1930

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Recommended Citation
Stotts Hopkins, Marguerite (1930) "Home Economics in Denmark," The Iowa Homemaker: Vol. 10 : No. 1 , Article 2.
Available at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/homemaker/vol10/iss1/2

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Home Economics in Denmark

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There are three “Husmoderskole” or householding schools in Denmark. They are privately owned, but are under a certain amount of state supervision—that is to say, the state fixes the minimum of work which must be taught and gives the examinations to candidates for teaching certificates.

The largest and most up-to-date of these schools is Den Suhuske Husmoderskolen, in Copenhagen, owned by Mrs. Suhr-Mailland. Although the state does not specify either entrance requirements or examinations, Mrs. Mailand prefers her seminar students to have had three years of high school and to have passed their university entrance examinations, or a minimum of two years in the high school. “High school” here does not mean quite the same thing, however, as in the United States, because girls go ten years to school before entering high school.

The seminar, or two-year course, prepares the girls for teaching cooking in the elementary schools. There are also short courses, which may be from four to ten months in duration. These short courses are very popular—patronized chiefly by prospective brides.

The school has both boarding and day students. At that time there were 159 students in all, with 24 in each year of the seminar. There are living accommodations for about 26 students. They have separate kitchens and cook their own meals. Their rooms are very pleasantly furnished, in a style similar to that of our own dormitories. Several of the teachers also live at the college.

The seminar course was the most interesting to me, because it is comparable to our college course. The first year the students have these courses: Cookery, Cleaning (floors, furniture, etc.), Laundry (washing), Chemistry, Botany, Bacteriology, Physiology.

The second year offers the following: Fancy Cookery, Laundry (ironing and dry cleaning), Pedagogy (theory and practice teaching), Hygiene (including home nursing and child care), Dietetics, Budgeting, Marketing.

This year’s work includes several trips to the city markets and fourteen whole days spent in Children’s Homes in Copenhagen. You will notice that there are no sewing courses offered. The reason for that is because Mrs. Mailand feels that it could not be properly taught in the little time that could be devoted to clothing work in the two-year course, and therefore had better be omitted entirely. Formerly an optional third years’ work was offered in clothing, but lack of space necessitated its being discontinued.

In the short courses the students devote most of their time to cookery. If they are to be there only from four to six months, sewing is optional, but the ten months’ student must devote two days per week to sewing. They make a variety of garments—from simple house dresses to tailored coats. To my regret, they were unable to show any garments the day of my visit.

In addition to these regular courses, Mrs. Mailand has evening classes. A cookery class for poorer girls who cannot afford the regular fees meets two evenings per week for three months. She has also free evening classes where poor women are taught such things as how to utilize inexpensive foods most advantageously, simple home nursing and home dry cleaning.

The equipment in both schools was rather similar to our own. Much white enamelled and white tiling gave a crisp, clean look to the kitchens, and blue tile-top tables provide an attractive note of color. Gas stoves and ovens, with an occasional electric stove are in general use.

For the first month or so the cooking desks are arranged so that all girls are cooking the same dish. After that the girls are organized into “families” and the laboratories rearranged into a unit kitchen system. Much less time is spent on the theory of foods and much more in the evolving of elaborate dishes than with us.

On the day of my visit a group of short course girls had prepared a luncheon which I was fortunately invited to share. All of the dishes were cooked and the table was covered with attractive and elaborate dishes in an amazing variety. They had thoughtfully placed me between two girls who spoke excellent English, and their gay conversation was so like that of Iowa State coeds that I felt quite at home in spite of my different surroundings.

The old proverb about having too many irons in the fire is an abominable lie. Have it all in, shovel, tongs and poker.—Adam Clarke.