

Higher Education for Rural Homemakers

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Abstract

This article explores the curriculum of a one-year college diploma course in Homemaking for rural Ontario, Canada women from its founding in 1903 through the first two decades of its existence. This post-secondary program at the Macdonald Institute of Domestic Science emerged as an educational response to pressing social concerns about the future prospects for traditions of rural home-life.

At the turn of the twentieth century, there was a considerable degree of reticence among rural Ontarians to embrace the women's movement and throw open the doors of higher education to women, but post-secondary programs in Domestic Science satisfied the burgeoning demand for continuing the education of the nations' daughters without threatening to usurp the places of the nations' sons in traditionally male-dominated disciplines. The field of Domestic Science offered a vital alternative to providing women with unfettered equality of access to all programs of higher education, and educating women to preserve the traditions of home life, particularly rural home life, held appeal as a likely antidote to the perceived growth of social ills.

The educational offerings of the Macdonald Institute of Domestic Science (Mac), founded as a branch of the Ontario Agricultural College (OAC) in 1903 in Guelph, Ontario, were accepted without great objection by Ontarians so long as "the existence of gender differences was not challenged. Women's sphere was domestic, and women were the nurturers, the preservers of family harmony and social welfare. The question of equality was tackled by giving equal

importance to the knowledge necessary for those complex tasks" (Gaskell, McLaren and Novogrodsky 1989, 34). The complicity of the Institute's curriculum with traditional ideas about the nature of an appropriate education for women provided it with a unique opportunity for autonomous development. Because it was moderate and innocuous enough not to arouse the dismay or attention of either conservative patriachs or liberal feminists, the Institute enjoyed a protected haven in which to nurture a post-secondary curriculum designed largely by women for women. The Institute provided systematic, formal training in Domestic Sciences and Arts touted to be based on cutting-edge practices, the highest moral standards, and the most scientific and modern knowledge. It attracted primarily young, single, English-speaking women of European descent from surrounding rural communities and middle-class urban homes to its programs.

Through programs that elevated Homemaking to a field of post-secondary study, the women of the Macdonald Institute worked to redefine themselves and their places in society. They distanced themselves from generations of women who had only the benefit of whatever lessons they could learn from their elder female family members in raising a family, caring for a home and serving a community and moved toward an institutionally defined understanding of their roles. Formal study in Domestic Science and Art allowed Macdonald Institute women to lay claim to authoritative knowledge of the best ways to perform domestic tasks. As they gained confidence in their knowledge and abilities, Mac women began to stretch beyond the traditional boundaries of the private sphere to extend their

influence in the public sphere in all matters connected to the health and well-being of the Canadian home and family. They leveraged their Mac credentials and put their knowledge and experience to use in community health and community service. Where they met with success, the Institute succeeded, and where they met with failure, many of the women who felt a strong sense of allegiance to the Institute, brought their hard-learned lessons back to the Institute for the benefit of future generations of graduates.

In the tradition of American land grant institutions (Murray 1989, 6), the Ontario Agricultural College, which reported to the provincial Ministry of Agriculture rather than Ministry of Education, was established in the rural, southwestern Ontario town of Guelph in 1874 by the Ontario Legislature. What began as the School of Agriculture and Experimental Farm, became the Ontario Agricultural College by an act of incorporation in 1880. OAC offered its own agricultural diploma programs and a three-year associate degree granted by the provincial university, the University of Toronto. A further parallel with the land grant college system in the United States is evident in the creation of a Domestic Science programs for rural women, which became a part of the offerings provided by the land grant colleges such as Iowa State, Kansas State and Illinois Industrial University (Vincente 1997, 321-22).

Domestic Science higher education at the Macdonald Institute was created as a response to urgent social concerns, but as social changes occurred both outside of the Institute and within its walls, those concerns for rural life, family life and traditional roles for women also changed. The impetus for the founding of the discipline was no longer a compelling reason for formal educational programming, and a result, the early organizing principle of Domestic Science as a legitimate

discipline has gone. But during the first two decades of its existence, the Macdonald Institute thrived under the direction of its venerable Lady Principal, Mary Urie-Watson and a case-based analysis of its early curriculum is well-suited to an examination of the transformative nature of Institute's early programs for women and the society in which they lived.

