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Such Is Life in the Arctic! . . .

A Home Economist’s Work in Alaska

By Lydia Jacobson Fohn-Hansen, M. S. ’22

(Home Economics Extension, Alaska Agricultural College)

TOURISTS always declare that Alaska has the loveliest scenery in the world. Her cities are all set in beautiful surroundings—Sitka with its island-dotted harbor and romantic history, Skagway with its flower gardens, Haines, in a veritable nest of snow-capped mountains, Valdey, against a background of blue-white glacier, Sel- dovia, streetless and carriage-less, on a snug little harbor.

But underneath this beauty of scenery, there are many serious social and economic problems to be met. Indian and white settlers alike are facing a transitional period. When fishing and mining fail, other resources must be resorted to. There are thousands of acres of tillable soil in Alaska, but farming is not a get-rich-quick proposition, and few people can afford to take the risk of starting a new venture. However gardening is becoming more popular every year, and is one way out of the depression for settlers depending largely on employment in the canneries, lumber and copper mills.

IN THE fall of 1925 I came to Alaska as head of the Home Economics Department in the last hand grant college to be established. Before this I had spent several years teaching, had attended St. Olaf’s, then Iowa State, where I received a B. S. in 1919. After two more years of teaching I was granted a fellowship, and received my M. S. in 1922. Then I taught at Iowa State for 5 years in the Home Economics Education Department.

When I first came here to Alaska, there were only two of us teaching in my department, and very few students were enrolled in the course. The college was opened in 1922, near Fairbanks, in the “golden heart of Alaska.” Mining, agriculture, business administration, general science, home economics, and normal training are offered the students coming from the white settlements of western and central Alaska.

In spite of small classes there was no lack of work to be done, and I was glad that there had been so little time for specialization in college. A teacher in a small college must be versatile and adaptable, and it seemed to me that everything I had ever learned came in handy.

After my marriage I continued to teach for 2 years. Homemaking has always seemed like enough of a career for any woman, and I simply don’t comprehend why some people prefer routine office jobs to the freedom and healthfulness of housework. However, after a year of being the parasitic housewife, in 1930, when the Smith-Lever funds were extended to Alaska, the position thus created was offered to me.

Fortunately my job is only a step removed from homemaking. As assistant director for extension service in home economics, I have a share in the problems of 15,000 homemakers, scattered over a territory much larger than the state of Iowa.

MY WORK takes me to all parts of Alaska not too inaccessible, and I travel mainly by boat. However sometimes I journey also by train, auto, or airplane.

No two communities are alike. In one place electricity may cost 20 to 30 cents a kilowatt hour; in another it may be so cheap people scarcely bother to turn off the lights. In some places the temperature drops occasionally to 50 below; in others it seldom reaches the freezing point. The grocery stores in Ketchikan are open to the street both summer and winter.

In Fairbanks, milk costs 25 cents a quart; in Gustavus it is milked on the ground because there is no way to use the surplus. Living conditions vary from the most primitive to the most modern. Radios, electric refrigerators and oil burners can be found in many Alaskan homes.

To present a program for improved home practice to groups possessing such varied interests and abilities is not easy. The greatest need of the largest number of homemakers seems to lie in the realm of food management. We spent 5 million dollars a year for food that could be produced in Alaska—meat, dairy products, potatoes, vegetables, eggs.

In spite of high food expenditures, there are many evidences of poorly selected diets, both among children and grown-ups, and so I have tried to stress

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**Alumnae Echoes . . .**

. . . news bits from the front lines

Edited by Virginia Garberson

**Here's What They Do**

**Madelyn Kleespie, '31,** is teaching home economics, English and dramatics in the Hatfield, Mo., high school.

**Elizabeth Borgman, '32,** is now employed in the United States Indian Service. She has been substituting in grade school instruction at the government sanitarium at Dulce, New Mexico.

**Mabel Coleman, '31,** is teaching her second year at Elkader, Iowa, where she has charge of the high school paper.

**Winnifred Rannels, '31,** was married June 5 to Herbert M. Gale. They are spending the year in Berlin, where Mr. Gale is attending the University of Berlin.

**Louise Smith, '26,** who has been dietitian in a city hospital at Cleveland, will be transferred before Jan. 15 to a similar position at the marine base hospital in New Orleans.

**Beatrice Brown, '32,** taught home economics in the Gladbrook, Iowa, schools for several weeks in November and December, as a substitute for Mary Hill, '31, who underwent an operation for appendicitis.

