Playing house: the role of home management houses in the training of scientific homemakers at Iowa State College, 1925-1958

Megan Elizabeth Birk

Iowa State University

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Playing house: The role of home management houses in the training of scientific homemakers at Iowa State College, 1925-1958

by

Megan Elizabeth Birk

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: History

Program of Study Committee:
Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, Major Professor
Amy Sue Bix
Mary Winter

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2004

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This is to certify that the master’s thesis of

Megan Elizabeth Birk

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project benefited from the skill and patience of many individuals. Dr. Pamela Riney-Kehrberg read each chapter more times than I did, and this paper would not be nearly as readable without her help. She has shown me great kindness and her guidance makes me a better writer and a better historian. Much credit is also due to the history graduate students who listened to the details of this project so many times they could probably write the paper themselves. J.A. Anderson and R. Douglas Hurt deserve separate thanks for being outstanding examples of scholarly and teaching excellence. The staff of the Iowa State University Parks Library Archives, especially Jenny Barker-Devine, provided me with a wealth of materials and enthusiastically helped me locate materials about the babies. Funding for my survey project received from the State Historical Society of Iowa made sending out surveys fiscally possible. Additionally, Doris Blair Brown sent out extra questionnaires to her friends and family. Her enthusiasm for my project echoed the support I received from many alumna, and I thank all of them for responding to the survey with intimate memories and photos.

Finally, no student can be successful in their chosen path without supportive family and friends. To my mom and dad, both excellent life long learners and educators, I thank you for tireless encouragement and unconditional love. For friends both past and present, you patiently listened to the whining, crying, confusion, and frustration as only friends could. Each of you managed to keep one of my feet in the real world and although you are not particularly interested in history or the specifics of this paper, I figured some of you might at least make it to this page and deserve to feel included.
INTRODUCTION

Home economics education manifested itself in multiple forms in the twentieth century. Vocational education for women blossomed as a result of progressive ideals about proper homes and positive child rearing practices. It provided young women the opportunity to study scientific methods designed to improve and simplify the drudgery of domestic work as well as allow them to earn a college education without losing the all-important aspects of femininity. Colleges and universities with home economics programs used a number of methods and techniques to teach women modern homemaking practices. One of these options, the home management house, reproduced a middle class home so students could experience home management while at school. Initially, the concept of home management houses represented the pinnacle of laboratory experience in home economics. Schools that wanted to train efficient wives and mothers as partners for their male graduates capitalized on popular reform movements like Country Life to provide guidance and direction for the next generations of home makers.

In 1862, when many states began founding land grant universities for agricultural and engineering development, some chose to include home economics as part of the curriculum. The land grant college became a place for all rural youth to attend college and created a place where women could benefit from scientific homemaking innovations. Land grant universities also helped fulfill the desire of reformers not only to educate future farmers and agriculturists, but also homemakers and mothers in the hopes of maintaining a viable rural population. The post-Civil War migration to urban areas further encouraged reform minded educators and activists to create ways to improve rural life. Providing quality home
economics education using practical laboratory experience such as home management homes was one of the ways to achieve this goal.

Iowa State College, now Iowa State University, housed a thriving home economics department as part of the vocational education it provided. The goal of home economics at ISC was to promote the scientific management of home and family. To meet this goal, the college provided its students with the finest laboratory learning facilities. In 1918 administrators decided to implement an additional scientific experience in the form of a home management house. The program combined all the classroom elements women studied throughout their four years at ISC into a single opportunity to practice outside a classroom before marrying and running their own home, or working in one of the many fields of home economics. The college trained women for professions as well as married life, because many worked for a year or two before starting their own home. Students lived in a house equipped with modern appliances and controlled cooking, cleaning, entertaining, improving the house, and budgeting – all essentials in the management of a successful home.

Although the original home management houses provided a broad representation of housekeeping work, the absence of a child rearing experience in the homes left a void. In a balanced home economics education, child care represented the most important aspect of domestic responsibility. Women were supposed to provide emotional and physical support to their children, but outside of caring for younger siblings prior to marriage, few enjoyed the systematic training needed for motherhood. In 1924, ISC Home Economics Dean Anna Richardson sought the help of state child welfare agencies to add infants to the home management houses. The home economics department searched juvenile county courts and public institutions in Des Moines for healthy infants between the ages of four months and
eighteen months. Legal arrangements made with the state ensured the college would provide proper care and health services to each baby. Information obtained by Dean Richardson from a small number of other universities that already included infants in their home management houses guided ISC in the initiation of the infant program.

Before ISC became one of the first colleges in the nation to include a baby in each of its home management houses, the home economics department focused on other vital areas of effective home making. By including infants in the homes, the simulation of home life was more complete, and the experience not only enhanced the education of the women who lived there, but was also used for state extension reports and pamphlets, encouraging women to utilize as many scientific home making and motherhood practices as possible, thereby providing continuing adult education to rural women. Child care - much like nutrition, hygiene, and fashion in the home management houses- relied on the latest academic insight to ensure a thriving and healthy childhood. The home management houses set an example for rural women and graduating students toward which to strive.

Other responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, entertaining, meal planning, and budgeting helped shape the home management house program. Equally important were the relationships built between house residents. Many women who lived in the homes recall their time as perhaps the first, and/or last time they would live together with a group of women in a home setting. Students who worked while attending school typically lived on their own, and as seniors even women who lived in dormitories found their time for female camaraderie running short. For many it was also the first opportunity to live in a home designed with modern convenience in mind. The Country Life Movement and Progressive Era influence encouraged home economics students to learn more modern, urban methods of
running a home and raising children. These concepts received reinforcement in the home management houses through equipment and furnishings rarely found in a rural Iowa home. The six weeks spent living in one of the houses prepared students for life in a well-equipped home, which ironically was not reasonable for many rural women because of expense. Like students at most land grant college programs, many women graduates never established a life in the country, instead choosing marriage and city dwelling with a college educated husband.

The program quickly expanded alongside ISC enrollment, and joined extension education and outreach programs to show rural women what their lives could be like with the right modern equipment. Two homes became four homes, and the infants who lived there stayed for about a year before being adopted by families or returned to their guardians. At the height of the program there were five homes with seven to eight students and one infant each. This program of simulated home life continued from 1924 to 1958, and every home economics graduate completed a six-week stay in one of the homes during her senior year. The six-week residence enabled ISC to receive and maintain certification through the Smith-Hughes Act for teaching vocational home economics.¹

Through home scrapbooks, baby books, and questionnaires from residents representing each decade the homes operated, the story of how the home management house program functioned, how infants became an integral part of the ISC home economics experience, and how students used the experience becomes clear. These resources also help establish how the intellectual ideas that fostered the program eventually aided in its downfall. A mailed questionnaire, undertaken with assistance from the State Historical Society of Iowa,

involved surveys that provided additional insight. A random sampling of 100 ISC home economics students from 1925-1958 received surveys. A majority of the questions focused on the home management homes and the experiences of students while they lived in the homes with infants. Approximately seventy-five graduates returned surveys, although not all surveys were completed because some women left school prior to graduation. The questionnaires help expand information already found in the house scrapbooks and baby books. Overall, the former residents reflected positively on the experience and their home economics education at ISC.

The historiography on women’s vocational education is rich with home economics details about sewing, cooking, and cleaning. Additionally, the wealth of sources available regarding the changing ideals of childcare and the transition from public child welfare institutions to private foster homes demonstrates the importance child welfare played in the twentieth century. Graduate students at ISC used research gathered at the homes to compose sociological master’s theses on time management, infant behavior, and household expenditures. Graduate students studying the houses addressed criticisms of the program such as the lack of male influence for the infants, and the constant changing of mother figures every few days. These studies provide an additional view into how all the elements of home economics played out in the home management houses.

Despite the popularity of the program, and the enthusiasm that most residents demonstrated for the experience, the evolving ideas of women’s work and home economics eventually made the home management houses unnecessary. By examining the development

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2 See Appendix for survey questions.
3 The return rate on the questionnaire also reflected an unknown number of additional surveys graciously sent out by Mrs. Doris Brown, who forwarded her copy to family and friends who also lived in the home management homes.
of the program, numerous ideas about why it eventually became obsolete emerge. First, the unavailability of healthy infants and the competition from the university day care made obtaining babies for home management houses difficult. In addition, women gained such advantages over housework due to improvements in electric appliances, mobility, economic success, and processed foods, that much of the work formerly practiced in the home management houses was not needed in a modern 1960s home. Third, the successful implementation of home economics education for high school girls, ironically one of the reasons the ISC home economics program for training teachers was such a success, meant that women who went to college came prepared for basic household duties and began to pursue a variety of degrees and professions outside the realm of home economics.

In order to illustrate these concepts Chapter One provides background on women’s traditional housework and the professionalization that the Progressive reformers and the Country Life movement attempted to bring to domestic work. It also discusses the foundation of the home management house program at ISC. Chapter Two highlights the role the infants played in the houses, the process the university went through to obtain them, and the recollections of a few of the thousands of students who helped raise the children. Finally, Chapter Three addresses the criticisms of the program and the combination of issues, both culturally and practically, that resulted in the dismantling of one of the oldest home management house programs in the nation. Additionally, the changes in department goals and emphases affected the demise of the home management program and the need for new types of home economics training that focused less on efficiency and more on family nurturing.
While numerous colleges and universities undertook programs with home management houses, none have received historical scholarly attention. The ISC program survived in various forms longer than other schools’ houses. The infant program also outlived any other of its type. Because of ISC’s nationally recognized home economics program, its home management houses can be considered a good representation of the highest caliber home economics education. Home management houses served a critical purpose for the program, and illustrate the various facets of home economics education during the early twentieth century. The use of infants inside the homes also emphasized the techniques utilized during the period for parenting and child care, in addition to explaining how the university worked with child welfare agencies of the time period. This is the first known comprehensive study of a home management house program and coincides with the golden age of home economics in the United States and at ISC.
CHAPTER 1. SCIENTIFIC HOME ECONOMICS EDUCATION

"Women are beginning to understand that housework has received the caress of science and has been made beautiful. It is no more simple drudgery, but a glorious conquest for the welfare of new generations ... such a field should satisfy the natural longing of any rightly made woman."4

Making housework beautiful challenged educators and reformers alike. While many women in the early twentieth century gained the "caress of science" in their homes, far more in rural areas still worked under conditions of drudgery. Training the daughters of these women to work effectively with both new tools and outdated technologies became the goal of those concerned with the future of rural society. Because most women could not attend college for anything other than teaching, the opportunity to attend a university to learn about proper homemaking techniques presented a practical way for more women to attain a degree. By attending school to learn household skills these students would be breaking the tradition of grandmothers and mothers training younger generations. They would also be able to learn new skills and techniques unfamiliar to their mothers and grandmothers because of their unfamiliarity with technologies and innovations being taught at the collegiate level.

A number of outside influences created the desire for home economics education in higher education. As early as the mid-1800s, social reformers wanted to ensure that home and family life in rural America paralleled the experiences of middle class Americans. This class of people could afford new furnishings and appliances in their homes, reducing the

amount of difficult housework done by women. Farm families, and those living in rural areas, became targets for this reform during the Theodore Roosevelt administration with the advent of the Country Life Movement. Founded to improve the lives of rural people through innovation and the transfer of technologies found in middle class homes, the movement did not necessarily enjoy a warm reception with all farm women. As some historians have pointed out, women who enjoyed their difficult work and gained pride and status from making a nice, clean farm home, did not necessarily desire and could not afford the changes reform brought to their lives. For many women, producing goods in their homes provided spending money and limited financial dependence on husbands. However, the desire of outside parties to implement electricity, plumbing, appliances, and better education for poor people and rural residents overcame the objections of men and women who did not want outsiders influencing their lives.  

In addition to Country Life reform ideas, Progressive Era ideals about how modern families and homes should operate helped shape the home economics curriculum. Social reformers desired the improvement of urban families in addition to those in rural areas. The goal of allowing women time to care for and educate their children with good moral values, while maintaining a safe and clean home for husbands and children, meant that managing a household effectively would be the primary task of women. Quickly, educators seized the opportunity to study the ways in which housekeeping could be most advantageously completed.

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This did not differ greatly from similar attitudes regarding industry or agriculture. Land grant universities specialized in scientific developments to improve efficiency and production in agriculture and the sciences. These developments helped mechanize the agricultural aspects of rural life, and developments in home economics would do the same for rural homes. Using proven methods for the home expanded study and development of a wide variety of areas including kitchen appliances and design, furniture placement, nutritious meal planning, and creative entertaining. The concept of home economics developed out of the desire for better homes and the increasing enthusiasm for using science to better people’s lives. As early as the 1920s, textbooks for home management stressed the importance of emulating suburban life. The benefits of a lighter work load left time for leisure activities such as walks. It also clearly enforced the idea that the woman in the home needed to adapt to the needs of her family whether that be by changing a menu, a schedule, or making the home more aesthetically pleasing, as well as adapting to the advice of experts.7

In the 1930s, texts included the advances that arrived with electricity, but as early as the 1880s class lectures at Iowa State College included information about indoor plumbing and artificial lighting. The advantages associated with cleanliness, health, and efficiency helped to make a better family. Managing a house in modern times involved running a house like a business. Businesses that avoid waste, through scientific management were more efficient. This became the goal of home economics until the 1950s – eliminate waste of all

7 Lillian M. Gilbreth, The Home-Maker and her Job, (New York: Appleton and Company, 1927), 12-13. Gilbreth specialized in industrial time management. Her home economics books focused on the specifics of detailed time management in the home such as the number of steps used in moving between the sink and the oven. For specific information about scientific motherhood see: Rima D. Apple, “Constructing Mothers: Scientific Motherhood in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century,” in Mothers and Motherhood: Readings in American History, ed. Rima D. Apple and Janet Golden, (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1997).
types such as the wasting of time, food, energy, and money. Science aided the planning and design of this goal.\(^8\)

Women’s work between 1920 and 1950 changed considerably with these developments, especially in rural areas. Technology inside rural homes was finally catching up to technology in urban homes and to academic information students had received since the beginnings of the home economics department. Students from farms who grew up with little to ease the burden of cream separation, water hauling, or cooking over a coal or wood stove soon found themselves in laboratories full of plumbed water, electric appliances, and laundry machines. Even the earliest students at ISC, who started home economics education in lecture classes in 1869, benefited by using laboratories beginning in the late 1870s. These labs contained sewing machines and other basic technology not typically found on the farm such as indoor plumbing, electric lights, and early appliances.

