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## "I Was the Editor of the First Homemaker"

Elizabeth Storm Ferguson  
*Iowa State University*

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# What We Were . . .

## 'I was the editor of the first *Homemaker*'

by Elizabeth Storm Ferguson, 1921

### Editor's Note:

Elizabeth Storm Ferguson is the woman greatly responsible for the first issue of the *Iowa Homemaker*. She and her staff created Volume 1, Number 1 of the magazine in 1921.

That same year she was graduated from Iowa State, receiving her degree in Home Economics and Agriculture. Her courses had included many electives in English and journalism.

From 1921-1923, Elizabeth Storm worked with the Extension Service of Iowa State. In 1923, she married Fred E. Ferguson (ISC '22), publications editor for the Division of Agriculture and the Iowa Agricultural Experiment Station.

An Ames resident since that time, Mrs. Ferguson is interested in "homemaking, people, cooking, gardening, and housework, in that order." A little free-lance writing through the years has kept her in practice; and now she is managing editor for publications of the National Association for Nursery Education, women's editor for the *Iowa Rural Electric News and Tractor Farming*, and publicity chairman for the Iowa Home Economics Association.

On a gray April afternoon forty years ago, the first copies of the *Iowa Homemaker* were presented to Iowa State faculty members who had supported its struggle into existence with advice and encouragement: President Raymond A. Pearson, Dean of Home Economics Catherine J. MacKay, and Head of the Journalism Department Fred W. Beckman.

Backed by \$500 from the home economics club, the publication board and the editorial and business staffs had spent a year planning and producing Volume 1, Number 1.

The associate editor, Gwen Watts (Mrs. H. A. Madson, Glendive, Montana) and I and our staff had great fun planning and assigning stories, discussing cover designs with the Applied Art Department, and choosing type styles.

The real work of sending a new magazine out into the world befell the business manager, Jessie McCorkindale (Mrs. Frank Kerekes, Houghton, Michigan) and circulation manager Eloise Parsons (Mrs. Wade Hauser, Atlantic, Iowa) who were charged with selling advertising and subscriptions.

Jessie and her staff approached every potential advertiser in Ames and found them a little reluctant to buy space in an imaginary magazine. But many did.

### Why the *Homemaker*?

The efforts of Eloise and her staff to sign up the 500 subscribers Mr. Beckman had designated as

the starting point took them to every college girl's room and out over the town, knocking on doors to promote this magazine that was to bring the newest ideas in homemaking to the homemakers of Iowa.

The purpose of the founding mothers of the *Iowa Homemaker* was as simple as that; and the homemakers of Iowa were our mothers, our sisters, our cousins, and our aunts and their neighbors.

In time, the *Homemaker* became the practical laboratory for home economics students in journalism, with a local audience. Here is valuable experience in writing, editing, and publishing. The activity fee now eases the chores of the circulation manager; but the business staff continue to be active salesmen, and the editors continue to interpret home economics for their contemporaries.

We who dreamed up the *Homemaker* were too naive to think in large numbers of readers. Mass communication had not yet become a common term or a common concern. We wanted to share our knowledge with women whose problems we knew something about and thought we understood.

### Consideration of Each of 1300 Readers

Over the years, this recognition of the reader as an individual has gathered ever-widening acceptance. A recent issue of *Time* carries a full page ad for itself. Four words, "The Audience of One," are centered in the upper two-thirds of a white page. Below, the ad explains that, although *Time* is read by millions, it is edited for individuals.

This, it seems to me, is the heart and soul of successful communication. Whether we write a note to the milkman, a letter of application, a memo to a supervisor, or a report to the President of the United States, we reach for the attention of an individual. As we move into larger fields and write for mediums reaching people by the hundreds or thousands or millions, the writer who keeps the individual in mind will have a large and appreciative audience. Successful communication is a person to person affair.