In addition to professional programs in Institutional Housekeeping and Domestic Science Teacher's Education, the Macdonald Institute of Domestic Science offered a range of non-professional programs in Homemaking including a two-year Associate Course in Home Economics, three-month short course certificate programs in Domestic Science and Sewing, and a one-year diploma in Homemaking under the guidance of its first Lady Principal. The one-year diploma in Homemaking is particularly interesting because it so clearly emerged as a deliberate educational response to concerns of rural Ontarians for the future of family farming and rural living. In early 1900's Ontario, perceived threats to healthy home life took many forms – increased opportunities for women beyond the private sphere, impoverishment, immigration, rural decline, urban industrialization, irregular preparation for running a home or raising children, ignorance of basic principles of food preparation and nutrition, lack of awareness of hygiene and sanitation, to name but a few. As Linda Kealey has noted, at the turn of the century, “women, as well as men, were disturbed by a series of transformations in Canadian society. The abuses of industrial capitalism, the congestion and disorder of the cities, the influx of new immigrant groups and declining fertility among the Anglo-Saxon elements of the population worried middle-class reform groups, who envisioned wholesale social degeneration” (1979, 3-4). The rural reformers and maternal feminists who lobbied for the

establishment of the Macdonald Institute hoped that by raising the profile and respectability of the domestic sphere through the provision of a tailored form of higher education, women would be more satisfied with pursuing the role of wife and mother or of other work related to the private sphere (teaching, nursing and the Domestic Sciences fell within this category), rather than working in a factory or in the public sphere professions ruled by men. The proposals of reform groups who touted maternal feminist ideals were widely accepted because they offered a compromise to the more radical proposal of full, unmitigated access to higher education. They also offered the potential ancillary benefit of stemming the tide of women leaving the home or the farm to work in urban factories. Maternal feminism in Canada, like Republican Motherhood in the United States (Howe 1984; Kerber 1987, 37-48; McKillop 1994; Palmieri 1987, 49-64; Selles-Roney 1996), provided a foot in the door of higher education for women. The success of the arguments employed were influential in creating opportunities for women to study conservative, domestic sphere programs of higher education in the closing years of the nineteenth century that eased the expansion of room for women in the halls of academia. In its first two decades, these educational opportunities at the Macdonald Institute consisted of non-professional one to two-year diploma courses and three-month certificate courses in Homemaking.

The Macdonald Institute's one-year diploma course in Homemaking began as a two-year Housekeeping certificate course offered by the Institute in 1903. It was, much to the surprise of the Institute's Lady Principal, Mary Urie-Watson, poorly received and short-lived. In her 1905 annual report to the President of the Ontario Agricultural College, Urie-Watson expressed the opinion "... that a woman's best field of work is

in her own home," (8) and was confident that at least two years of study was required to develop a thorough enough understanding of women's work to lead to improvements in rural homes and communities. However, prospective students did not initially agree that such a long course was necessary, or could not manage to set aside two years' time and money, and enrolment was well below expectations. This lack of response resulted in a dramatic and immediate curriculum change. The two-year non-professional housekeeping course was quickly dropped after its first year and, for those seeking a more in-depth, non-professional course at the Institute; only the one-year homemaking course was offered in the 1904 calendar.

The one-year Homemaker's diploma course began in September 1904 with sixteen students and proved popular during Urie-Watson's tenure at the Institute, often recruiting classes of thirty to forty students from 1903 to 1917. By 1910, in the interest of preserving its allegiance to the objectives of its two founding institutions, the Department of Agriculture and the Ontario College of Agriculture (OAC), offers of admission to this program were made only to applicants from rural areas until sixty days prior to the start of classes. The program filled quickly and tardy applicants from both rural and urban centres were frequently turned away. In her submission to the 1911 Annual Report of the Ontario Agricultural College, Lady Principal Mary Urie-Watson lamented that "now even the farmer's daughter must get her application filed three months ahead or take chances of refusal" (24) and added this program to her grounds for lobbying the OAC administration for increased teaching and residential space to meet demand. In spite of its popularity, this one-year non-professional program caused problems for the Macdonald Institute because of its high attrition

