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A Child's World

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Child's World

Merrill-Palmer, a school of child-development, as seen by Ruth Stultz



"YOU love it while you are there, and you weep when you have to leave," said one home economics student after spending a quarter in the enchanting environment of Merrill-Palmer School in Detroit. It is the privilege of two Iowa State women every quarter to study child development there.

Merrill-Palmer gives no degrees and students may stay one quarter, one semester, or one year corresponding to their own college plan.

At four o'clock every afternoon, tea is served in one of the big rooms of the nursery school. Here teachers and students gather informally. This is one means of everyone's becoming better acquainted. The lovely custom of an afternoon cup of tea may be one of the traces of the early work of Miss Emma Henton, who came from England as the school's first nursery school teacher.

Miss Edna White, the woman whose vision made this school possible, is still director of the Merrill-Palmer school. Miss White has been active in many projects. She has vision and foresight and has the ability to see the new thing that has value.

How can an Iowa State woman secure this privilege of a quarter's study at Merrill-Palmer? Winter quarter of every year all junior home economics women who have done better than average work from the scholastic standpoint are sent notices that they are eligible to go to Merrill-Palmer for one quarter. If they respond to this notice, they are interviewed by Miss Lydia Swanson.

Two students who are interested and who feel they can benefit by this work are chosen. Scholastic rating is not the only important requisite.

Students at Merrill-Palmer live a typical big-family life in the four large brick houses that now belong to the school. One girl plans the meals for a week, buys the food and pays the bills for the house from a sum of money given her by the school. Each house has a cook and a maid.

Merrill-Palmer offers increased opportunity to study certain aspects of child life and homemaking. Iowa State is able to give six women a year this privilege of studying at a specialized school.

In 1922 when the first students went to Merrill-Palmer from Michigan State College, the plan of granting college credit for work done at Merrill-Palmer was an experiment. From that time on training college women has become a definite part of the program.

Miss Lydia V. Swanson, head of the Child Development Department at Iowa State, was one of the first two students from outside of the state of Michigan to go to Merrill-Palmer. She went from the University of

Nebraska. Iowa State was the first land grant college to establish a nursery school as a part of college work in home economics. There are now over 30 colleges in the United States sending students.

The Merrill-Palmer school was founded under the will of Elizabeth Merrill Palmer of Detroit. Mrs. Palmer was the wife of Senator Thomas W. Palmer. She left her fortune for the endowment and maintenance of a school. The school, located in Detroit, was to be for the purpose "of training young women for the function and service of wifehood and motherhood and the management, supervision, direction and inspiration of homes."

A group of men and women of Detroit were named as a board to set up the school. The board appointed as director Miss Edna White, then head of the Home Economics Department at Ohio State University. In 1921 Miss White went to England to study the English nursery schools.

The result of this trip was the establishment of the first nursery school in the United States to be used as a laboratory for teaching child care as a part of home economics training. It was at this time that the English nursery school teacher, Miss Henton, came to take charge of the nursery school. Mrs. Florence Wilson Duhn, now in charge of the nursery school, was graduated from Iowa State in 1926.

The residence of Mrs. Charles L. Freer, founder of the Freer Art Gallery in Washington, D. C., was purchased to house the nursery school. During Mr. Freer's life the home had been used as an art gallery. It had large spacious rooms, winding stairways and big windows, making a perfect setting for such a school.

Creating a collegiate curriculum in child development was the first task of the school. This necessarily involved a program for nursery education. The children, who were enrolled in the Merrill-Palmer nursery school, were children of business and professional families of Detroit.

Many studies have been made of these children and the findings have constituted a basis for literature and teaching materials published by Merrill-Palmer. Scientific knowledge of child development was very scarce in 1921. This scarcity has resulted in an intense research program in many phases of child development. Merrill-Palmer Standards of Physical and Mental Growth have been made from information secured from this research program. The Nutrition Research Laboratories established in cooperation with the Children's Hospital of Michigan have made large contributions to the knowledge of the biochemistry of the human milk.