The program gained in popularity from about a dozen female students in the first class to almost one hundred female students in its 1897 class.\(^9\) Mary Welch, the wife of the first university president at ISC, implemented the initial home economics classes. She believed a strong need existed to bring scientific housekeeping education to young women, thereby providing male graduates with well trained wives. Her students used the university

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\(^9\) This was the first year for an official four-year program at ISC that was offered under the title of home economics. These early classes were designed to give a well rounded experience of sewing, cooking, and cleaning and did not focus on one particular area. Child care did not begin until after 1913.
infirmary, kitchen, and laundry as their labs. Eventually the students learned the specifics of homemaking in laboratories with the latest in appliances and methods.\textsuperscript{10}

They also learned basic science skills to ensure that they could use biology, chemistry, and other natural sciences to advance their understanding of household goods and processes. In the early years between 1869 and 1913, these science classes targeted topics such as “Household Chemistry,” “Home Nursing,” and “Garden Biology.”\textsuperscript{11} Growing enrollment in the early 1900s necessitated the expansion out of school cafeterias and into lab space specifically designed for home economics use. These labs continued to operate in various forms until many of the skills could be replaced by technological advancements, such as frozen food and dish washers, causing some of the labs to be obsolete in the 1950s. Later classes incorporated psychology as one of the new emphases in home economics education focused on family living.\textsuperscript{12}

This discrepancy between rural women’s work and the curriculum at ISC continued throughout the program’s history. As noted by other historians who have studied the art of rural homemaking, the challenge of providing meals and cleanliness to families where all money was reinvested into the farming operation, and the desire to ensure that children - especially daughters - found some other lifestyle, caused some mothers to encourage daughters to go to school and learn the techniques of modern housekeeping. Education provided a better chance for daughters to make their own money before marriage, and it also

\textsuperscript{10} Eppright, 1-21. The ISU publication of the home economics history contains much biographical information about school faculty and classes offered throughout the first one hundred years. The work is useful but offers limited information about home management houses.

\textsuperscript{11} Hazel Keefer, \textit{The development of the home economics curriculum of Iowa State College from 1869-1913}, Master’s Thesis (Ames: Iowa State College, 1932), 97-99.

gave women an opportunity to meet men who would not be returning to the farm. For farm mothers who wanted a better life for their daughters, marrying an educated man instead of a farmer must have been an additional reason to send daughters to college. Women who attended ISC cited various reasons for attending school, but most agreed that they did receive the emotional, if not financial, support of their families. Farm families frequently sacrificed small luxuries or improvements to send their children to college. “Pin money,” which farm wives raised through the sale of eggs, chickens, cream, and other homemade items provided much of the funding for a college education.  

Other scientific training facilities for students included art studios, household equipment labs, and opportunities to work with extension agents. All these applications of home economics existed in the early practice homes, as well as lecture classes that evolved to include home management techniques being practiced in the labs. A home management lecture course became one of the major course requirements while students lived in the home management houses. The one element missing from the technical training was a day care, or nursery school for child care. This opened around 1910 so students could learn proper practices of child development. The facility became a training ground for students before they entered the practice house, and many of the infants who lived in the homes eventually spent a few hours a day under the supervision of underclass students who worked at the day care.

Reformers hoped to produce professional housewives and mothers through university education. It would then be the responsibility of these educated women to modernize

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13 Anne Marie Low, *Dust Bowl Diary*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).
14 House Scrapbooks.
communities by becoming mothers and wives, extension agents, and rural teachers of home economics. Vocational education standards and expectations changed after 1900, when the emphasis shifted between running the home like a business and creating a home that ran efficiently and served as a sanctuary against the hardships of the outside world. Women became not simply the provider of food and services; they also needed to create a warm, comfortable environment that they managed and maintained. This change not only reflected the standards of suburban life, it also illustrated the desire of reformers to maintain a healthy rural population on the farm by improving home life for rural residents. These expectations created new responsibilities for women running a home, regardless of the location and status of their family. Existing home economics programs around the country developed new programs such as home management, and schools that did not provide an educational outlet for women reexamined the role of vocational education at the university level.

Land grant colleges were not alone in providing early home economics education for young women. Normal schools, women’s colleges, religious affiliated schools, state universities, and African American schools recognized the growing importance of training women for their futures as homemakers. Progressive ideals of family life demanded that some type of training be made available to ensure that children and husbands received proper emotional and physical care. Vocational education for women reduced strict constraints by allowing higher education possibilities, while reinforcing the typical domestic role expected of women.16

Women gradually discovered they could utilize home economics to pursue other outlets such as journalism, business, art, and higher education. As long as they reported about domestic issues, learned business to better balance a budget or run a home-based shop, designed crafts or furnishings, and taught home economics, much leeway existed inside the home economics department at large schools such as ISC, which after 1918 offered course specializations in all these areas. Because of these growing specialties in the field, it became clear that some type of experience combining all the branches of home economics was necessary. The home management house fulfilled this need.

Women who wanted to pursue employment outside the home before marrying trained for careers in education, child care, institutional management and also provided opportunities to do scientific research. These research projects at larger universities helped make homemaking into a science that involved setting a standard for a quality home environment. Typically, this standard resembled middle class urban homes. As some students pointed out, their time in the home management house offered them a look at what they wanted their adult lives to resemble in terms of material quality. Without an increase in disposable income, this standard would be hard to recreate on a farm.

Studies and lists compiled by “experts,” who were usually educated middle class people pursuing academic or popular publication, set standards for everything from proper ventilation, to appropriate books for the home library, and the correct combination of framed art for the walls. The process of teaching proper home management involved combining

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18 Letters to author.
19 ISC Home Economics Circular no. 6, Valuable Books and Bulletins on Home Economics, 1916-1917, Home Economics Department Publications, Box 1 Folder 1, University Archives, Parks Library, Ames, Iowa.
these detailed specifications and techniques for child care, interior design, and food preparation.

In 1904 the Stout Institute in Menomonie, Wisconsin and the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama both took an advanced step toward scientific home economics education. They opened the first actual homes, away from school laboratories, to house women and allow them to experience homemaking skills firsthand. These private schools set an example for other universities and schools by founding the first home management houses. After 1917 the Smith-Hughes Act, which provided federal matching funds that matched state funding for home economics education and training of home economics teachers, public schools like land grant universities could fund home management houses of their own. High schools also received matching funds in the Smith-Hughes Act, which increased the need for college educated teachers in home economics. By 1930 most high schools required some type of home economics education for girls. This further emphasized the importance society placed on trained homemakers. Federal guidelines soon reinforced the importance of home management homes when it required some type of stay in a home management house or dormitory experience for vocational educators.

The growth of educational options for women mirrored the increasing importance activists and agencies placed on women as consumers as well as homemakers. As early as 1914 the USDA stressed the importance of home economics ideas in the extension program for farm homes. The passage of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914 provided funding for home

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21 Eleanor Vergin, Function of the home management houses in providing managerial and technical experiences in home making for undergraduate students, Master's Thesis, (Ames: Iowa State College, 1953), 2. Home management homes were also referred to as practice homes; the two phrases will be used interchangeably in this paper.
extension service agents. These women, like extension agents for agriculture, would provide local programs designed to help rural women use new technologies and techniques to make farm life more comfortable and enjoyable – like suburban, middle class life. They tried to assimilate rural women into the consumption-driven middle class. ISC maintained a close working relationship with rural extension programs throughout the home economics program.22

Various studies written about home extension agents show that the desire of reformers to send college educated young women into the countryside to improve the skills of adult women did not always work as planned. In many situations, the “book educated” home extension agent did not possess the actual experience that her older, practiced clients did.23 Reading about women’s domestic work and applying it in homes proved to be two different tasks. In order to prevent further alienation of farm women and potential destruction of the home extension programs, it became vital for future agents to gain some experience, however limited, in the arts of family communication, child rearing, using tools and materials, and economizing. This need changed the goals of home economics educators and progressive reformers to include proper experience during training.24

The goals of reformers also created a need for college programs in home economics to integrate modern equipment into their laboratories and utilize practice homes so students could learn what many urban middle class women already knew. Some experts, like Isabel

22 More information about the relationship between ISC home economics and extension and rural education programs can be found in Eppright, and The Iowa Homemaker, a publication started in the 1920s.
24 See Sturgis, “‘How ya’ Gonna Keep Em,’” 138, for further information on rural beautification and attempts to keep women in rural communities.
Bevier, a leading home economics educator from Illinois, spoke publicly about the numerous ways women’s education benefited the Country Life movement. Additionally, as Bevier mentioned, at land grant universities the partnership between men’s and women’s vocational education gave the sexes an opportunity to work together to solve problems. This link between the sexes meant that at ISC, almost 70 percent of female graduates married fellow ISC attendees. This percentage held true for an extended period of time between approximately 1910 and 1950. Additionally it meant that the same percentage of women entered housekeeping no later than five years after graduation. Most graduates took up housekeeping as a middle class wife instead of a rural farm wife, despite the fact that a majority of ISC home economics students came from rural or farming backgrounds.

Between 1917 and 1918, Iowa State College joined almost fifty other colleges and universities when it opened two home management houses in order to provide the necessary experience for young women to learn household management. Permission for a trial period, obtained by Dean Catherine MacKay through college president R.A. Pearson and the state Board of Regents, began in 1918. ISC utilized two older faculty homes on the campus for the purpose, and alumni and community members donated equipment and furnishings. Initially, seven or eight students spent two weeks in one of the houses where they rotated through tasks under the instruction of a house mother. In the first years of the houses, unmarried home economics faculty members lived in the homes with the women, but in later years graduate students fulfilled the role of house mother.

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25 Isabel Bevier speech at Ohio State, 1920, Home Management House Files, Box 8 Folder 3, University Archives, Parks Library, Ames, Iowa.
26 Eppright.
Between 1918 and 1925, students stayed for two weeks and prepared meals, cleaned, laundered clothes, designed small accent furnishings like draperies or napkins, and entertained faculty and fellow students. It is interesting to note that although the students washed clothing, they did not launder their own linens; this work was hired out, possibly reflecting the influence of middle class ideals. Overall, these tasks reflected the priorities of household management. The home management house experience proved to be flexible over the four decades it existed at ISC; faculty frequently adjusted the program to include new innovations, important female-oriented tasks, and changing expectations. One of these changes, the addition of infants to the homes, represented a drastic change in the operation of the home management homes at ISC, and as such will be discussed in a later chapter.

One of the smaller, but important alterations in home management programs regarded the growing importance of cash purchases. The growing cash driven economy of home products meant that many women did not make as many of their own goods as women had during the nineteenth century. Even rural women depended on spending money to buy cloth, supplies, and amenities. As consumers, women running their own households faced many new choices for conveniences and services. Industrial production and the consumer goods market increasingly revolved around home products. Women needed to make good decisions regarding these purchases for the benefit of their families. This became particularly true for rural women, who lacked the conveniences many middle class urban women enjoyed and lacked the spending money to purchase many luxuries. Rural expenditures for household goods were planned in advance.

28 Anna Richardson Papers, Correspondence, 12-1-12, Box 1, Folder 5, University Archives, Parks Library, Ames, Iowa.
Regardless of the actual desire of rural women to own items such as washing machines or new cream separators, and evidence does indicate that some rural women did not desire this equipment and many others could not afford to bring these items into their homes, reformers in the Country Life movement thought that acquiring these new machines was vital to making rural life easier and therefore more desirable. As potential future extension agents, home economics students at ISC needed to master these new innovations so they could bring their knowledge to rural areas. Extension agents worked as demonstrators and advertisers encouraging rural women to make these purchases. These new appliances required cash. In 1920 many rural women did not manage large amounts of cash, but reformers encouraged women to learn, so budgeting became one of the basic responsibilities of home management houses at Iowa State College.

The original two home management houses at ISC began as the ultimate laboratory experience. For two weeks students performed basic household tasks while still enjoying the privileges of attending class and student social activities. Students between 1924 and 1958 spent six weeks because that additional time included the responsibility of helping to raise a baby in addition to constantly entertaining fellow classmates and university friends with

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31 Neth, Preserving the Family Farm. For additional information Neth concentrates much of her book on the struggle of rural women to deal with the onslaught of new technologies and appliances. Neth argues that many rural women identified part of their personal wealth as a homemaker in their ability to “make do.” The invasion of extension agents and sales people created tension and encouraged the unwanted adaptation to new modern appliances.
theme parties and dinners. The goals of the administration changed with the beginning of the six-week home management program. The six-week term ensured that the women knew how to manage their time, deal with an infant, and entertain in a stylish yet affordable manner. As in the past, students also made homemade crafts and home improvements instead of purchasing new items.