rates. The Institute made efforts to forewarn applicants and their families about the workload, and attempted to manage enrolment and the occupation of residence rooms by opening the class each term to accommodate the need for rural girls to help with farm operations in the spring and summer. But for the students, a perceived pointlessness of the non-professional program, as well as a common lack of academic and social preparation, contributed to a consistently high dropout rate. Typically, 30-50% of the class failed to graduate with the worst year of this first phase of the Institute occurring in 1916 when only nine out of twenty-eight students, or 32%, finished the year successfully (Macdonald Institute, Director's file, Watson, 1903-1920).

The Homemaker course blended classroom instruction in the art and science of homemaking with hands-on experience and, as noted in the 1903 Annual Report of the Ontario Agricultural College and Experimental Farm, retained "the practical work of the old course [two-year Housekeeping certificate program], including the Apartment housekeeping" (Urie-Watson 149). The intent of the one-year program was to train young women in the art and science of running a healthy and happy home. The very existence of this program spoke to concerns that Canadian society, particularly rural society, was doing an inadequate job of recruiting and training young women as homemakers. William Algie, who enrolled both of his daughters in the one-year course in 1905, typified the impetus of many parents for sending their daughters to the Institute for this course. As he wrote to the Lady Principal on February 2nd, 1905, both of his girls were "engaged to estimable young men" and he wished them "to qualify for 'Home Builders' before they take upon their shoulders the responsibilities of married life" (Macdonald Institute Papers, Director file, Watson, 1903-1920). The creation

of the program was motivated by the fear perhaps best expressed by Homemaker student Minnie Gallop in a 1905 edition of the *OAC Review* that "home life is losing its influence" (86) and the hope that "the time has come when woman's work is no longer thought to be mere drudgery of housekeeping, but is recognized as an art, and handwork is no longer considered menial and despised" (84). The supposition that women were instinctively inclined to domestic duties by virtue of their gender was widely held and evident in the Institute's Domestic Art instructor Grace Roberts', comment in the February 1905 *OAC Review* that "to learn to sew seems a natural instinct of almost every girl" (319). But instinct was believed to be an inadequate basis for decision-making and work in the home. Women and their families were led to believe that females needed "thorough and systematic training, step by step" to open their minds to "the laws and principles that underlie and govern household arts, and to show their application; but a greater object still is to produce a habit of mind and of action such as a proper study of science can give" (Gallop 86). Minnie Gallop and many of her classmates learned to work with "real things and materials, with the actual processes of their construction and manipulation, with knowledge of their social necessities and uses" (86). Such applied learning was considered to be the best method of preparation and formed a cornerstone of the curriculum. Through applied practice, preferred ways of doing and thinking became more deeply embedded and the students gained an increased sense of comfort and competency in the simulated household environment. Each student in this program was required to keep the Institute apartment for a week. During this week, the student had no other work. As Urie-Watson described the student experience in the 1906 Annual Report of the Agricultural College: "she

enters and works with her predecessor one whole day before assuming full responsibility. She is given money and expected to do the marketing, to cook and serve the meals for the two members of the staff who live there, to wash the dishes, keep the rooms clean, and finally to render account of the expenditure” (214).

This began as an experiment, but within short order, the administration had decided that it “gives the girls such valuable training and satisfactory practice in household administration that it has become a permanent feature of their work” (Urie-Watson 1905, 243). The practical work done in the apartment was not without controversy or dissent, but the administration chose to thwart resistance to this applied portion of the curriculum. As Urie-Watson admitted: “when this work was started in the first year, considerable opposition was made to it because of the feeling that it was ‘janitor’s work’. This has died away, and the warm approval of this practice expressed in many quarters is helping to develop the more sensible attitude that ‘it is well for a woman to know how the work of a house should be done’” (1906, 214). In the 1905 Annual Report, the reasoning for the program’s mix of instruction and practice was explained:

