

# “As Members of the Social Whole”: A History of Social Reform as a Focus of Home Economics, 1895–1940

Rima D. Apple, Joyce Coleman

First published: 02 July 2009

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077727X03032002002>



## Abstract

This article studies the critical purpose of home economics postsecondary education as preparation for social reform, focusing on the role that founders expected homemakers to play in ameliorating social problems. For them, the goal of home economics was a better world. The means to this improved society was scientific knowledge applied to the family and the community by home economists and home economics-trained homemakers. Yet, by the 1920s, it was clear that the social responsibility of homemakers, as envisioned by the first leaders of the discipline, had virtually disappeared from the rhetoric of home economics. Although no one factor explains the silencing of calls for civic involvement on the part of homemakers, factors external of the discipline, including federal legislation and directed appropriations, developing education theories, growing emphasis on professional specialization, increased employment opportunities for women, and a redefinition of women's familial role served to redirect the focus of the field.

## REFERENCES

Alderman, K. M. (1948). Expressing our philosophy. *Journal of Home Economics*, 40, 1–2.

[Google Scholar](#) 

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#)

Manage Preferences

Accept All

Reject Non-Essential

---

Apple, R. D. (1995). Constructing mothers: Scientific motherhood in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. *Social History of Medicine*, 8, 161–178.

[CAS](#) | [PubMed](#) | [Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

---

Apple, R. D. (1997). Liberal arts or vocational training: Home economics education for girls. In S. Stage & V. B. Vincenti (Eds.), *Rethinking home economics* (pp. 79–95). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Berlage, N. (1998). The establishment of an applied social science: Home economists, science, and reform at Cornell, 1870–1930. In H. Silverberg (Ed.), *Gender and American social science: The formative years* (pp. 185–231). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Blair, K. J. (1980). *The clubwoman as feminist: True womanhood redefined, 1868–1914*. New York: Holmes & Meier.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Bomar, W. M. (1929). *Social aspects of homemaking*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Bomar, W. M. (1931a). *An introduction to homemaking and its relation to the community*. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Bomar, W. M. (1931b). *The education of homemakers for community activities: A study of the community interests and activities of representative homemakers to discover certain needs for home economics education*. New York: Columbia University, Teachers College.

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#)

Manage Preferences

Accept All

Reject Non-Essential

Chadsey, M. (1915). Municipal housekeeping. *Journal of Home Economics*, 7, 53–59.

[Google Scholar](#) 

Charters, W. W. (1926). The traits of home makers. *Journal of Home Economics*, 18, 673–685.

[Google Scholar](#) 

Cheek, W. K., & Moore, C. E. (2003). Apparel sweatshops at home and abroad: Global and ethical issues. *Journal of Family & Consumer Sciences*, 95, 9–19.

[Google Scholar](#) 

Civic engagement. (2002). *Journal of Family & Consumer Sciences*, 94(3).

[Google Scholar](#) 

Cole, J. M., & Desmond, H. J. (1905). *Biennial report of the Regents of the University for the years 1904–05 and 1905–06*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin.

[Google Scholar](#) 

Cooley, A. M., Winchell, C. M., Spohr, W. H., & Marshall, J. A. (1919). *Teaching home economics*. New York: Macmillan.

[Google Scholar](#) 

M. East (Ed.). (1982). *Caroline Hunt: Philosopher of home economics*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, College of Education.

[Google Scholar](#) 

Fitzpatrick, E. (1990). *Endless crusade: Women social scientists and progressive reform*. New York: Oxford University Press.

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#)

Manage Preferences

Accept All

Reject Non-Essential

Home Economics Section of the Association of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities. (1933, November). Meeting minutes. Typescript located at the University of Wisconsin Archives, Series 10/2/0, Box 2, Folder: "Land Grant College Association, 1933-34, 1934-35."

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Howe, H. R. (1934). Food and drug legislation and home economics clubs. *Journal of Home Economics*, 26, 559-560.

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Hunt, C. L. (1908). *Letter to Charles VanHise, dated 22 May 1908. Located in the University of Wisconsin Archives, Series 4/10/1, Box 3, Folder: "Florence Buckstaff."*

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Hunt, C. L. (1912). *The life of Ellen H. Richards*. Boston: Whitcomb & Barrows.

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Hunt, C. L. (1982a). Home economics at the University of Wisconsin: A housekeeper conference. In M. East (Ed.), *Caroline Hunt: Philosopher for home economics* (pp. 70-74). University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, College of Education. (Original work published 1904)

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Hunt, C. L. (1982b). Revaluations. In M. East (Ed.), *Caroline Hunt: Philosopher for home economics* (pp. 52-62). University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, College of Education. (Original work published 1901)

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Hunt, C. L. (1982c). Woman's public work for the home. In M. East (Ed.), *Caroline Hunt: Philosopher for home economics* (pp. 66-92). University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, College of Education. (Original work published 1907)

[Web of Science®](#)  [Google Scholar](#) 

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#)

Manage Preferences

Accept All

Reject Non-Essential

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Ladd-Taylor, M. (1994). *Mother-work: Women, child welfare, and the state, 1890–1930*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Ladd-Taylor, M. (1997). “When the birds have flown the nest, the mother-work may still go on”: Sentimental maternalism and the National Congress of Mothers. In R. D. Apple & J. Golden (Eds.), *Mothers & motherhood: Readings in American history* (pp. 444–474). Columbus: The Ohio State University Press.