The experience of simulated home living became so important that students could not graduate without fulfilling the requirement of staying in one of the houses. In 1925 a typical home management house experience at ISC included the following tasks: a cook planned and prepared the meals with the help of an assistant cook; a housekeeper handled cleaning responsibilities while the assistant housekeeper managed laundry and trash disposal; a child director and assistant attended the infant with the supervision of the house mother; finally, one student coordinated the entertainment and parties, while the last student balanced the household budget and scheduled activities.\(^{32}\)

The training gained in the practice homes brought together the many facets of home economics education. Diet and nutrition students typically spent much of their class schedule working on the particulars of their degree. The same applied to the arts and design students who learned proper color coordination and furniture design. Child care specialists took additional psychology classes and worked at the nursery. All these women united under one roof to benefit from each other’s knowledge and to use the information gained from their household management class. This class brought together the many aspects of textbook learning before women entered the practice houses. To reinforce the experience of home

\(^{32}\text{House Scrapbook, Home Management House Files, Box 3, Folder 3.}\)
management house life, students attended a discussion section during their six-week stay to help solve problems they might be having in their homes. Because they came from numerous academic specializations, many women worried about performing unfamiliar tasks. Students frequently recorded this anxiety in letters left behind in house scrapbooks, and many times it came from students in design or textiles who worried about properly caring for their house infant. Jean, a student from 1926 wrote, “There once was a girl named Jean. She had never taken care of a baby and your compact twenty pounds of humanity frightened her very much.”

Household technology received particular emphasis in home economics at ISC. Multiple studies completed on the subject of household equipment led university officials at ISC to constantly change furnishings to ensure that students worked with top quality appliances. As a result, other household research projects utilized the list of furnishings from home management houses to rate typical homes for efficiency, child safety, and convenience. Large living quarters for group activities, a large coat closet, strip outlets, book shelves, downstairs bathrooms, and a fireplace topped the list of essentials in home management houses and reflected the priorities middle class women should seek in their future homes. Many students recalled that these improvements did not resemble any of the simple technologies found in their parents’ homes.

Other household equipment duties such as ironing and dusting subjected students to the appraisal of their house advisor. One student recalled her advisor leaving marbles in hard to reach locations behind furniture to see if the students cleaned thoroughly. Anne Beem

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33 Home Economics at Iowa State.
34 House Scrapbook, Home Management House Records, Box 3, Folder 3.
Hesse recalled her house advisor criticizing the job of the ironer at dinner because she had creased the napkins. Small details such as these possessed importance for instructors teaching proper methods for home management. The proper and efficient method for completing tasks included attention to detail. For many students, these methods continued in their own homes. Elizabeth Kleffman, a 1946 graduate, noted that she retained many of these values and habits in her own home while she raised six children. The proper technique for ironing and dusting carried on after school ended, especially for women in a middle class situation.

For children’s rooms, the essentials included hard washable floor surfaces such as linoleum, a recessed radiator, south or east facing windows, and indirect lighting to protect the baby. In the kitchen, houses came equipped with an exhaust fan, dishtowel drying space, cupboard space for dishes, and a passage between kitchen and dining room. All these specifics could be adjusted as needed, but represented the ideal in scientific homemaking. They also represented the current ideas of parenting experts about what should be included in infant rooms and the types of equipment needed for a successful childhood. Some of these innovations provided efficiency not previously associated with domesticity. According to some experts even the proper arrangement of kitchen furniture could save women 300 miles of walking in a single year. These ideas lasted throughout the 1950s in a practice called “time and motion.”

One of the problems that became apparent in simulating a home environment involved time management. Six or seven women shared the responsibilities that one woman

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36 Anne Beem Heese, letter to author.
37 Elizabeth Kleffman, letter to author.
tackled in the typical home. In a study determining how much time women spent doing various tasks in the home management house, meal preparation absorbed the most with almost three hours a day spent on cooking alone, without including the three and a half hours consumed by clean-up and set-up. In other studies done from 1920 to 1923 specifically regarding farm women, the average working day lasted almost twelve hours. This figure accounted for all household related tasks. These studies also indicated that farm women in the northwest, northeast, and west spent less time completing household tasks. While these hourly figures reflect typical working hours for many rural people in the 1920s, homemakers also cared for children, and did all of their work seven days a week, 365 days a year. The home management houses obviously did not have the ability to simulate this full-time experience. This discrepancy also caught the attention of students, many of whom later reported that one of the biggest challenges of their adult lives was time management, in part because practice and reality differed greatly.

Budgeting was one of the tasks that reinforced the role of women in household management. In 1933 students paid $12.00 for six weeks’ rent. A little over $30 of the total rent money went toward the expense of food, gas, utilities, supplies, magazines, papers, flowers and entertainment. The budget allowed fifty-five cents a person for food each day. Expenses for the infant and for entertaining university guests came from a $10 reserve fund. The student in charge of maintaining the budget for the week held the responsibility of ordering the next week’s food and balancing the books to ensure that the residents did not

41 Letters to author.
overspend their funds. Like many rural women in the 1930s, the women residing in the four homes in the summer of 1933 suffered the wrath of a dust storm. The dirt that followed complicated chores for the housekeeper and her assistant, and skewed the data collected for a time management study about cleaning that a graduate student tried to complete during the storm.

The rotation between tasks every four or five days bothered some of the students involved in this particular study. They expressed concern that they handled each task just long enough to gain an understanding without being able to master any one of the many jobs in the house. Unfortunately the consistent increase in home economics enrollment at ISC prevented anything longer than a six-week stay, to ensure that all students could participate before graduation their senior year. By 1934, 771 students were enrolled in the home economics program at ISC, ranking first out of the fifty-one land grant schools, and 11th in the nation. During the peak years of enrollment, the importance of depression era “making do” became more important. Students needed to conserve funds and be able to stretch food, clothing, and other supplies further than usual.

During the Depression years students learned to make small improvements with little money. In one house, students repaired living room pillows with scrap fabric, cleaned pans to keep them working longer, and made pot holders from other scraps. During World War II students saved sugar ration stamps to make ice cream. They also learned alternative methods

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43 Ibid.
44 Newsclippings, Untitled Entry, Family and Consumer Sciences Collection, Box 1 Folder 1, University Archives, Parks Library, Ames, Iowa.
45 The highest enrollment periods spanned from about 1930-1945, when about 770 women were enrolled between freshman and senior status. This number is deceiving though, since sometimes almost ½ a class would drop out before graduation to get married.
of food preservation and, "a study of the buying and care of new and substitute textiles."\textsuperscript{46} The home management houses stayed current with the needs and requirements of the times.

Entertaining in the houses was the overwhelming memory surveyed graduates discussed. Not even hard times prevented students from entertaining guests in their home. Between 1931 and 1933, the residents in the Isabel Bevier house hosted two formal dinners, one buffet luncheon, created color schemes for parties, made guest lists, gave multiple progressive dinners and teas, along with the typical improvement projects of flower planting and curtain making.\textsuperscript{47} This emphasis on entertaining related more to middle class expectations than rural home management skills. Lillian James, a 1930 graduate, recalled a hard lesson learned when her house served duck at a dinner. One duck hardly fed the guests, leaving James with a lesson that lasted seventy years- one duck does not feed a large group of people.\textsuperscript{48}

Other incidents occurred as students learned the art of entertaining guests. In a 1935 home management house, the cook prepared a purple colored gravy that should have been brown. Without the convenience of food coloring the students turned off the lights and served dinner by candlelight to hide the unappetizing color.\textsuperscript{49} The antics did not stop as technology advanced to make some household tasks easier. Even though most homemakers bought store chickens by the 1950s, Marilyn Loupee, a 1952 graduate, fondly remembered an afternoon spent trying to behead a live chicken on a wobbly stump with a dull knife for the chicken and noodle dinner.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{46} Eppright, 162.
\textsuperscript{47} Isabel Bevier House Book 1931-33, Home Management House Files, Box 2, Folders 1,3.
\textsuperscript{48} Lillian James, letter to author.
\textsuperscript{49} Laura Christensen Dailey, letter to author.
\textsuperscript{50} Marilyn Loupee, letter to author.
Although the students did raise gardens during the spring and summer, poultry care and milking were not offered as part of the home economics curriculum. This is another example of the home management houses emphasizing the importance of urban, middle class expectations. It also differed from the early, formative years of the home economics curriculum between 1870 and 1900, when female students were required to perform labor for the university community. These chores included typical domestic cleaning and cooking duties in addition to typical rural household duties like poultry care.\footnote{Paul Nienkamp, ‘Work and Labor at Iowa State University,” 2003.}

Iowa historian Dorothy Schwieder stressed the importance of ISC home economics in providing educational programs for rural women. Like many other land grant university – extension relationships, ISC departments actively provided the most up to date scientific home-making information to rural people.\footnote{Dorothy Schwieder, “Education and Change in the Lives of Iowa Farm Women”, 60 (Spring 1986), Agricultural History, 209.} This took place through educational programs as well as through pamphlets and mailings. Much of the information provided to extension agents and rural women came from work done in home management houses. In the nine months prior to June 1935, they supplied seventy-five home economics stories to state daily newspapers. These articles appeared roughly eight times each, garnering 2,780 inches of column space and 38 weekly columns. The most frequently used articles involved child care practices and home management stories.\footnote{Genevieve Fisher Papers, 12-13-1, Box 1 Folder 3, University Archives, Parks Library, Ames, Iowa.} The State of Iowa also reported that 11,000 women enrolled in vocational education home making classes provided by extension services with material from ISC.\footnote{Iowa Child and Youth While House Conference, (Des Moines: State of Iowa, 1950), 18. For more information about extension service work in farm homes see, Places of Pride: The work and photography of Clara R. Brian, (Bloomington IL: McLean County Historical Society, 1989). Brian worked as a county
A wide variety of information distributed from the home demonstration news service originated in the home economics department at ISC. Many of these topics reflected the methods being practiced and used in the home management homes. By identifying numerous subjects written by the news service, it is easier to see the evolution of ideas in home management between 1937 and 1947. In 1937 and 1938, various articles written about recycling clothing to match seasonal styles made the papers. During the Depression, women still seeking stylish clothing often did not have much with which to work, but home economics professionals encouraged them to utilize the plain style of the day to patch single color garments, and to reuse children’s clothing by changing the fasteners to make the garments larger. In the same years efficiency in the kitchen received attention. Experts recommended that by using the correct type of pot or pan on the stove women could save electricity and fuel. This mirrors the work done by home management house students who cleaned their pots and pans to make them more efficient and who kept busy patching pillows and furnishings with scrap fabric.55

During the remaining years of the 1930s, the news service made various recommendations about home comfort and improvements that would be affordable. Cleaning with inexpensive supplies kept rugs and window treatments newer longer and storage units constructed with boards served as bookcases until new ones could be purchased. Among the more practical reminders that went out to homemakers was a helpful article about

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extension Home Bureau advisor from 1918 – 1945. In addition to observing the many changes in rural homes in this period, Brian captured different domestic situations with her camera that provide intimate glances into farm homes in Illinois.

removing cellophane from new lampshades to prevent fire.\textsuperscript{56} Many of the themes of home economics education stressed during the Depression continued throughout World War II. Immediately after the war, however, new emphasis on domestic equipment created an intense barrage of publications encouraging making purchases long postponed because of financial hardship and rationing. Washing machines, electric ranges, refrigerators altered the way women planned their time, made family meals, and organized their homes.\textsuperscript{57}

The home management houses also repeatedly opened their doors for numerous home economics extension activities such as Farm and Home Week, which took place on the ISC campus. These tours allowed women in extension clubs to examine the latest in household furnishings, appliances, and child care methods. The college also tried to take these methods into rural counties, especially using the child care practices from the houses to educate extension group members.\textsuperscript{58}

ISC utilized the funding provided by the federal government to expand the home economics department and meet the needs of a growing number of female students. The expanding numbers of students, coupled with the expanding numbers of possible majors in the department meant that additional laboratories and more home management houses were needed. By 1930 four practice houses served a growing number of home economics students. In the late 1930s this number grew to a high of five houses, and then gradually decreased until the 1950s when the home management project moved into adjoining duplexes.

\textsuperscript{56} Home Agencies News Service (Ames: Iowa State College, January 1 – December 31 1938, January 1 – December 31 1941).


\textsuperscript{58} Maria Steyn, \textit{The development of parent education through the extension service of Iowa State College, 1925-1932}, Master's Thesis, (Ames: Iowa State College, 1933).
As a university requirement all seniors needed to spend six weeks in one of the homes to graduate, and typically the homes filled year-round, with one or two houses staying open all summer. Upon moving in, students spent time acquainting themselves with their surroundings and their new roommates. Typically with such a large and varied department, women did not know everyone living in their house before moving. Administrators tried to combine students from different disciplines to ensure that one house did not have all cooking majors or all child care development students. This way the women could learn from one another in addition to learning from the experience.

A house mother or advisor usually lived with the students full time. A surprising number of students recalled that their house advisor, usually a masters’ candidate, did not spend much time watching over the undergraduates because she was busy with a fiancé or a thesis project. Other times the house advisor provided strict guidance. During the 1930s and 1940s curfews helped keep students under control. However, sometimes advisors missed curfew as well; some students remember locking their house advisor out of the house to make sure she would have to knock to be let back inside. This trick worked against students as well; one scrapbook memorializes a tricky climb back into a window after a late night outing.