From the very nature of the work, the homemaker is thrown largely upon her own resources, and should be capable of dealing intelligently with difficulties as they arise. One short year will not transform the girl just out of her teens into an expert housekeeper, or develop abnormal wisdom, but the earnest girls certainly benefit greatly. Older students also find the systematic study of familiar things very profitable. We try to give the girls by means of many lessons and much individual practice work, a good elementary knowledge of the different branches of ordinary household work; to

develop their interest in some of the housekeeper’s administrative problems; and above all to induce them to think about the greater questions of sound bodies, wholesome dwellings and real homes. The average student in this class is inexperienced in the ordinary work of a household. We therefore try to teach them the best methods and processes of elementary sewing, laundry, cookery, housework, etc., and each student is required to do a great deal of practical work (Urie-Watson 1905, 242).

Graduates of the one-year Homemaker’s course were expected to be self-sufficient in their homes – able to prepare meals, care for the health and well-being of their family, and clothe them, or at least mend clothes and manufacture simple undergarments and derivations of the basic shirt-waist pattern. The focus of the curriculum emphasized the pre-eminent importance of the tasks, methods and values emphasized. The development of specific, valued skills was closely monitored through course work, but more intensively, through observations of practice. The aim was to train the hands and the mind harmoniously.

Six periods of house practice were scheduled for the students each week. The Homemakers were given some lectures in house practice on topics such as the importance of natural light, the necessity of eradicating dust, and methods of ridding the home of waste matter and methods of purifying household air, water and surfaces. The Homemakers were also taught how to determine the best site for septic systems during the building process and they received a basic orientation to household plumbing. They were likely to have been motivated to learn this content well, because “if a wife and mother was solely responsible for major design decisions (like setting up a house) that were thought to affect the

health of the family, it followed that any defects or illness that subsequently emerged were essentially her fault. In addition, it meant that a woman's poor health was regarded as a result of her own actions" (Adams 1996, 83-84). With increased knowledge and skill, came increased culpability.

The focus of the house practice curriculum was on the completion of practical, assigned work. The women were given practice cards to fill out and hand in for grading. As seen in figure 1 (Macdonald Institute Papers, Students File: Class Pictures), each card required the student to note the title of the assignment, apparatus used, procedure and any observations made during the completion of the task.

No. 10.

Macdonald Institute, U. A. C.
HOUSE-PRACTICE CARD

CLEANING A GAS STOVE THOROUGHLY.

APPARATUS
A stove apron, a couple of old newspapers, a wire sink-brush the monkey-wrench, whisk, dustpan and brush, a sink towel, several pieces of old cloth, soap and washing soda, and the Separator-oil bottle.

PROCEDURE

- 1—Put on the apron and spread the papers on the table.
- 2—Turn off the gas at the main supply pipe with the monkey wrench.
- 3—Fill a large dish pan with strong hot soapsuds, put into it to soak the dripping pan and rack, and any moveable nickel pieces of the stove.
- 4—Fill the sink half full of strong hot soda water. Put the drop tray in the bottom to soak, and on top of it put the top grates, doors and all moveable black parts of the stove.
- 5—Brush out both ovens and all parts of the stove frame.
- 6—Wet one of the old cloths in hot water, rub it on the soap and wash off the stove, drying if necessary. Let the soda water out of the sink and let in fresh water. Scrub the doors and other black pieces with the wire brush, dry with another old cloth, and put them back on the stove.
- 7—Take a clean piece of old cloth, rub a little Separator oil into it, and rub all the black parts of the stove with it. Then take a large fresh piece of cloth and polish them thoroughly. If oil is left on the stove it will smoke when the stove is heated.
- 8—Let the dirty water out of the sink, transfer the nickel pieces, dripping-pan and rack to the sink, pour in the soapy water, scrub them thoroughly, dry them with the sink towel and return them to place.
- 9—Scrub, rinse, dry and return to place the drop tray.
- 10—Burn the old cloths, wash the sink out carefully, and put everything away. It is especially necessary to be careful about burning oily cloths that are not washed after using, because they have been known to take fire spontaneously, and are therefore dangerous when tucked into corners out of sight.