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Lehman, R. T. (1953). The home economics graduate in the community. *Journal of Home Economics*, 45, 713–716.

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Lubove, R. (1965). *The professional altruist: The emergence of social work as a career, 1880–1930*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Macdonald, E. (1927). *Homemaking: A profession for men and women*. Boston: Marshall Jones.

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Mack, P. E. (2002). The municipal housekeeping movement and the profession of engineering. Unpublished manuscript.

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Marlatt, A. L. (1922). Achievements of home economics. *Journal of Home Economics*, 14, 5–8.

[Google Scholar](#) 

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#) 

Manage Preferences

Accept All

Reject Non-Essential

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Nickell, P., & Dorsey, J. M. (1942). *Management and family living*. New York: John Wiley.

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Nerad, M. (1999). *The academic kitchen: A social history of gender stratification at the University of California, Berkeley*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Nickols, S. Y. (2001). Keeping the Betty Lamp burning. *Journal of Family & Consumer Sciences*, 93(3), 35–44.

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

An opportunity to serve. (1948). *Journal of Home Economics*, 40, 32.

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Petrich, B., & Gross, D. (1983). Human services education: Social responsibility and helping others. *Home Economics Research Journal*, 11, 359–366.

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Popple, P., & Reid, P. N. (1999). A profession for the poor? A history of social in the United States. In G. R. Lowe & P. N. Reid (Eds.), *The professional of poverty: Social work and the poor in the twentieth century* (pp. 9–28). New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Pundt, H. (1980). *AHEA: A history of excellence*. Washington, DC: American Home Economics Association.

[Google Scholar](#) 

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#) 

Manage Preferences

Accept All

Reject Non-Essential

---

Richards, E. H. (1910). *Euthenics, the science of controllable environment*. Boston: Whitcomb & Barrows.

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Richards, E. H. (1911). The social significance of the home economics movement. *Journal of Home Economics*, 3, 117–125.

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Rossiter, M. W. (1982). *Women scientists in America: Struggles and strategies to 1940*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Rury, J. (1988). Vocationalism for home and work: Women's education in the United States, 1880–1930. In B. E. McClellan & W. Reese (Eds.), *The social history of American education* (pp. 233–256). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Smith-Hughes Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1145, 1628 (1917).

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

Smith-Lever Act, 7 U.S.C. § 341 et seq. (1914).

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

S. Stage, & V. B. Vincenti (Eds.). (1997). *Rethinking home economics: Women and the history of a profession*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

[Google Scholar](#) 

---

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#) 

Manage Preferences

Accept All

Reject Non-Essential

Third annual Housekeeper's Conference, University of Wisconsin, Department of Home Economics. (1908, February 4-14). Program located at the University of Wisconsin Archives, Box "Home Economics Course Catalogs."

[Google Scholar](#) 

Tomes, N. (1998). *The gospel of germs: Men, women, and microbes in American life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[Google Scholar](#) 

University of Wisconsin Catalog of Home Economics, 1913-1914. Located at the University of Wisconsin Archives, Series 10/0/1. Box 1.

[Google Scholar](#) 

Vance, M. H. (1976). A chronological history of the development of the objectives for teaching home economics in the high schools of the United States during the 1918-1972 period. Unpublished doctoral thesis, East Texas State University: Commerce, Texas.

[Google Scholar](#) 

Vincenti, V. B. (1982). Toward a clear professional identity. *Journal of Home Economics*, 74, 20-25.

[Google Scholar](#) 

Waite, W. C. (1933). Some contributions of economics to the problems of home economics. *Journal of Home Economics*, 25, 567-572.

[Google Scholar](#) 

Weigley, E. S. (1974). It might have been euthenics: The Lake Placid Conferences and the home economics movement. *American Quarterly*, 26, 76-96.

[Google Scholar](#) 

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#)

Manage Preferences

Accept All

Reject Non-Essential

Winslow, E. A. (1920). The new visiting housekeeper: Her training and her work. *Family*, 1, 11-13.

[Google Scholar](#) 

*Women's Course in Home Economics and Demonstration School in Home Economics*. (1913). Program located at the University of Wisconsin Archives, Series 10/0/1, Box 1.

[Google Scholar](#) 

Zuill, F. (1932). Does home economics function in the modern home *Journal of Home Economics*, 24, 671-678.

[Google Scholar](#) 

Zuill, F. (1934). New values in home economics. *Journal of the National Education Association*, 23, 119-120.

[Google Scholar](#) 

Citing Literature



[Download PDF](#)

#### ABOUT WILEY ONLINE LIBRARY

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

[About Cookies](#)

[Manage Cookies](#)

[Accessibility](#)

[Wiley Research DE&I Statement and Publishing Policies](#)

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#)



Manage Preferences

Accept All

Reject Non-Essential

**CONNECT WITH WILEY**

The Wiley Network

Wiley Press Room

Copyright © 1999-2026 John Wiley & Sons, Inc or related companies. All rights reserved, including rights for text and data mining and training of artificial intelligence technologies or similar technologies.

**WILEY**

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#)



**Manage Preferences**

**Accept All**

**Reject Non-Essential**