**A son, John Robert, was born Oct. 29 to Mr. and Mrs. Roscoe Robert Miller, of Clear Lake. Mrs. Miller is the former Jean Millard, '30.

**Freda Emery, '32,** is working at the Candy Box in Chicago.

**Life in the Arctic**

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proper diets whenever I can get an audience. Frankly, I can't see that it does a bit of good. None of the oil companies has been rushed with increased orders since my lectures. I would get discouraged and quit, but every time I see a youngster with a pasty face and lank-luster eyes, my enthusiasm returns, and I'm determined to find some way to get mothers to improve meal-planning practices.

In sewing there has been little demand for assistance, as most women buy their clothing ready made. The greatest demand is for fitted foundation patterns, and I have made at least 150 such patterns in the last 2 years. Most women are so glad to get something that approaches their particular proportions, that their gratitude is almost embarrassing.

The use of leisure time is a problem of some importance up here. Homes are small; home production of food is limited to a short season; jobs outside the home are limited and community activities are not well organized. The average housewife has, therefore, considerable time which may be wasted on worthless reading and extensive social entertaining, or it may be used to convert available materials into objects which will add to the comforts and attractions of the home.

I have found women everywhere eager to make rugs and home furnishings. Not all our hooked rug designs, hastily improvised on burlap feed sacks, would pass the course in applied design, but we are having some lessons in self-help that may eventually lead to something more beautiful.

Weaving has captivated the interest of quite a few of our homemakers. Several looms have been purchased by women in some of the towns I visit, and the portable loom I carry with me is in constant demand. During the last six weeks women have made 23 handwoven scarfs and 10 bags. In an Indian settlement where I started work in weaving last year, women have been able to sell a number of rugs. They do very good work and will eventually be able to put out rugs with distinctive patterns.

My job also includes supervision of girls' 4-H club work. We have 10 clubs, studying sewing, cooking, canning and personal development projects.

Our extension service puts out a monthly news letter, and numerous bulletins. Although I cannot boast an extensive fan mail, the increasing number of requests for information makes me feel that the service is meeting the needs of some of our homemakers.

I am constantly meeting with new and interesting, sometimes disconcerting experiences, of which the worst is the passage across the Gulf of Alaska—24 hours totally ruined!

Just step into my Alaskan cabin home with me. It is a five room log cabin, equipped with modern conveniences, electric lights and telephone.

If we decide to go riding, we have the choice of three highways. Or we may run out to a summer cabin on Lake Harding, and take a dip anytime from the first of June to the middle of October. After the hunting season opens, we may be lucky enough to get a caribou, a moose, mountain sheep, grouse, ptarmigan, all excellent eating.

In summer we garden, pick berries, and complain about the mosquitoes. In winter we sit by the fire and read, or have parties and play contract. And when the thermometer goes up to zero, we unbutton our furs, and say, 'How warm it is today!'

Smoke rising like incense from a hundred little cabins silhouetted against a starlit sky; lights shining in all the windows. Such is life in the Arctic!

**Alumnae Lunch Together**

**Sixteen** alumnae of Iowa State's Home Economics Division had luncheon with Dean Genevieve Fisher at Theresa Worthington Grant's tea room on Park Avenue, New York City, on Nov. 10. Dean Fisher, who was in New York City attending the meeting of the American Dietetics Association, gave intimate glimpses of campus life and bits of news of the Home Economics Department. The group presented Miss Fisher with a corsage of gardenias.

Those attending were Anna Margrethe Olsen, M. S. '31; Florence Packman, B. S. '17; Ruth McClintock Lawrence, '14; and Marjorie Gaskill Stanton, '30; who are now on the staff of the General Foods Corporation in New York City; Caroline Cecil, '29, who is demonstrator for the New York Consolidated Gas Co.; Maria Vermuellen, M. S. '32, who is doing a year of graduate work in Teachers' College, Columbia University; Esther Church, '31, who is visiting her sister and brother-in-law, Loel and Roger Wilkinson, E. E. '24; Marie Krause, '29, Assistant Dietetics Director, University of Chicago Clinics; Virginia Johnson, '31, who is a dental nutritionist with the Association for the Improvement of the Conditions of the Poor.

Ruby Edginton, '28, who is a dietitian near Cinncinati; Neiger Toshunter, who did graduate work at I. S. C. in 1929 and who is now working toward a doctor of philosophy degree under Dr. H. C. Sherman at Columbia University; Dr. Lillian B. Storms, B. S. '08, formerly on the staff in the Chemistry Department.