NOTE.—Remember to have the stove all put together before any oiling is done.

Student *Miss Geddes* Date *Sept. 29/16*

Get Apparatus in Room *36*

Work to be Done in Room *109*

Hang Wet Cloths in _____

Actual Time Occupied in the Work *40 minutes*

When the student has finished the assigned work, she will record the time occupied, and deposit this Card on the Teacher's Desk in the House-practice Room.

Figure 1. House Practice Card.

House practice tasks included: black-leading a kitchen stove, brushing walls, cleaning aluminum, cleaning dirty granite wear, cleaning a fireplace, cleaning windows, daily bathroom work, dishwashing, flushing a sink trap, waxing floors and cleaning window shades. Each task had a preferred method of approach and was graded on quality of completion. Initially, Urie-Watson oversaw the house-practice inspections, but her administrative duties occupied an increasing proportion of her time. In 1906, she handed the inspections over to the laundry teacher to ensure that the observations were completed with care and attention. Urie-Watson wrote in the 1906 Ontario Agricultural College Annual Report: "The house-practice was organized and up to September conducted by myself, but the work is individual, and its rapid development made adequate inspection impossible. Miss Bigelow's employment makes possible the careful oversight which is so necessary, her time is very fully occupied, and the work is in a much more satisfactory condition" (219). The time spent in preparation, guidance and evaluation of practical work was considerable, and the financial implications of practical work were enormous. Raw materials such as fabric, cleaning supplies, and groceries were required, as well as items such as household appliances, equipment and furnishings, fabricated models for physiology and nursing, illustrative materials to explain the structure of cloth and specialized work tables and drawers for the creation and storage of student work. It was a resource and time-intensive aspect of this program and likely contributed to the difficulty that the Institute had in expanding its enrolment. It also limited the faculty's time for participating in research and community service.

Classroom instruction was a complementary method of curriculum delivery in the one-year Homemaker's course. Each week,

students enrolled in this program took classes in household management for one period; one period of physiology and hygiene; one period of foods; one period of plain sewing and one period of machine sewing; four periods of instruction in making shirt-waists; and six periods of cooking. Lessons in dietetics, sanitation and hygiene, home furnishing, home nursing and emergencies, laundry and marketing, were offered once per term. Some work in child study, ethics and aesthetics was also available to the students.

The classes in management of the house included a comparison of various methods of table service such as Russian, English and combined methods, as well as methods of folding linens. But the Homemakers took very few notes from their lessons in management of the home – either because they were engaged in practice and did not have time, or the content was not sufficiently difficult or foreign to warrant note-taking. Similarly, few archival records of notes recorded by Homemakers in sewing and home-furnishing exist – just a few brief notes on cutting patterns for shirt-waists, and the advantage of ease of cleaning for wooden furnishings such as those found in a collection of memorabilia belonging to Homemaker student, Corea Cleghorn (1914-1915).

Physiology, as is evident from the phonetic spelling “Physciology” in the class notes of Dorothy Anderson, a Homemaking student in the class of 1916, was a novel field of study for many of the Homemakers, but critical to the development of an awareness of how the body processes nutrients and eliminates wastes. It is apparent from student lecture notes that Dr. Annie Ross, a graduate of medical school and the instructor in the course, chose to employ feminized metaphors in instruction in an effort to couch the lessons in a discursive field that fell within familiar territory for the women and

perhaps compensate for perceived intellectual weaknesses:

The body is like a house, the entrance is the lips. The telephone is the ears. The muscles are the servants which are over 600. The master of the house are the nerves with the head office in the brain. That part which looks after the food and drink is the receiving room. The stomach is the kitchen. The dining room is where the food is absorbed in the small intestine. The garbage or the waste food which is the large intestine. The fresh air comes to wash out all stagnant impure air, which is called the laundry. The framework of this house is the skeleton or the bones (Anderson 1915-1916).