This camaraderie between students remains as the fondest memory for many former home management house residents. Of those surveyed, a majority stated that the relationships built with fellow students during the six weeks was perhaps the most enjoyable and beneficial part of the entire experience. The constant need for teamwork when dealing with a baby, house guests, menus, budgets, and chores may have made solitary housework much more lonely later in life. Additionally, many students were preparing for their own
weddings while living in the home management house. Among the most popular parties
thrown in the houses were engagement parties for graduating students. Doris Blair Brown
recalled her own five pound party, which was written about in the ISC paper. She, like many
other students, went directly from practice house life to a home of their own and a husband to
care for. 59

Over the lifetime of the home management house program, the emphasis changed
from a, “department decided organization for all houses” to a ‘student initiated program in
each house with the teacher acting as an adviser.” The change in ideology also meant
students learned to plan for the good of their specific group or “family” instead of working
toward perfectionism in routine tasks. 60

In the late nineteenth century, educators believed that the textbook education of future
homemakers was insufficient to provide the type of intensive training educators and reforms
thought necessary for successful families. As a result, the scientific methods used in other
areas such as the male dominated careers of agriculture and engineering, transferred to the
home, creating equipment and methods that encouraged efficiency, careful management, and
proper techniques. Students, encouraged by the advent of new electric appliances and labor
saving devices, learned the basics of running a modern household. In the eyes of Progressive
Era reformers and those in the Country Life Movement, the ideals of middle class households
also needed to expand to include women struggling with drudgery in the country. The home
management houses at ISC combined all these issues into a place where students enjoyed

59 Doris Blair Brown, letter to author.
60 Eppright, p. 207-208.
working with the most modern conveniences while helping inform rural women about their projects and skills.

In 1925 the ISC practice homes began a new chapter in their tenure. The addition of children changed the program, and the effect the experience had on house residents. A number of special provisions designed for the safety and security of the baby needed to be implemented. With the addition of a baby, the program also began to attract a larger number of students. Soon more houses, instructors, and labs were needed to contain the home economics department. The basic elements of home management that students concentrated on in earlier homes remained. Students continued to clean, cook, budget, entertain, and plan. But, as responses from former residents indicate, the infant was the element of the house experience they remembered best, although the skills they carried with them into their own homes as adults pertained more to basic household duties instead of parenting methods. The comprehensive lessons the homes provided mimicked a type of home life most students from the farm had never before experienced. The equipment, furnishings, and the help of seven other students to complete jobs resembled middle-class life more than rural reality.
CHAPTER 2. BABIES ENTER THE HOME MANAGEMENT HOUSES

Child care was the only major ingredient of home economics education not originally represented in the first two home management houses. This deficiency bothered Dean Anna Richardson, so she worked with school administrators, other universities, and state agencies to include babies in the homes who students could then help raise. Ideally, the arrangement benefited students and babies alike. Students received a complete practice house experience and the infants escaped poor home situations and enjoyed scientific care and constant attention. In 1924, the home management program at ISC changed to accommodate two infants, thereby beginning a twenty-five year tradition that allowed almost 3,000 home economics students to experience all the basics of home management first hand.

In the fall of 1923 when the idea of including babies emerged, ISC already ran a nursery school that operated under the supervision of underclass students.\(^{61}\) It did not, however, meet the needs of both child development students and those of the entire home economics department. All students needed to gain some type of child development skills as part of the goal to create efficient home makers, extension agents, teachers, and parents.\(^{62}\)

During the fall of 1923 the process of adding infants to practice homes at ISC began with negotiations between Home Economics Dean Anna Richardson and college president Raymond A. Pearson. Her argument in favor of adding infants stressed that motherhood could not be underestimated as a vital role in society. Richardson cited the downward spiral


\(^{62}\) *Home Economics at Iowa State College.*
of moral values and believed that encouraging proper parenting skills in her students would foster happy, healthy children in the future.\(^6\) As research continued into the possibility of placing children in practice homes, President Pearson contacted colleagues at other land grant universities to gauge their feelings on this program. While most responses reaffirmed Richardson's ideas, President R.S. Shaw of the Michigan Agricultural College did not encourage including infants in home management houses because he thought students did not live there long enough to support the addition of infants.

Despite this opinion, most responses that arrived from around the country were positive. J. Tigard from the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Education wrote in response to an inquiry from Pearson that, "the foundling is infinitely better off in a practice home instead of an orphanage." He suggested that students and instructors gain ample training to support proper mental development in infants by taking a child psychology course before they lived with the babies.\(^6\) This class already existed as a requirement of the home economics department at ISC. As planning continued and Pearson gave his consent, Richardson tried to make convincing arguments to the Board of Regents.\(^6\) She collected testimonials from other schools that used infants in their practice homes. Some of the schools that reinforced the positive effects of the program included the University of Nebraska, Oregon State Agricultural College, South Dakota Normal School, and the University of Maine. Among the reasons given to add infants, child welfare ranked high as

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\(^6\) Anna Richardson Papers, Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 5, University Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa.

\(^6\) Ibid.

\(^6\) The Board of Regents is the governing board for state schools in Iowa. It makes decisions on major program changes and budget expenses for Iowa State, the University of Iowa and the University of Northern Iowa (formerly the normal school).
did the experience for the students. The benefits to the child included good development and positive spiritual benefits since the babies would receive more attention than they received in boarding homes or orphanages. Students would better appreciate the responsibilities of motherhood, learn child training in a "normal" way, and realize how much they would enjoy children of their own.  

Through the winter of 1923 – 1924 work continued to convince the Board of Regents that the infant program would benefit child and student alike. On January 18, 1924 the board agreed to allow infants in the two home management houses for a year long trial period, providing that the college did not accept liability for the babies. In February the search began for two healthy babies between the ages of eight and eighteen months. Richardson and her staff explored numerous options including the university hospital in Iowa City, and various children's homes in the Des Moines area. Before the end of the month, one child from Polk County was secured through the juvenile court. The judge who agreed to the transfer told Richardson that while the school could not be held liable for the child's physical well being, the college would be "morally responsible" for the good care of the infant. He added that this expectation would be the same if the court placed the baby in a private care home, or institution.  

Juvenile courts first developed to manage child support and other social issues involving women in the late nineteenth century. They were a product of progressive era involvement in social issues, and relied heavily on probation officers, who worked much like

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66 Letter, Richardson Papers, Box 1, Folder 5.
67 Ibid.
present day social workers. Juvenile courts in Iowa handled the welfare of orphaned babies and unwed mothers, and that made them a good resource for the college to utilize when finding babies for its homes. The Iowa Welfare Department also regulated children’s homes and other institutions, which ISC used on many occasions to find healthy, but abandoned children. Numerous probation officers visited the home management houses during the programs’ duration to help find permanent homes for the children before they became too old for adoption. This usually happened when the children reached two years of age, because children older than two were much harder to place in homes.

The legal issue of acquiring children from state agencies generated plenty of paperwork in the home economics department and the Office of the President. The school enlisted the help of state Attorney General Gibson to ensure that the college could not be held accountable in case of death or injury of the child, that the school could give back the infant in case of illness, vacation, or any other undisclosed problem, that the school did not hold responsibility for placing the infant in a permanent home, and that the school would work with the child’s mother for financial obligations. In many of the boarding homes or orphanages, parents typically provided some money for the support of the child as long as they retained guardianship. The responsibility fell to the father if he could be identified, or to the mother if she worked. Over the course of the program many infants living at ISC received money from a parent since Iowa had a precedent for collecting from parents retaining guardianship.

69 Letter, Richardson Papers, Box 1, Folder 5.
70 “A Guide to Iowa Child Caring and Placing Agencies,” (Iowa City: Institute of Public Affairs, 1955); Mothers who released their children to the college were required to sign an additional release form approved by
Other issues needed to be resolved before students could move into homes with infants. With babies in the homes, students needed to stay longer to receive a balanced experience. Richardson decided the women would spend six weeks in the revamped home management house instead of the two that had been required. Richardson and college treasurer Herman Knapp agreed on a $12 fee to be paid by each student to cover house upkeep and supplies. This increased the $8 fee women paid in previous years to spend two weeks in the homes, but did not exist to pay for the care of the child. The fee provided for meals and laundry as well as the room. The university excused students from their dormitory contracts for their practice house stay. The women would spend four or five days in one of the following rotations: cook, assistant cook, housekeeper, assistant housekeeper, child director, assistant child director, social director, and manager. The first two children arrived in the spring of 1924, and lived in the previously used Beech and White houses.71

Gretchen and Albert (Sonny) both came from county juvenile agencies and were sixteen and thirteen months old on arrival.72 The college required that the chosen infants be in excellent health, so Richardson and her assistants rejected many potential candidates from hospitals who suffered minor illnesses. Sonny’s mother was an unmarried tuberculosis

the school’s lawyers to ensure that the school could not be held liable for death or injury to the baby. It does not appear that any fathers signed the release form, although it is believed that some of the release forms may be in the restricted files in the Special Collections at Iowa State University Parks Library.

71 The houses changed locations and names frequently. The growing campus pushed them further away from central campus, so private homes were purchased from time to time. They needed a bedroom for the house mother, the baby, and two or three other bedrooms to hold between 6-8 students. They also needed to possess enough modern features that they did not require extensive remodeling. Most homes were named after a famous home economics leader or educator. One of the longest running houses, the Isabel Bevier House, maintained contact with its namesake. Miss Bevier visited on various occasions and donated a floor lamp when the house opened.

72 This chapter will use the names used in the school records located in the Special Collection. Many of the children’s names were changed upon entering the home management houses. No surnames will be used to ensure the privacy of the children, although most would be presently advanced in age. Some surnames, as well as the full names of the parents of the children, do exist in various archival documents, but the adoption records are sealed and labeled confidential. As such they were not available for the research of this paper. Albert was nicknamed Sonny by his first set of mothers and is recorded in the baby books under that name.
patient and Gretchen’s mother was also unmarried. In later years the college selected infants based partially on mental health tests given to the parents, but the first few years illustrate that healthy infants in the desired age range were slightly difficult to find, and intelligence tests were not administered to either baby’s parents. Throughout the program, the students did not receive detailed information about where the babies came from, but some of those surveyed knew their baby came from a Des Moines children’s home.

The college did not set a requirement for how long children would live in the home management houses. Much depended on whether someone wanted to adopt a particular baby, or if the mother/family made the decision to regain total guardianship. Parents did not necessarily sign away legal rights to their children when their cases reached juvenile court. Some infants eventually spent as little as one quarter at ISC, while others spent almost two years. Gretchen’s mother retained guardianship when her daughter left ISC but Sonny’s mother, because of her terminal illness, did sign away custody to the juvenile courts and he was adopted.73 Many of the children became more attractive for adoption because the level of care given in the homes exceeded that in orphanages and boarding homes. The amount of public press attention given to the original babies helped Sonny to be adopted quickly, and would serve the same role in the local adoption of many home management home babies.74

Gretchen and Sonny played together on a regular basis throughout their time at ISC, but their relationship got off to a rocky start when Gretchen smacked Sonny for stealing a toy.75 Like many of the children who followed them, Gretchen and Sonny spent a

73 Home Management House Files, Coburn House Scrapbook, Box 3, Folder 6, 12-5-1, University Archives, Parks Library, Ames, Iowa.
74 Richardson Papers, Box 1, Folder 6.
75 Letter, Richardson Papers, Box 1, Folder 5.
considerable amount of time socializing in the university community. Administrators, faculty, and other community members paid frequent visits to the home management houses to bring gifts and play with the babies. Occasionally when students went home for holidays and breaks the children would stay with a faculty member and his/her family. Some students also stayed during the holidays and took care of all the infants from home management houses.

Throughout the summer of 1924 crews worked on two new homes to make sure they were ready for their “families.” The previous two houses did not have enough room for all the students, house mother, and baby, so rooms needed to be expanded and rearranged in the new houses to ensure that the babies possessed everything they needed for a comfortable home life. Influences and guidelines from popular baby raising books can be found in the rooms prepared for the infants. Southern exposure windows, good ventilation, laminate flooring, and the correct number of outfits and garments that existed in the home management houses all correspond with these books. Three houses opened in the fall of 1924 to make sure all seniors could live in one before graduation. A new baby, Betty, from Mercy Hospital in Des Moines, joined Gretchen and Sonny. She was almost a year old and her mother did not retain guardianship.76

The first full year the infants lived in the homes (1924-1925) seemed to affect the students in emotional and maternal ways not previously experienced when the homes lacked infants. The women kept baby books for each infant, recording minute and intimate details of the daily happenings of their small charge. They also recorded the other incidentals of

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76 Ibid.; Information about Betty can also be found in the Home Management House Files, Bevier Scrapbook, Box 2, Folder 1.
each baby so they could be remembered later. Sonny’s “mothers” received a letter from his real family on his birthday. His mother lived in the desert of Nevada for her health, and sent money to help with new clothing and toys.

The baby books also record how the students implemented accepted child rearing methods of the time in the homes. Strict emotional control marked child care during the 1930s and 40s when mothers were advised to be cautious about showing too much affection to their babies. The students received warnings against spoiling children with indulgences and unnecessary attention. Some women recorded in their letters to the children that they struggled to be so stern with such a small child. In an indication of what experts thought proper discipline included, Sonny went hungry one night after throwing food at the dinner table. Days later when he saw one of his mothers skipping dinner, he wanted to know if she had also thrown food at dinner. 77 The students learned to let children cry themselves to sleep, and in many houses this caused sleepless nights for students and infants alike.

The home management houses received frequent attention in Ames and across the state during the initial year. The Des Moines Tribune covered house happenings in the fall of 1924 with engagement announcements of residents and the addition of baby Betty. The article featured details about the scientific care of infants in the homes and celebrated the good fortune of Betty for being selected to live at ISC. 78 A milk recipe came with her because her hospital nurses created a special combination to aid her digestion.

