Rural/Farm Women in Agriculture, titled "A Symposium on Rural/Farm Women in Historical Perspective," held at the University of California at Davis, June 26-28, 1992, sponsored jointly with the Agricultural History Society.

<sup>48</sup>SHDA Annual Report, 1929-1930, p. 45.

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