The analogy was carried throughout the course and was used to instruct the women in the purpose, features, description, growth, and structure of bones, blood, skin, muscles, joints, glands and major organs. For example, the women were taught that “the upper story is like a strong box and we call that the skull, sometimes cranium. This box holds the brain” (Anderson 1915-1916). The spine was described like a pillar which supports the upper body and vertebrae were described as a series of spools, sweat glands were part of the plumbing system and the liver was a storehouse (Anderson 1915-1916). This characterization of the body as a house was not unique to Dr. Ross. Annmarie Adams has noted that another female doctor, American Mary Wood-Allen, used this metaphor in her book *The Man Wonderful in the House Beautiful*. “She used the metaphor of the house-body to warn of the dangers of ‘guests,’ such as alcoholic stimulants. And she began her popular textbook of physiology, *The Marvels of Our Bodily Dwelling*, by stating: ‘Let us study the body as a house in which we dwell here on earth, a house

created by a divine Architect, fitted up with every comfort, divided into many rooms, each with its own appropriate furniture and adapted to its own especial use” (65-67). These two books by Wood-Allen were not found in the Macdonald Institute archival collection, but *The Man Wonderful in the House Beautiful*, *The Marvels of Our Bodily Dwelling*, and a sex education book written by Wood-Allen in 1905, *What a Young Girl Ought to Know*, were on Urie-Watson’s list of recommended texts for high school domestic science programs which appeared in a March 25, 1905 letter to John Seath, Ontario’s Superintendent of Education (Macdonald Institute Papers Director File: Watson, 1903-1920). So, it is likely that Ross was also acquainted with the author and saw fit to pull her use of the house-body metaphor into her own instruction.

Dr. Ross’ physiology curriculum was fairly exhaustive, covering such details as the types of muscles and the action of lactic acid on the muscles; types of joints and corresponding cartilage and ligaments; the path of food through the system, including the action of involuntary muscle systems, the stomach and intestines down to the details of the manufacture of bile and urea. The women also dissected rabbits in physiology lab. The faculty must have been concerned about requiring women to conduct such an indelicate task because they provided each woman with oil of cloves in case of sudden faintness – an act which may have suggested to some students that fainting was a natural and appropriate response for ladies placed in such a situation. But, surely some of these women had killed and dressed game in their own homes and at least one student found the practice of providing the women with oil of cloves for the rabbit dissection lab insulting or demeaning. The “Macdonald Notes” section of the March 1904 *OAC Review* included the following tongue-in-cheek question from an

unnamed author: “Why are not the girls of the chicken-drawing class treated likewise?” The incident exemplifies the tensions and negotiations that existed over conflicting constructions of appropriate images of women. In one laboratory, women were expected to be delicate and sensitive creatures easily overcome by such gritty procedures as dissections, and yet, in another lab, were expected to be capable of slaughtering, cleaning, and preparing fowl for a family meal without the slightest perturbation. Such contradictions did not go unnoticed by some of the women and having the opportunity to both experience and reflect on the clash in subject positions provided opportunities for conscious ideological affiliation with preferential characterizations of femininity. Powerful discourses and ideologies are often rationalized by curriculum, but curriculum can also serve to make discourses and ideologies seem absurd. Following the comment in the *OAC Review*, no further mention could be found about the dispensing of restoratives during dissection labs for those with fragile constitutions.

It is unclear how most of the students responded to the lessons in physiology, but they must have been either overwhelming or overly tedious for Dorothy Anderson, who wrote sideways to a classmate on the margin of her lecture notes about the intestines: “What time do we get to move on?” (1915-1916) Structuring the Physiology curriculum around the features of the home may have been intended to make the content more accessible and less intimidating for the female students, but it was also based on an assumption that this elaborate simile was the best way to make the concepts meaningful and interesting. It served as a powerful way to anchor the women to their prescribed sphere of knowledge, remind them of their comfort there,

and it functioned to naturalize and reinforce the connection.