Betty’s time at ISC provides a balanced picture of what happened to babies selected to live on campus. She resided in the Beach House her first year but the college sent her

77 Sonny Baby book, Box 5, Folder 1.

78 Beach House Book, Box 4 Folder 2.
back to Des Moines during the summer because they did not need her in a house for summer school. When she returned to ISC in the fall of 1925, the instructors noted that she had lost weight and color while at the Christ’s Child Home. This information would later be examined in a separate research study comparing the health and intelligence of home management house infants to those found in public care facilities. Betty lived in the new Isabel Bevier House during the school year of 1925-1926, but in the spring she contracted whooping cough and went to the hospital in Des Moines to recover.79

Gretchen left in the fall of 1925 and lived with her mother in downtown Ames. She is recorded as having visited Betty for her birthday in December. Baby Charles moved in to fill Gretchen’s spot. He was five months old on arrival and the students who cared for him took special care to write him letters upon their departure. The responsibility of caring for a child, even with the supervision of a house mother, overwhelmed many girls, who took the task to heart. They fully realized that their influence shaped a little person, and used all available scientific methods to ensure the health and happiness of their baby. Geraldine, one of the students who lived with Charles in 1926, wondered in her letter what he would grow up to be and what he would think of them. This was a constant theme in the student’s letters to their children. Many women expressed the initial fear they felt when they were the child director, and then discussed the sadness they felt when giving up responsibility for the baby to the next student.80

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79 Ibid., Because some records have been closed, it is difficult to piece together exactly what happened to all the children, and develop a precise timeline. The complete information about some children in this paper comes from the information recorded by students living in the houses with the babies.

80 There is no clear indication why the baby books made for some of the children stayed behind after the babies went to new homes. The frequency of baby books drops off considerably after 1940, but it is not presently known if that was because they were sent home with the babies or simply not made at all. Early in the home management house program the books counted as one of the projects the students needed to complete before the
Charles’ diet illustrates the strict schedule infants adhered to while living in the homes. Between February and April Charles increased his daily intake of milk, egg yolk, cereal, and began taking cod liver oil with his orange juice. The addition of cod liver oil did not please Charles, so the students permitted him to follow each serving with juice. The process did not have the desired results however, and Charles soon began refusing all orange juice because he related it to cod liver oil. Charles’ diet again illustrates that the correlation between modern advice books for mothers and policies followed in the houses is strong. This particular menu matches almost exactly one found in a parenting guide for the 1930s. These experiences, both positive and negative, show why instructors thought practice house life did a better job of teaching true mothering skills than working at a day care or nursery school.

The following year, baby Ellen received a visit from her birth mother. The practice house “mothers” stayed nearby while the two spent time together, and later relayed the event to Ellen in her baby book. Ruth Roberts wrote, “Your mother was sweet and attractive and she found it hard to say goodbye to her baby when it was time to leave.” Contact with birth parents was recorded again in 1937 when baby Nancy’s real mother sent Christmas pictures of Nancy to her former home at ISC after the baby returned to her mother. This correspondence, like the letter from Sonny’s family in Nevada, reinforced the interesting
service ISC provided for children from broken families. The contact with families or potential adoptive parents was not strange. Thelma Chenoweth, a 1929 graduate, remembered a young farm couple coming to see baby Richard. After graduation Chenoweth used the positive example of adoption from the home management house and became an adoptive parent herself. 84 Without the home management houses these children, even though they had at least one parent, would have lived in a boarding house or orphanage. In a time before foster homes, these places did not provide the vital individual attention and care needed for happy, healthy babies. 85

The baby books for the children who lived in the homes between 1925 and 1935 contain more information about their personalities and daily lives. The college set some precedents for care and medical attention of the children. A number of children were sent to the hospital for the smallest of illnesses. In the summer of 1927 baby June caught a cold and her mothers wrote goodbye letters to her after she left for the hospital. The college did not want to be held responsible for the loss or illness of any of the children. 86

There are indications that ISC accepted babies with slight health problems when "ideal" children could not be found. One such case happened in 1933 when baby Margaret Ann arrived from Des Moines. She breathed rather shallowly which scared her new mothers. A faculty member arrived to check on the situation and reassured the girls that some infants breathed lightly. They also decided to feed Margaret six times a day instead of the recommended five times because she fussed frequently. The students reported being awakened before dawn with Margaret’s crying. They quickly learned not to pay attention

84 Thelma Chenoweth, Letter to author.
85 Ibid., Box 8.
86 Ibid., Box 3, Folder 2.
and she was soon broken of the habit. As mentioned in one parenting guide, “What a temptation to make a fuss over him (the baby). But this is the very thing that must not be done, for its effects are definitely harmful, sometimes disastrous. The excessive handling of the infant has also a very pernicious influence on his mental development.” The students also recorded that Margaret suffered from a slight bend in the legs, which they sought to correct with cod liver oil. Despite these early concerns, Margaret became a beloved member of her house and her mothers received perhaps a more accurate experience of actual child rearing since they cared for a fussy and slightly ill baby, a situation usually avoided by the college because of liability issues.

In 1935 ISC took in a child with a problem. At the time, however, university officials did not realize the little girl suffered from “a slight mental retardation.” Shortly after her first birthday, the little girl underwent an evaluation to prepare her for adoption. State officials determined she possessed slow reactions and would be returned to a state institution instead of an adoptive home. For students like Laura Christensen Dailey, who helped care for Alice, the news came as a real-life tragedy. She remembered the entire house mourned the decision and felt upset that the child would grow up in an institution.

1937 graduate Marian Premble is still “haunted” by thoughts of baby Rosalie, who returned to the Davenport Children’s Home after it was discovered that the soft spot on her head closed too soon, preventing her brain from growing properly. Premble lived with Rosalie in her final weeks at ISC and remembered her as a happy, docile child who loved

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87 Schick, Child Care Today, 34.
88 Bevier House Book, Box 2, Folder 5.
89 Laura Christensen Dailey, Letter to author.
attention. More frequent health issues appeared in the 1950s when healthy babies became hard to locate. One group of students in 1950 helped raise a baby allergic to milk. Mary Nelson recalled caramelizing milk for the baby, a task that added considerable time in meal preparation for the infant. Like many infant specific tasks in the home management houses, this substitute for milk could be found in great detail in a number of the publications available at the time. Ardis McMechan, a 1951 graduate reported that most of the babies brought to campus while she attended school suffered from some small problem like slight mental slowness or a physical disability.

Occasionally the baby books recorded frightening moments involving the children and their many mothers. In 1931 one of the students living in the Ellen Richards House with baby Dickie came down with smallpox. All the women and the baby rushed to the hospital to be vaccinated. Luckily no one else contracted the disease and the student eventually recovered. In 1929, baby Jerry struggled to sleep through the night and stay under the covers. His mothers pinned him to the bed, hoping to tuck him into the blankets using pins. This caused a scare when Jerry ended up stuck under the blankets.

Baby Janice also struggled with bed blankets and was placed in a sleeping bag. Janice’s strong personality prompted faculty members to nickname her “Miss Personality” and her mothers to leave touching messages for her in the baby book such as one that said, “We hope that we have contributed some small part toward her development for she greatly

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90 Marian Premble, Letter to author.
91 Schick, *Child Care Today*. 87.
92 Ardis McMechan, Letter to author.
93 House Scrapbook, Box 6, Folder 2; Dickie came from the Benedict Home in Des Moines. He lived in the Richards House one full year.
94 White House Scrapbook, Box 6, Folder 1; Jerry was one of the older children at ISC. He celebrated his second birthday with his mothers before finally being adopted.
enlarged our experience.” Janice, like Dickie, spent almost two years at ISC. She arrived when she was four weeks old in 1930, and celebrated her second birthday before finally leaving. Janice participated in one of the first baby intelligence tests given at ISC. She scored well and increased her vocabulary to include, “ball,” “shoe,” “piggies,” and “baby.” As one of the older babies she also spent a few hours a day at the nursery school while her student-mothers attended class. This is where most of the home management house children went if they reached the age of two while living at ISC. When Janice finally left in the spring of 1932, her mothers met with her new adoptive family of two parents and a brother. 95

By 1930 four practice houses served a growing number of home economics students. Babies started their experience in the fall and stayed about a year, unless circumstances demanded otherwise. Because the four houses operated year round to deal with growing enrollment, babies lived with approximately fifty mothers each in one year’s time. Throughout the 1930s, complete scrapbooks and baby books exist for the children and the students. By the 1940s the details and stories taper off considerably. It is not clear if this is due to a lack of record keeping on the part of the students or if the baby books for some infants went with them when they left ISC. If popular methods for infant care are brought into the question, women would have been expected to keep daily or weekly records of some type until the 1950s. 96

The mothers not only practiced child rearing, they still attended classes and normal collegiate events. Dating, dances, parties, and academic obligations did cause a few problems while women lived in the home management houses. The amount of responsibility

95 House Scrapbooks, Box 2, Folders 1-2.
96 Examples of the types of record keeping recommended for mothers can be found in a variety of parenting books including: Healthy Babies, 195-220; Frederic Bartlett, Infants and Children, (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1944), 92-93.
increased considerably for the women, who had not previously lived outside a dormitory or their parents’ homes. Some of the students from the 1933 Isabel Bevier House came in after curfew and found themselves climbing in a window when their house mother interrupted the fun.97 In 1937 students combated a mouse problem that eventually resulted in the demise of the mouse family. The girls felt fortunate that their baby arrived late due to a cold and did not suffer through the mouse invasion. Other girls took advantage of the car driven by their house mother, and hosted a picnic at a local state park. Most students recorded taking their baby out for walks around campus and Ames, occasionally picking up ice cream or other supplies for their house.98

A typical daily schedule survives in the Alice Norton House book for 1939. The household woke up at 6:30 and breakfast started at 6:45. The baby took a bath every day before the women left for classes at 7:30. At noon everyone came home for lunch and then returned to school for the rest of the day. While students went to class, the house advisor looked after the child. For those children who reached the age of two at ISC, they typically spent the class-time portion of their day at the nursery. Dinner started at 6, the baby went to bed around 8, and the girls spent the rest of the evening at their own discretion. Depending on the age of the baby feedings took place between four and five times a day, although exceptions for particularly fussy babies earned those babies six feedings a day. Each day baby playtime lasted about an hour in the morning and another hour in the afternoon. All

97 House Scrapbooks, Box 2 Folder 3
98 Ibid., Box 2, Folder 7.
duties and responsibilities of the house could be accomplished during free time away from class and on the weekends.99

The child director held responsibility for preparing food for the infant, and the assistant child director helped bathe and dress the baby. Meals, as seen in Charles’ diet, were strictly regulated and home economics faculty members set the requirements according to the needs of each child.100 Meal plans also took into advisement the recommendations from published doctors and experts. The meals recorded in baby books at ISC rigorously follow those recommended by popular baby advice books of the time. This was particularly true between 1930 and 1950 when food preparation involved time consuming straining and processing procedures.

During World War II men started to visit the home management houses to make calls. The Alice Norton House recorded boyfriends coming over for dinner, and staying to do the dishes while wearing the women’s aprons. Navy men stopped by the homes to take pictures with the babies and take the women out for ice cream. Some of the male callers visited with the baby, especially if their girlfriend worked as the child director during the time of the visit.101 The absence of a male figure in the homes led some critics to question whether or not a real home environment could exist without male influence, and whether that exclusion hurt child development. Some researchers, normally graduate students in home economics studying various aspects of the houses, tried to show that the children received enough male attention. All the children visited the school’s child psychologist, a position held by a man

99 Alice Norton House scrapbook; the schedule used in the houses mimics the ideal schedules recommended by experts such as Dr. Bartlett in his book Infants and Children.
100 Ibid., Box 7.
101 House Scrapbooks, Box 4 Folder 6; Box 3, Folder 1; Box 7.
the entire time the program existed. Other male professors and faculty members paid frequent visits to the homes in addition to the male friends of the students. None of the children suffered a recorded negative reaction to men.\textsuperscript{102}

One other criticism of home management house care of infants involved spoiling the children. Some people argued that with so many women in the homes at one time, all desiring time with the infant, that the baby would demand constant attention when it arrived in its permanent home with only one mother. A time of the day for each child to spend alone helped combat this problem of over indulgence. In the mornings, the babies spent one hour by themselves in a playpen, and did not see anyone else until their hour was over. In 1937 infants started naptime at 10 a.m. This usually took place outside in a buggy until it became too cold. Marian Premble remembered leaving the baby in the buggy until 2 p.m. regardless of the weather.\textsuperscript{103} This advice came directly from childhood experts who published textbooks and instruction books for new mothers. The coldest temperature for babies to play outside was approximately 20 degrees Fahrenheit. Later professionals did not recommend such extensive time in the outside air, especially in cold weather.\textsuperscript{104}

The babies did not react negatively to time away from their mothers, although many of them did not always enjoy their hour of solitary playtime. Like situations at bedtime, the students needed to allow the children to cry unless they were hurt or sick. Failure to cooperate with these policies could lower students’ grades, which the house mother

\textsuperscript{102} Florence McLauchlin, \textit{The development of home management house children compared with children of similar age in boarding homes and in an institution}, Master’s Thesis, (Ames: Iowa State College, 1931), 86.

\textsuperscript{103} Marian Premble Letter to author.

