1943

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Recommended Citation

Madigan, Frances (1943) "Women Choose Engineering Careers," The Iowa Homemaker: Vol. 23 : No. 1 , Article 10.
Available at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/homemaker/vol23/iss1/10

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Women Choose Engineering Careers

War-created positions in engineering await equipment graduates, says Frances Madigan

An engineering career for a home economist might have seemed a fantastic thing a few years ago, yet it is one of today’s realities. As the demands of war have drained the nation’s supply of trained men, women more and more are replacing men in vital war industries.

In the aircraft industry, women trained in textiles and clothing have replaced men as inspectors. In scientific research, women are assuming positions formerly held by men. Women chemists are being employed by companies engaged in the manufacture of munitions. And finally, women have begun to assume positions in the field of engineering.

Pioneering in the plan, General Electric began to employ women in engineering positions about a year ago. The status of women employed was that of assistant engineers. Following suit this year are Westinghouse and General Motors.

Women majoring in household equipment are best equipped for the positions available. In addition to their regular training and as a special war-time supplement, many women have added to their regular training courses in electrical engineering. Additional courses in mathematics and physics also prove of value in these new war-time positions.

Far from monotonous are the jobs these women are taking over. Since the basic idea behind the plan is to provide a general background and training in every phase of the company’s work, no one is allowed to remain in one department for any great length of time. Rather, they are shifted from department to department until each has learned every phase of production.

The assistant engineer spends the major portion of her time testing small war equipment. She checks each piece of equipment as it goes along the assembly line and as it nears completion tests it to see that it measures up to specifications.

As a background for this phase of the work, she has her training in equipment mechanics, a regular course in household equipment in which standard tests are run on ranges, refrigerators and small appliances.

Another aspect of her work is the experimental phase. Here she sets up the wiring for each experiment and attends to all details preliminary to the actual experiment. Her further duties in this work include graphing and recording data on experiments.

Since women have come into this new field, many adjustments have been made by these companies. One innovation is the company-sponsored recreational program. For relaxation, the companies have provided recreation rooms for their employee’s leisure time. Newly initiated, too, is the idea of dances and parties for employees.

With an eye toward the future, Iowa State household equipment majors, although veering from their own fields at present, still plan to go into home service work after the war. Nor is this time wasted, for their work behind the scenes today provides them valuable experience and background for their work in the future.

Women trained in the engineering field perform experiments such as this worker who is preparing a metal corrosion test.