During their one period of Foods each week, the Homemaker students learned about the composition, characteristics, and structures of the various food groups such as fruits, vegetables, cereals, dairy, and meats, much as did the short course students; however, the Homemaker students went into far greater detail and depth of analysis. They were taught how to conduct food value tests using four methods of testing: chemical testing to determine the proportion of nutrients; physical testing to determine the amount of heat and energy supplied; physiological testing for ease of digestion and absorption; and finally, economic analysis to weigh the relative cost of the food. The Homemaker students worked on comparative charts for the percent composition of water, protein, carbohydrate, fat and mineral in food substances, and they learned about the function of vitamins and minerals. They received instruction in the molecular structure of fruits, vegetables, cereals, milk, fat, eggs and meat and considered these structures in terms of the relative ease of digestibility. Through this process of examination of the value of foods, students developed critical thinking and evaluation skills. After completing food value testing, Dorothy Anderson came to the conclusion that, although beans were not easily digestible, “because of their cheapness beans should occupy an important place in diet, where economy is observed” (1915-1916). She also recorded in her notes information about foods that contributed to tissue building such as cereals, those which aided in digestion such as barley, and those that were best suited to the dietary needs of vegetarians and the ill, elderly, or very young. An awareness of the need for a balanced diet was reflected in student’s notes. Dorothy Anderson recorded that rice was cheap and easy to prepare,

but noted the caution that the consumption of too much polished rice could lead to a disorder and that because rice was high in carbohydrates, but low in proteins and fats, it was best eaten in combination with foods that satisfied those categories. Evidence of the start of a dietetics and nutritional sciences curriculum is apparent in these early class notes.

Principles of the economics and marketing of food goods were part of the Foods curriculum for the Homemaker’s and were reinforced through separate lectures on the topic of marketing, with marketing, in this case, referring to the act of purchasing goods at market, rather than the current connotation of promotion for sales. In an effort to level out social inequities, the Institute emphasized the charms of simplicity and positioned the ability to live with thrift as a highly desirable skill to attain. Women were given a leading role to play in raising the standards of living across the nation by modifying expectations and values. It was argued by an unnamed author of an article entitled “Economy and the Woman’s Influence on it” which appeared in the April 1914 edition of the *OAC Review* that “if the women would remember that they can be a big factor in reducing the high cost of living by household economy, there would be happier homes throughout the Dominion” (360).

There were two underlying suppositions circulating in such discourse: first, that it fell to women to overcome poverty through thrift and careful housekeeping; and secondly, that women from impoverished lower-class and rural settings were incapable of budgeting prudently and needed training as a remedy. They were instructed on how to make the best use of what resources they had and how to spend funds judiciously. Ingenuity and industry in the face of uncertain or limited resources were afforded greater esteem than the ability to live lavishly and effortlessly

with an abundance of readily available resources. The First World War intensified the importance of this lesson when conservation of food resources became critical to the war effort. The Mac girls were told by an unnamed classmate in the May 1918 edition of the *OAC Review* that “if Macdonald students are to use their influence in this cause and act as conservation propagandists, they must be able to meet antagonism with irrefutable statements” (438). The Institute taught the women how to judge the best sources for purchasing fruits and vegetables and methods for determining the quality of goods. The best seasons for various foods were identified and patterns of pricing were discussed. The potential health effects of preservative chemicals, such as copper sulphate which was used to turn vegetables from a grey-green to a vibrant green, were discussed. Similarly, the women had lectures on the potential health effects of faulty canning methods and were instructed on how to identify signs of problems such as unlevel cans, no detectable sound of liquid, or a metallic or acidic taste. In 1884, the Canadian Department of National Health and Welfare passed the nation’s first food adulteration act, ten years after the first such act in the world was passed (Cameron 2007), and the heightened awareness of quality control measures found its way into the curriculum at Mac. The manner in which contaminants enter into milk – the likely source of the illness which took the life of Domestic Science Education Crusader Adelaide Hoodless’ son – were discussed at length, and the women were told that it was the responsibility of the homemaker to “get milk from a good source, and in covered bottles. [Milk] should be kept in hygienic surroundings, in a cool place, not in hot temp” (Anderson 1915-1916). This section of the curriculum aimed to produce savvy and responsible consumers, but it was also based on the presumption that the

students had little or no knowledge of how to be hygienic or thrifty – a presumption that was likely ill-conceived in the case of students who grew up in homes where vigilance for food contaminants and economy was an absolute necessity. Most likely, this ignorance reflected the curriculum authors’ privileged class background.