\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Healthy Babies}, 65. In addition to outdoor temperatures, this book recommended that the nursery room be kept between 65-55 degrees with a possibility for fresh air during all seasons provided damp air did not circulate through the room. For 1950s recommendations see: Benjamin Spock, \textit{A Baby’s First Year}, (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pierce, 1955).
determined according to overall performance. Some of these experiences left graduates with mixed feelings about the child rearing practices taught in the houses. A number of those surveyed expressed that they did not use these same tactics once they had a family of their own.

Graduate students did not live in the home management houses, unless there as house mothers. They did use them as rich research resources for behavioral and sociological studies. While many papers examined the efficiency of students performing basic household skills, others studied the household management children to prove they received outstanding care. One such study used intelligence tests to compare ISC babies to babies in the homes of professional level parents and working class parents. This study rated household equipment and the profession of the child’s father, along with visits from the college child psychologist to determine how environment affected child development. The final results demonstrated a balanced between home management babies and babies with professional-class fathers – with home management babies scoring slightly higher in motion and physical reactions and “white collar” babies performing slightly better on intelligence tests, but the babies from working class families did not score far behind in either section of tests.

Along with this study on socioeconomic groups, one key study completed in 1931 compared the same mental and physical skills but used babies from home management houses, boarding houses in Des Moines, and orphanages in Des Moines. This study showed that the home management house babies advanced far beyond their counterparts in institutions. This reinforced the initial suggestions that babies raised in the home economics

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105 House Scrapbooks, Box 6, Folder 2.
intensive environment received top-notch care and developed accordingly. The same study also attempted to use parental intelligence to determine the effect that might have on the children. While some parents could not be located, or did not undergo testing when they left their children in the care of the state, those parents who did participate appeared to rank well below the mental health average as determined by the Standford Revision Test, which measured approximate mental health age.\(^\text{107}\)

The home management children exceeded the other children in all levels. They appeared happier, healthier, and slightly smarter than children their age in public institutions. One of the interesting facts uncovered by this research indicated that many of the children in the boarding home system maintained contact with one parent. Of the six studied, three children in the boarding home saw either a father or mother on a weekly basis. Only one of the six children studied in the orphanage maintained contact with its mother. The institutionalized children also suffered more recorded illness than the home management babies.\(^\text{108}\)

Other studies examined better record keeping skills to accurately measure the growth and mental progress of home management children and children who attended day care to ensure that their parents received information on bodily functions, diet, and personality.\(^\text{109}\) Parenting manuals stressed the importance of charting a baby’s precise growth progress. Mothers of the 1940s received encouragement from “experts” to weigh and measure their infants on a daily basis for the first year. Home management house students took these

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\(^\text{108}\) Ibid, 30, 54.

instructions seriously as well, and the progress of many infants is located in baby books.\textsuperscript{110} The wide variety of master’s research completed in home management houses provides a more detailed picture of the results and activities of the homes both at ISC and other institutions. Because the information contained in official records is sparse in many regards, the master’s student’s papers fill an important research void. They usually observed the house and its residents for a month or more, capturing details about bath time, toy selection, cleaning methods, and furnishings.

Many babies stayed in boarding homes, institutions, and ISC for a short period of time while their single, working mothers could make arrangements for housing and support. Many of these mothers, like some whose children lived at ISC, gave financial support for their children to stay in public institutions and visited as frequently as possible.\textsuperscript{111} Iowa formed numerous state committees and agencies to deal with the problem of broken homes. By the 1930s, group homes and institutions started to close in large numbers in favor of a federal and state supported movement to keep children in homes with their parent(s). In Iowa this transition took place in 1940, and out of the approximately 4 in 1,000 children who were orphaned, only 1/3 stayed in a public facility by 1950. This fraction primarily consisted of children who were disabled or handicapped in some way. In 1950 almost all Iowa counties employed a full or part-time welfare agent to handle home welfare cases.\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{110} The students also followed the practices recommended by the U.S. Child Welfare Agencies for children in foster care. The weighing and measuring of children, the in-home visits by trained professionals such as psychologists and doctors, and the diet of the children was recommended as early as 1926. See: \textit{Foster Home Care for Dependent Children}, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1926), 120-125.

\textsuperscript{111} Gittens, \textit{Poor Relations}, 28.

\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Children and Youth in Iowa}, 38 See also: Marshall B. Jones, “Decline of the American Orphanage”, In \textit{Social Service Review}, 67(Fall 1993). This article provides detailed examples of various programs across the country that moved children into private homes, and explains why child psychology influenced the decision to move stable children out of institutions.
These changes in child welfare policy came as a direct result of situations created by the depression of the 1930s. Iowa experimented with "placing out" orphaned children to families on relief, giving them income in return for proper care of a child. This was in response both to the desire to find a better place to keep children, plus institutions and boarding homes in urban areas like Des Moines were overflowing with abandoned children. This experiment took place in two counties, and met with only moderate success. It was however, the first official attempt Iowa made at finding foster families for unwanted children.

In 1937 Iowa formed the State Department of Social Welfare, which held the responsibility of licensing children's institutes and boarding homes and caring for displaced children. They kept a current list of public and private institutions caring for children, but ISC was never listed on the inspection list, possibly because it did not hold the responsibility for placing children in permanent homes. The state also concentrated on locating fathers of abandoned children, in the hopes that child support could be secured. All the changes in child welfare policy did not start to affect the ISC home management house program until the late 1940s when adoption rates increased and healthy babies became harder to locate. In 1949 Iowa supported 9,000 children in state care, over half of those stayed in private care facilities such as church-operated homes. Almost 1,000 lived in detention homes for delinquent children, and an unknown number lived in state care because of disabilities.

115 IA Placing Agencies, 13. The records for the Public Welfare Department are available, a summary was published each month indicating the number of licenses applied for, approved, and how many cases each county social worker handled during the previous month.
These children typically ranged in ages from four to thirteen, which made them too old for home management house residency.\textsuperscript{117}

Parenting methods also changed during the 1950s. As early as 1920, universities like Cornell began bringing in mothers with their children to advise on parenting techniques according to the mother's and child's unique personalities. These "child clubs" expanded to community centers and suburban areas, and by the 1950s they provided women from all economic backgrounds with guidance and offered interaction with other mothers who dealt with similar experiences. Individualizing care for children and mothers eliminated some of the purpose for learning general child care skills with a child that was not one's own. Professionals in the 1950s like Dr. Benjamin Spock focused on quality time spent with one's own child as being particularly important for the comfort and security of the baby, in addition to helping the mother bond with her baby. Events such as the daily bath took place in the home management houses, but the task shared by multiple students did not simulate the same relationship as a parent-child bond. Public opinion and child experts stressed the connection that could be made during these special moments.\textsuperscript{118}

In earlier years when a professor or full-time house mother cared for the infants during vacations and classes, they filled need for an actual mother figure to "bond" with. By the 1940s and 1950s graduate students who regularly switched in and out of homes could not properly fill this role, and it became a concern during the 1950s when experts stressed the importance of such a connection. The change from ideas two decades earlier that focused on

\textsuperscript{117} Iowa Commission on Children and Youth, 2.
For other information about the development of Iowa's child welfare laws in the 1800s see John L. Gillin, History of Poor Relief Legislation in Iowa (Iowa City: The State Historical Society of Iowa); Leah Tookey, "Poor relief legislation for Iowa's children before the New Deal," 2001.

\textsuperscript{118} A Baby's First Year, 44. Spock also compared babies sucking their thumbs to adults enjoying a cigarette, an interesting comparison not made in previous decades.
teaching babies to be by themselves and the dangers of over affectionate parenting was harder to incorporate into a house that provided an infant with multiple mother figures. Hence the home management house children, although they received the type of individual home foster care reformers encouraged, did not serve as much of a purpose for the home economics students. ¹¹⁹

A small number of the women surveyed questioned the decision to allow college aged women to raise a baby. Those who expressed displeasure in hindsight mentioned the confusion of having so many caretakers and the inability for the babies to bond with one person. But others, like Doris Brown who graduated in 1954, thought that the infant program served an extremely valuable purpose for students and babies alike. Additionally Brown mentioned that the home management house infants were far superior as teaching tools to current practices such as making students carry a bag of flour or a hard boiled egg for a few days. ¹²⁰

Other former residents thought that the infant positively affected their stay in the home management houses. It is clear, however, that because students did not worry about all the home related problems such as medical care, managing a home with multiple children, cooking, and cleaning that they did not receive the complete experience. Graduates like Julia McCutchan used skills learned in the house, but said that the experience with eight moms was not realistic compared with what she later experienced in her role as house wife and mother. ¹²¹

¹²⁰ Doris Blair Brown, Letter to author.
¹²¹ Julia McCutchan, Letter to author.
Clearly the home management house infants left an indelible impression on the women who helped raise them. The emotion conveyed in house scrapbooks and by women who remembered their infants decades after living in the homes illustrates the significance and impression the experience made on students. Unlike other schools that never included infants in their homes, or those that maintained that aspect of a home management program for a short time, ISC kept a steady flow of babies for almost 25 years. The reputation of the home economics department assisted many babies in being adopted by local families, and also eased the burden for many families struggling to provide for their infants. As the state and federal governments became more involved in aiding parents and abandoned children, the need the program fulfilled reduced considerably.

After 1958 when the last babies left ISC, the university relied on the nursery school to train child care specialists, while students from other disciplines went on to specialize in their majors and did not receive the benefits of learning how to care for a baby in an intensive four or five day period. The exclusion of the baby program at ISC mirrored what other universities with home economics programs had already decided; that the expense and problems associated with infants on campus could be eliminated and students could rely on local daycares or those located on campus to gain experience. The demise of the use of infants in the home management homes also reflected a changing attitude about home economics education. By the 1950s and 1960s more women worked outside the home in addition to raising a family. They needed more instruction in multitasking and a concentrated effort to spend all day with a child no longer fit realistic middle-class American life, despite the fact that experts such as Dr. Spock recommended spending as much time as possible at home with children.
CHAPTER 3. THE END OF AN ERA

Over the fifty years the home management program existed, a number of criticisms and changes affected the operation of the houses. Like the addition of infants, the design of rooms and equipment, and related curriculum already mentioned, some problems needed to be dealt with before the homes could even implement improvements. Early in the development of the houses, the increasing costs for students became a concern for ISC administrators when they decided to include infants in the homes. By expanding the session from two to six weeks, students needed to find additional funds in order to fulfill the graduation requirement of living in one of the homes. The Smith-Hughes Act certification quickly reduced the concerns about the cost for students because many of them would teach home economics after graduation.

During the 1923-1924 school year, when Dean Anna Richardson raised the idea of adding infants to the homes, the issue of liability concerned school officials. This concern lasted until the state welfare agencies and the university agreed on the expectations to be fulfilled by ISC. Help also came from the numerous organizations in Iowa City dedicated to child research and health.122 This team of professional assistants helped the students with the care of the infant and alleviated fears that the children would be injured or neglected. Undoubtedly a number of studies comparing the conditions of public child care facilities in Des Moines and the home management houses, along with intelligence tests comparing institutional children with home management house children also proved the homes benefited students and children alike.

122 See Eppright and also Hamilton Cravens, Before Head Start: The Iowa Station and America's Children, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).
Spoiling the children with too much attention also raised concern. Seven or eight young women could be inclined to lavish a baby with constant attention, making it difficult for the adoptive parents to continue such treatment. This is one of the reasons the infants spent time alone during the day. The students also received strict instructions to restrain themselves from allowing bad behavior to continue unpunished. If the university created overindulged children, couples might hesitate to adopt the school’s babies. Parenting guides and child care textbooks also encouraged the practice of not lavishing attention and affection on a child.

Because only female students and advisors interacted regularly with the infants, some critics charged that the lack of a male presence would harm the babies. The children encountered women each day, but no men living in the homes meant few interactions between the children and men. The school combated this in a number of ways. As previously mentioned, most of the professionals who visited the children, such as doctors and therapists, were men. These men visited the children on a weekly basis and spent about an hour a week with the babies. Next, the women who lived in the homes entertained male visitors. In addition to boyfriends and callers, who visited during approved hours, the women also entertained administrators, professors, and guests from other schools. All men visiting the homes could play with and visit the children.

Administrators at ISC did not want the children to be afraid of men. Their major concern, as seen in other situations, was that potential adoptive parents would not want to adopt a child afraid of men. According to the doctors and therapists who visited the children, none of them reacted poorly to a male presence. The students kept a busy social schedule and the number of recorded male visitors increased during the late 1930s and 1940s. The
male students who visited the houses helped with domestic duties such as washing dishes and entertaining the babies.

While the university fought criticisms with logical responses, it became harder after 1950 to maintain the high quality of the home management house program. Post-war family values typically dictated that women stay home, and the average age for marrying declined from twenty-three to nineteen between 1930 and 1960. This meant many women did not finish their degrees, and if they did, many students finished as married women. For already married students to live in a practice home seemed redundant and disrupted their living arrangements. Additionally, the need to train women on new appliances and decorating methods faded in importance as more households equipped themselves with these items after World War II.