Is this important? John Bowen thinks it is. He says, in *The Writer's Dilemma*, "One has a duty to use the media of communication one can, . . . and to use as skillfully as one can every technical device of those media, provided only that one does not compromise the truth of what one is trying to say. Even with that skill, communication is

not going to be easy, because it is always two-way — simply to receive is a positive act. Always. It is like a broadcast. At one end is a man with a microphone and a technical apparatus of extreme complexity. At the other end is a woman with a cheap portable radio of indifferent tone and a battery that needs renewing, who is using it only as background noise while she does the ironing. In between are atmospherics. But every now and then the voice comes through clearly and the woman looks up from her ironing, and thinks over what she has heard, and perhaps says to herself, 'That's true, but I never knew it.' It's all one can hope for, but it's worth doing."

In the same little book, Arnold Toynbee emphasizes the need for the writer to feel a part of the audience he is writing for.

"It is no use being a writer if one is not en rapport with the world in which one is living. The pen can be used for different purposes: for instance, either in support of prevailing tendencies or in opposition to them. But, to be effective for any purpose in the writer's own day, the written word must reach the minds and touch the feelings of the writer's contemporaries. If a writer cannot do that, he might as well store his manuscripts away in a safe, in the hope that, some day, there may be a generation for whom his words will come alive. One can think of writers who have had this fate: Akhenaton, Obn Khaldun, Roger Bacon, Vico and Mendel are famous examples. But this is a sad fate, and worse than that, the writer will be failing to fulfill his vocation if he fails to affect his contemporaries in an age in which the fate of mankind itself is in the balance."

From a practical, down-to-typewriter point of view, the American Psychological Association counsels its writers, through its publication manual: "A good and mature writer is so vividly aware of his material and the ultimate reader that he perceives himself chiefly as the link between the two."

And this warning hangs over the desk of biographer Catherine Drinker Bowen: "Will the reader turn the page?"

Now to come back to the *Iowa Homemaker* and women writers. We must be "en rapport with the world" in which we are living. We must be on the alert for ideas that will open up new vistas, new avenues of thought and new ways of doing things. We must write clearly and accurately about what we see, what we hear, what we do, what we think, and how we feel. These reports become our contribution to our times.

"The here, the new, and the individual, have always been the special concern of the saint, the artist, the poet and — from time immemorial — the woman," says Anne Morrow Lindberg.

## And After May 26th?

James Hilton, President of Iowa State University, comments with enthusiasm about ISU graduates. He can name dozens who have become really important contributors to the advancement which the 1960's show.

And many of these alumni have remembered the institution which helped them succeed. Some have contributed financially to the improvement of Iowa State. Some have sung her praises through their excellent work.

But, you say, "I've had to work for my diploma, and once I get it in my hands, I'm going to forget school. I've earned my degree!"

Well, maybe you're right. You may not owe Iowa State a thing . . .

IF you haven't benefited from new classroom buildings.

IF you haven't enjoyed the air-conditioned library and Union.

IF you haven't made any friends here.

IF you never had a good instructor.

IF you haven't received some recognition for going to a university which has a very high reputation in America and abroad.

IF you won't be proud to say you are an Iowa State graduate.

If you are convinced, then, that you don't owe loyalty to the school and the state in which you have spent your college life, then accept your diploma, and leave the campus and the associations in your scrapbook.

If you do think you could do something to further the work of Iowa State, consider the different capacity which each person has to support his "Alma Mater." President Hilton recognizes that financial aid is difficult for the recent graduates to give. It is the graduate of 40 years who may be most helpful — when he remembers ISU.

He reminds us, "You don't need perfect facilities for good research." You need curious and ambitious students — students who have heard from others the values of the University. Every student and graduate can repay part of his debt to Iowa State when he encourages the prospective freshman, saying, "Yes, you'll have to work, but you'll have a good education."

With the 1950-60 building plan now completed and plans for expansion needed again due to increased enrollment, it seems inevitable that this story will repeat itself. This, then, puts further emphasis on the necessity of not breaking the chain of progress. We have depended on what past decades have built. In what shape will the next decade be unless we also build? M.E.M.