Social aspects of womanhood also changed during the final decade of the home management house program. Although fifty percent of American women worked outside the home, many did so only long enough to help their husbands through school or until they started a family. Upper and middle class women could stop working after marriage, when typically women in working class and farm families continued to work outside the home in larger numbers. According to the standards of the day, the middle class housewife needed to concentrate on providing a well-run home for her family. Many women started families earlier and those families grew larger than during the 1920s and 1930s. Writer and activist Betty Friedan noted a number of interesting trends about 1950s housewives in her book, The Feminine Mystique. She studied many women with college educations who never used their degree after graduation because they married immediately. Other women attended college to find a husband.
Once in their own homes, middle class women of the 1950s possessed all the conveniences of modern technology. The expectation that family and a well-equipped home would provide complete emotional fulfillment left many women with unspoken emptiness. In higher education, women attending college in search of husbands instead of careers created the need for administrators to alter class offerings. ISC offered fewer technical science classes to home economics students in favor of classes such as interior design.123 Fewer women felt they should take courses such as philosophy or physics because it would not help them as wives and could place them in competition with men, an unladylike situation in the post-war era. The home economics classes designed to help women adjust to new technologies became increasingly obsolete as more women actually came from homes possessing washing machines or refrigerators. Additionally, as women’s purpose at home focused on making a peaceful environment for their husbands and children, they did not need such technical instruction in other areas such as nutrition or laundry, as Friedan wrote, “she is general practitioner rather than a specialist.”124 Nutrition information came from food processing companies and women’s magazines instead of college classrooms. Marketing materials distributed by companies selling household ease replaced many of the specific lessons taught in those classes.

Popular media also reinforced the idea that women should be in the home instead of in the working world. Ladies’ magazines did not appeal to the academic sensibilities of educated housewives. As Friedan discovered, these magazines put everything in the context of the home and stressed the femininity of housewives. Other outlets reinforced the

importance of home. Consumerism in the post-war era increasingly targeted women as the purchasers of goods for the home. Advertisements and consumer education by large companies helped teach women about the latest laundry advances or the safest car for their family. Instead of experimenting with a number of bleaches to discover which chemical combination offered the best whitening, women in the home now made that decision based on product information created by an advertising company. This mass media assault to gain the loyalty of homemakers replaced information given in a home economics classroom, especially a classroom like a practice home where a budget and frugality had previously been very important. Like many departments at the time, the home economics department reduced the number of department requirements for its students so they could spend more time participating in social and extracurricular activities.

Additionally, women in the late 1940s and 1950s consistently moved away from studying the sciences. As studies demonstrated, women believed that too much education would not serve them as housewives. Friedan interviewed a number of women who believed they should not take classes that could make them too smart for marriage. Science and similar male dominated fields, if studied by women, would defeminize them, possibly to a point that they would become unappealing to men. Ladies’ magazines and television shows reinforced these ideas through articles and programs stressing home skills of women in professions such as science. In a society where marriage and family represented the ultimate accomplishment for women, educating oneself in so-called men’s fields could mean a lifetime dedicated to a career instead of family. People who studied women’s unhappiness

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125 Friedan, 210.
126 Ibid, 132.
with their lives as housewives frequently blamed education for making women feel unfulfilled. By moving the focus away from classroom accomplishments such as independent thought to working all day in order to provide meals and entertain children, cultural expectations created unexpected tension between wives and their families in the American home. Many experts believed the reason for this lay in the fact that higher education for women created unnatural, unfeminine wives and that women should simply concentrate on finishing high school and finding a husband. 127

Many young women took this advice seriously. By 1960 one out of every three women who enrolled in college dropped out before graduation. The proportion of women attending college dropped from 47 percent in 1920 to 35 percent in 1958. 128 The average national marrying age for women sank from twenty-three years in 1940 to eighteen years in 1960. Some all-female colleges closed due to shrinking enrollment. ISC suffered a small drop in home economics enrollment. More importantly, the techniques that the college had relied on since the early 1910s no longer applied to new students. ISC home economics faculty also stopped being dominated by unmarried women and hired a number of men in child development and nutrition positions. Women did not study home economics to become teachers or social workers in the same numbers as before. 129 Gradually, the college distributed some of these programs to other departments. The school decided to phase out the home management houses in favor of less time consuming projects such as a day care and fashion shows. Programs such as these still provided practical experience without the expense of operating multiple home management houses.

127 Ibid, 22.
128 Ibid, 16.
Scientific development for the home created many of the so-called conveniences women of the 1950s used. However, housework occupied more time of women in the 1950s than previous generations. Women in the suburbs actually spent more time on housework than rural women.\textsuperscript{130} The products, items, and techniques seemed to make housework so easy that it left women with even fewer feelings of accomplishment and caused them to spread the work out over the course of the day. Raised expectations for meals and cleanliness created more work for housewives. One woman interviewed by Betty Friedan indicated that she washed sheets twice a week because detergent was affordable, she had time, and her family expected clean sheets. Items such as cake mixes meant that women no longer needed to develop their own recipes and some expressed guilt that so little skill went into their daily work.\textsuperscript{131} Psychologists advised that women should spend their extra time with their children and husbands, but some women believed they already spent too much time with their families. Despite the hard work of home economists and students to perfect an effective time management solution so women could enjoy activities of their choice, women of the 1950s found themselves bogged down with additional work thanks to raised expectations and product marketing.\textsuperscript{132}

In the 1920s and 1930s women in the home economics program received encouragement to develop talents such as knitting, decorating, or pastry baking so they could enjoy possessing a special skill and make their home better through small measures. In the convenience driven market of the 1950s, where women could purchase everything they needed and in middle and upper class homes, the expectation that women should buy all their

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid, 241.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid, 212.
goods instead of making them received reinforcement from popular media. The time
management studies from previous decades also lost relevance. The number of steps from
the sink to the counter did not need to be studied if a woman owned a dishwasher. She now
needed to concern herself with rinsing dishes, loading the machine, unloading the machine,
and keeping it full of detergent. Time in between tasks could be filled with manicures,
magazine reading, or Parent Teacher Association meetings instead of craft making or reading
literature.

Parenting had also become a serious issue for women by the 1950s, with massive
amounts of publications and expertise information in circulation. In the practice homes at
ISC educators always stressed the importance of allowing children to spend time alone. By
the 1950s these methods fell out of favor because many women spent all day at home and
experts like Dr. Spock told women they played a vital role in serving their children. As a
result, experts claimed a rise in childhood disorders took place in the late 1950s and 1960s.
Many doctors and psychologists attributed this problem to mothers who attempted to live
through their children. The balance needed between proper active parenting and smothering
children created additional stress for mothers. Women increasingly became consumed with
their children and found little to do outside playtime, Parent Teacher Association (PTA)
meetings, and carpool. It may have benefited children but it left many middle class mothers
void of accomplishments outside their homes. This type of environment would be hard to
recreate in a practice home where students needed to be away from the house and children
for social events and classes.133

133 Ibid.
ISC students who graduated in the 1950s theorized a number of reasons for the demise of the home management house program.\textsuperscript{134} These same women also used their degrees in a wide variety of ways. Although responses varied greatly, at least three of the twelve women continued their education after starting their families. Carol Jeske, class of 1953, believed the addition of more married students at ISC created a situation where married female students could no longer spend six weeks living away from their spouse.\textsuperscript{135} A majority of the women did work immediately after graduation. Most of the women surveyed worked for a few years before starting a family. Among the various occupations undertaken by home management house residents after their graduation were, teaching, taking professional photos at Yellowstone National Park, and forming businesses, all activities that indicate women who graduated managed to maintain a family life and some type of intellectual life.\textsuperscript{136}

Other women who started families after graduation did so quickly in order to return to work as soon as possible. One graduate said she had three babies in three years, but when they were all old enough she went to work. Much like the information compiled in studies regarding Ivy League female graduates, Iowa State graduates frequently managed to find some use for their education during or after having children.\textsuperscript{137} This proved to be true between 1925 and 1958, but it is unclear whether or not the home management house experience helped students determine when they would work and when they would raise a family.

\textsuperscript{134} Thirteen of the seventy respondents graduated in the 1950s.
\textsuperscript{135} Letter to author, Carol Beth Jeske.
\textsuperscript{136} Letters to author.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
Current members of the ISU College of Family and Consumer Sciences reinforced some of the ideas alumna proposed about the closing of the homes. Nancy Meredith, who attended school at ISC in the 1960s, suggested that the cost of operating the homes helped them lose favor. Meredith also believed that the homes did not provide as many new learning experiences for students because more young women worked small, part-time jobs such as babysitting. This gave them experience with children and with money.\textsuperscript{138}

The graduates expressed mixed opinions about the closing of the home management homes at ISC. About half felt that concerns about a baby being raised by a group of young women instead of one person influenced the 1958 end of including babies in the homes. Other graduates mentioned the rising costs of simulating home life, and the challenge of making such a project fit into the increasingly busy schedule of 1950s students. While most of the respondents understood the reasons for closing the homes, many expressed regret that the program did not continue because of the valuable learning experience it provided. Julia Gray McCutchan, class of 1958, mentioned that while she enjoyed the home management house it did not necessarily prepare her for the stresses of being the wife of a veterinarian and mother of five.\textsuperscript{139}

The number of students who enjoyed their experience in the home management houses far exceeded those who did not feel the program was worthwhile to their overall educational development. Only one of the respondents believed the program seemed,\textsuperscript{138} Interview with Nancy Meredith, February 25, 2004. Meredith also worked as a house advisor in the late 1960s, when the duplex’s were used to house sophomore students. They spent an entire quarter in one of the homes with the goal of developing the area of study that interested them most. Meredith cited curriculum changes and changing needs for working women in the 1960s for eventually ending this program, and therefore dismantling the last remnant of the home management house program.\textsuperscript{139} Letter to author, Julia Gray McCutchan.
“contrived and irrelevant – running a home seemed a learning experience best learned growing up in a home or on the job. Seemed a waste of my time and money.”

The university also changed during this time period. The number of women receiving degrees in the home economics department decreased and the number of dropouts increased. These numbers would not recover until the late 1960s. Additionally, almost twenty-one percent of women who graduated in the early 1960s were married before leaving school. Only five percent of women graduating between 1933 and 1937 were married at the time of their graduation. Also, ninety percent of the earlier graduates worked after graduation, while seventy-five percent of later graduates reported working professionally at some time. About sixty percent of all ISC/ISU home economics graduates surveyed in these studies reported they planned to go back to work in the future.

None of the graduates from the 1950s mentioned the overwhelming stresses Friedan discussed in her book. However, the 1940s graduates, women who earned a degree and then went into the home to start a family, like Betty Friedan, offered another interesting view on home economics graduates from ISC. Overall, more of the respondents from the 1940s lived on a farm before college. Only eleven percent of all ISC graduates between 1933 and 1953 lived on a farm according to the 1954 survey done through the department. Most of the twelve respondents worked at least for a short time before marrying. Marianne Klinsky married two quarters before her 1944 graduation and her husband moved to Ohio while she stayed to finish school. She recalled that upon her arrival to Ohio she could not teach school because she was married. Instead, she took a job in display design with the Goodyear

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140 Letter to author, Anne Beem Hesse.
141 Eppright, 346-349. These figures come from surveys done by the home economics department to study their alumna. The studies took place in 1930, 1954, and 1969.
142 Ibid, 348.
Company until starting a family.\textsuperscript{143} Other 1940s students worked once their children reached school age. Five women worked after their children started school and all five began successful long-term careers. Only one returned to a farm after graduation despite the fact that seven of the graduates grew up on farms.\textsuperscript{144}

This information from a small sampling of graduates does not necessarily indicate whether or not these women suffered from the “feminine mystique.” Most of the women became involved in other activities even if they were not working and none complained about their plight as a homemaker during the 1950s. Iowa State graduates were different from many suburban housewives of the 1950s because they possessed a degree. Using the survey as a measurement it appears that a majority of the graduates worked before marriage, after marriage, or both. The women Friedan used in her study include women with no degree, women who left school to marry, women who never worked, and women who did not know what type of work they would do given the opportunity. This makes her group different than the women from ISC because the ISC women all earned degrees.

Even though students overwhelmingly enjoyed the home management house program, by 1958 healthy babies became harder to come by and university courses in home economics changed to reflect societal needs. Most states, including Iowa, turned to individual homes to provide foster care for unwanted children instead of utilizing the institutional system so popular in the beginning of the 1900s. Parents in a foster home and

\textsuperscript{143} Letter to author, Marianne Klinsky.

\textsuperscript{144} Other, more statistical and comprehensive studies of ISC graduates do exist. The home economics department undertook four separate studies between 1930-1969. The researchers compiled various data including marriage statistics, employment histories, organization membership, and home life from different groups of graduates. A summary of that data can be found in Eppright, 346-348.
especially a resident mother seemingly possessed more time to give individual attention to children as opposed to a house full of college students.

Additionally, curriculum changes during the 1950s altered the basic construction of the home economics program at ISC. Emphasis placed on the responsibilities of women meant that the required courses changed. In 1925 freshmen took the following classes in their first year, Design, Costume Design, General Chemistry and Physics, Narration, Composition, Exposition, Personal Health, Textiles, Biology, Food Buying and Preparation, Government, Social Ethics, Physical Education, and Library. Students in the later 1920s and 1930s took similar schedules to this, and did not start their home economics specialty until their junior year. By the 1940s and 1950s students began specializing in courses in home economics their sophomore year. Additionally, later students also took more home economics classes their freshman year and spent fewer credit hours focusing on general requirements. By 1955 students no longer studied general sciences, ethics, or government and instead concentrated on sciences for home economics, household equipment, home management, and psychology.

By the 1950s many courses could be chosen according to the student’s emphasis or interest. The possible majors changed little in thirty years. The only major programs dropped between 1925 and 1956 were Home Economics and Agriculture and Home Economics Vocational Education. Vocational Education later evolved into Home Economics Education and eventually moved into the College of Education. Because home management was a series of classes culminating in living in the home, it was also a possible major. Students

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146 Ibid., 1956, 82.
majoring in home management during the 1950s learned more about family and individual relationships and less about technical concerns than their predecessors who focused heavily on household administration.  

Enrollment numbers also varied between 1925 and 1956. In 1925 the home economics department contained a total of 966 students. This represented about one sixth of the total college enrollment. The department’s numbers slowly increased until the beginning of the Depression in 1929, when enrollment declined, reaching its low point of 790 in 1932. By 1940 numbers had increased to 1,810 students. Numbers slowly decreased during the war years and immediately after, hitting a low point in 1951. By 1956, 1,673 students enrolled in home economics, but each year during the 1950s the number of students steadily decreased by about 100 each quarter. In the spring there were typically about 300 fewer students in the department than started in the fall.  

In the first half of the 20th century, the women in the home economics department represented a majority of the women enrolled at ISC. In 1947-1948 64.5 percent of ISC female graduates majored in home economics. By 1969-1970 the percentage had dropped to 31.8.  

By 1958, the students working through their six-week stay in the home management house no longer lived in the comfortable, old homes from the 1930s and 1940s. In 1952 and 1953 use of those homes was discontinued in favor of duplexes. The duplexes went on to be used by the department to house modified home management houses. After that, students

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147 Eppright, 300.
148 Enrollment numbers are found in: *Report of the Iowa State Board of Education for the biennial period ending June 1956*, (Des Moines: State of Iowa, 1956). The board of regents did not begin recording the gender of Iowa State’s total enrollment until the 1950s, which makes it difficult to determine what percentage of the female college population. In 1956, 9400 students enrolled at ISC, 2000 of them were female.
majoring in home economics lived in a variation of the practice home, but by the 1960s that program ceased after a university-sponsored study showed that women needed that time to work, study, plan weddings, and attend social events. The shortage of infants during the last years of the program meant that occasionally faculty with young families lived with the students. Their children became the responsibility of students and the wife served as the house advisor.  

One other probable reason for the restructuring of the home management house program involved the availability of infants. Throughout the program’s lifespan, administrators strictly adhered to the policy of bringing in healthy, white children. Child welfare practices in the state of Iowa changed during the late 1940s and 1950s to make this more difficult. The post-war baby boom created large, financially stable homes. Fewer people gave healthy children up for adoption, or sought out a temporary home for their children. The state also developed more modern techniques for caring for abandoned children. In the 1920s, Iowa had only recently discontinued use of their poor farms. By 1950, Iowa counties utilized private foster homes for healthy children and specialized institutions for juveniles, handicapped, and disabled children. The state wide system of social welfare offices handled cases with the help of the juvenile court system. The state also maintained various agencies to help unwed mothers with planning, lessening the desperate decision making of earlier decades. Typically, healthy white babies quickly found new homes with parents who wished to adopt.  

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150 Ibid, 302.
This left the college in a difficult position. While studies between 1925 and 1955 clearly illustrated that the home management houses raised smart, active, and well adjusted babies, when given the choice between placing a baby with adoptive parents or a house of college students, the state preferred the former choice. It is highly likely, although difficult to prove, that if the college would have continued bringing babies into the home management houses, they would have been forced to accept babies of various races or babies with specific disabilities. This situation would have created a number of problems for the college. First, the liability of caring for disabled children would be greater than for healthy children. Additionally, students and faculty would need to spend more time caring for a handicapped child. Finally, it would have been socially unacceptable for a household of white women to care for a racially diverse child. These limitations narrowed the selection pool for home management house infants.

By eliminating the babies from the home management houses, the college eliminated a major expense and opened up the possibility that the houses could be used for other educational activities. Senior students still lived in the homes after the babies left. Married faculty and graduate students assisted with the project, but the departure of the infants marked the eventual demise of the program. Changing expectations for child care in addition to the changing needs of students in the home economics department proved to be the undoing of this remarkable program.

The university cited the 1958 decision on factors such as a lack of single graduate students to live in the homes, a need to “liberalize the program,” and intensive specialization within departments. These bland descriptions do not provide a satisfactory answer and many graduates and students seemed to believe the decision had more to do with university
politics. One graduate commented that other departments wanted the duplexes and some professors wanted funding from the houses invested in the day care and nursery school operation. Whatever the actual reasons, the changing environment of American homes must have played an influential role.

With the integration of new cultural expectations and demands on American wives and mothers, students of home economics faced new challenges both in school and in their private lives. The generation of the Feminine Mystique no longer faced the drudgery of creating meals from family-grown products, instead facing the constant task of decision making with family finances. They also needed to find new ways to satisfy the natural longing for contributing to family well being. The scientific methods for motherhood and housewifery relied more on information from experts such as doctors than the natural instincts and inventiveness of women.\textsuperscript{152}

Women who graduated from a home economics program may have adjusted with greater ease than women who left college early, or those who possessed a degree that overqualified them for typical housework. ISC graduates did not complain of exceptional boredom at home after graduation. Their course of study prepared them for the rigors of consumerism and the strain of work at home, in addition to preparing them for a viable career if they chose to pursue one. The curriculum at ISC enforced the change in home economics careers from simple production, to manufacturing and management. As an example, clothing and textiles classes stressed design for line production instead of pattern design for home production.\textsuperscript{153} Students learned the skills important for working in their field in the working

\textsuperscript{152} Apple, 91.

\textsuperscript{153} Mary Winter, Interview, February 18, 2004.
world. They also took general classes to help them make the transition from student to homemaker easier. Instruction in household nutrition and consumer buying reinforced the change into the modern age of housekeeping. Home management houses were one of the casualties of the modernization of scientific home making and modern households.
CONCLUSION

The home economics practice homes served a varied number of interests during their existence at Iowa State College. In the beginning of the program, students needed training in basic facets of modern technologies and methods not found in their rural homes. During the 1930s and into World War II, students concentrated on “making do” with recycled materials, reduced food products, and little cash. These methods of conservation all correlated well with the scientific principles that progressive home management demanded. ISC led other universities with its innovative laboratories. Students and graduates went on to assist in rural development, study new scientific improvements in home economics, and run productive and efficient homes.

The practice homes met a number of requirements for students. Not only did the credits from the class earn an accreditation for the school, it also introduced students to the complete responsibility for a home. The most important elements of this, budgeting, meal planning, and child care, helped students simulate the requirements of women in a rapidly changing consumer-oriented marketplace. In the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, women increasingly became the target for manufacturers and experts who sold everything from cleaning products to parenting manuals. The home management houses and the home economics department trained women to spend money wisely, use appliances and new technology, and maintain a healthy and happy family.

While a number of schools used the practice home as a means of simulating American family life, ISC took special care to simulate a middle class environment because despite the best efforts of the Country Life Movement and other rural reformers, students
attending ISC typically worked for a short while and then married a man working in the professional class instead of working for a short while and raising their families in a rural community. In the 1870s Mary Welch, the founder of ISC home economics, recognized this and set the pattern for training female students to be efficient and proper according to the middle class standards of the time. The practice homes established in the 1910s contained furnishings and appliances much like the school’s laboratories. This equipment was up to date and replaced regularly to keep pace with changing technology. Furnishings and classroom instruction for the home management houses also maintained this idea.

Additionally, school administrators wanted the homes to be as complete an experience as possible. By including infants in the process, the school began a long-term relationship with juvenile courts and child welfare institutions to ensure the students would care for healthy, white infants. These infants created a lasting impression on the women who cared for them, and also ensured that the houses simulated real homelife as accurately as possible. No matter what training or profession a woman undertook, educators believed motherhood was consistently her most important role. Training women to be good housewives without training them to be good mothers did not serve society or husbands well. The children in the home management house ensured that all graduates experienced at least a small taste of motherhood.

Former residents of the homes overwhelmingly remembered the six weeks as time well spent. They enjoyed the cooperation between house residents and the opportunity to help raise a small baby. Most felt that the experience helped them in some way when they became wives. Very few of the former residents surveyed chose a lifelong career instead of a family. Many worked and raised children at different points in their lives. The babies ranked
high when residents responded to a question about their favorite memories or experience in the houses. The strong emphasis the house curriculum placed on entertaining did not resonate strongly with the residents. Aside from serving dinner or tea to visiting guests, the large amount of entertaining recorded in scrapbooks did not seem to be a lasting memory even for those who practiced rigorous amounts of party planning.

The changing environment of the 1950s also changed the practice houses and the home economics department as a whole. Managing a tight budget, creating household items from scraps of fabric, making their own cleaning supplies, and cooking food from scratch eventually became a thing of the past. In the early decades a rural background for most students meant that in the houses they worked with modern appliances and conveniences for the first time. As the decades passed, more items could be affordably purchased instead of mastering the time consuming process of making them at home. By the 1950s the composition of students changed, and the number of students leaving school for marriage and family changed the class structure. Students needed a more broad based education in their first semesters in the event that they left before graduation. This meant that the practice homes for senior students came after much of their basic class work in home economics ended.

Changes in the students’ backgrounds also meant that they did not need such rigorous practice using items such as indoor plumbing or a sewing machine. Many of their homes already contained such conveniences and they grew up mastering them before coming to college. The practice houses still maintained importance because of the babies, but the school’s day care and nursery school could handle the students interested in child development, and any others who wanted practice. Given the changing social expectations
and social opportunities at school, the practice houses would not be the same rite of passage for later students.

While they operated however, the homes helped ISC garner a national reputation as a top home economics school. Much as Mary Welch planned, ISC home economics prepared women to be successful and competent helpmates for their college educated husbands. It also prepared women to go out into the rural areas and help modernize the family farm. Many students went on to work as extension agents and rural teachers who brought new programs and ideas to rural homes lacking the means and perhaps the desire to adopt modern conveniences. It is ironic, though, that the research and scientific efficiency that was so important to early developers of home economics eventually made many women feel obsolete and purposeless in their homes. Women of the 1950s experienced these problems because there no longer existed a need for baking from scratch, sewing clothes for the entire family, or creating special window cleaner from basic ingredients. These things could now be purchased. In fact, mass media, educators, and family members encouraged women to purchase these items to make their lives easier.

Despite these efforts women did not spend less time cleaning the house or the kitchen. New products actually raised the expectations for proper middle class life so women did more laundry, baked more snacks, and became more intimately involved in the lives of their children and spouses. By 1958, homes in which to practice these skills did not seem like a fiscally responsible method of teaching home economics. ISC kept the labs and other facilities, but decided to stop including infants as part of the experience.

The loss of the homes did not mean an end for the home economics department. As in previous decades, the department continued to evolve with social expectations and the
needs of its students. A few of the specializations founded during the lifetime of the home management houses still exist today, such as institutional management and child development. Home economics became the study of family and consumer sciences, echoing many of the changes seen during the 1950s, when emphasis switched from efficiency to emotional nurturing of family members and responsible product selection for the home.

Between 1925 and 1958 students enjoyed a modern simulation of middle class home life that they could use in their own homes, and the infants they helped raise received the most modern care possible. As products and ideas about home life changed, the houses and the department as a whole tried to implement modern expectations. The home management homes represented a mutually beneficial relationship for all those who lived there.
Dear Iowa State Graduate,

You have been randomly selected from a list of home economics graduates to take part in research about the home management houses, or practice cottages, that students lived in prior to graduation.

My name is Megan Birk, and I am working on a master’s degree in History at Iowa State. My project is examining the home management houses, how they worked, and how residents felt about their experience. I am very excited to be working on this special topic. The topic is unique since very few schools kept their houses running as long as ISC. The houses were also different from those other schools since babies lived in the homes with the students. By participating in this project, it will be possible to preserve your memories and assist me in creating a more complete picture of what the practice homes were like.

I would like to learn more about how students felt about this experience. You are under no obligation to return this survey and release form - it is voluntary. It will take about 30 minutes to complete, unless you would like to include additional comments, which would be greatly appreciated. You have the option to return the survey anonymously, but please ensure that your year of graduation is included so that I can place your information in the correct time frame. If you choose to include your name it is possible that it will appear in the paper. This paper may be published in academic journals, or presented at professional conferences.

If there are any questions I can answer for you about this project I can be reached at 515-233-3220 or by email: mbirk@iastate.edu. You can also contact my advisor if you have questions: Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, 515-294-7266, 603 Ross Hall, ISU, Ames, Iowa 50011. A self-addressed stamped envelope is enclosed for your convenience in returning the survey and consent form. Thank you for your time and I look forward to learning from your responses.

Sincerely,

Megan Birk
1. Why did you choose Iowa State for school?

2. What was your area of study in the home economics department?

3. Which house did you live in when you resided in the home management house?

4. Please select the answer which best describes your home management house experience – circle all that apply:
   - very enjoyable
   - somewhat enjoyable
   - not enjoyable
   - intimidating
   - enlightening
   - memorable
   - stressful
   - helpful
   - enlightening
   - not memorable

5. About how old was the baby in your home management house?
   - 5 months or younger
   - 12 months-6 months
   - 13 months-18 months
   - older than 18 months

6. How did you feel about moving into the house and taking care of an infant during your six-week stay?

7. Did you have any prior home economics experience such as babysitting, helping with house work etc..?

8. What was the name of the infant you cared for during your stay?
9. What did you do after graduation?

10. Do you think the home management house helped you in your job or as a homemaker? If so how?

11. Were you a member of any home economics clubs or associations? If so which ones?

12. Did you live on a farm before attending ISC?

13. What was the most enjoyable part of your home management house experience?

14. Do you have a favorite home management house memory you would like to share?

14. If you graduated during the 1950s, please discuss why you think the home management house program finally ended in 1958.

15. Were the students in your house told anything about where your home management house baby came from or its background?
15. Are you willing to be interviewed if the researcher would like to gain additional information? If so please make sure your name and contact info is included.

   Yes  No

16. Please take this opportunity to share any additional information you think might be interesting about your experience as a home economics student at ISC or a resident of the home management house.
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