The home nursing and emergencies curriculum was not dissimilar from that provided for the Short Course women, but more conditions and cases were discussed. Like the Short Course students, the Homemakers learned how to take and chart vital statistics such as pulse rate, temperature, respiration, elimination, and patient’s state of mind. However, the Homemakers were also given instruction in how to make and maintain their own mercury thermometers and they learned temperature patterns associated with particular health concerns such as pneumonia, typhoid, measles and chicken pox. They learned how to mix, use and store their own disinfectants such as bichloride of mercury, boracic acid, carbolic acid, hydrogen peroxide, formaldehyde and sulphur dioxide. They were taught how to dress wounds, apply poultices, give footbaths and administer enemas.

Their first aid instruction considered not only burns, stings, sprains and cuts, but also poisonings, drownings, choking, gunshot wounds, snake bites, fainting, hysteria, strokes, and internal and external haemorrhaging. The Homemakers were taught the difference between metallic, vegetable, alcohol, strong acid and strong base poisonings, and they learned which types of poisonings required emetics and types which called for dilutants as treatment. Hysteria was distinguished from convulsions and fits and, as a student recorded in her lecture notes, thought to be “caused sometimes by uncontrolled crying, laughing or rage, etc.” It was presented as poor behaviour and a tactic to gain attention rather than

a serious health concern. The women were told to “leave the patient positively alone. It can be prevented by detracting the attention” (Ahrens 1914-1915).

Their consideration of illnesses included communicable diseases such as tuberculosis and the women were made to understand that homemakers play a crucial role in stopping the spread of disease as well as in easing the pain of sufferers. OAC Professor William Muldrew expressed this contention in a January 1907 *OAC Review* article when he wrote, “It rests with the women of Canada to stamp [tuberculosis] out, and if all women could have the right amount of education in this matter, and were willing to it into effect, this plague would be stamped out in one generation” (201). The women were encouraged to contribute to public efforts to stop the spread of tuberculosis including the eradication of public spitting, communal drinking cups and towels, and long walking skirts. They were also encouraged to lobby for better inspection of beef and dairy cattle, better pasteurization of milk, protected display of food goods for sale, and the building of sanatoriums. They were urged to volunteer to distribute educational literature and participate in public awareness campaigns. The causes, symptoms, treatment and dangers of droplet infection in cases of pneumonia also took up several lectures. The curriculum was fairly comprehensive and was intended to equip women to provide effective first aid and continuing care. Clear parameters were established between the limits of women in the home and the much greater capability of doctors to treat the ill. The women were frequently instructed on when to call in outside help and reminded that they were not to assume that they could usurp the role of medical professionals. They were, rather, to take care of their family member’s immediate and simple

health concerns and lobby for improvements to public health.

The laundry curriculum was far more detailed than that provided to the non-professional students at the Institute enrolled in three month short course in Domestic Science. The Homemakers were taught how to apply the lessons of chemistry to the task of cleaning fabric. As is evident in figure 2 (Macdonald Institute Papers, Students File: Class Pictures), to reinforce this lesson, the laundry classroom looked less like a Laundromat than a laboratory. Stations were set up around the room and the students worked on set laundry tasks by following precise methods.

The course began with a discussion of the differences between hard and soft water and the effects of both on the action of detergents and the durability of fabric. Students learned about



Figure 2. Laundry classroom at the Macdonald Institute

common alkalis and acids and their uses. They made their own detergents and their own starches. Ironing and folding techniques were practiced as were some simple dry cleaning techniques such as the use of gasoline as a solvent. Students were required to bring a selection of clothing items such as flannel pajamas, cotton shirts and undergarments, as well as linen handkerchiefs,

with them to the Institute as practice garments, but there is no evidence that they did the Institute's laundry as a part of the course work. Students were also responsible for reading sections of *The Science of Laundry Work* (Rankin 1904). Margaret Cuthbert Rankin wrote a total of six books on laundry work for teachers and students. The first volume was assigned to the Mac students and included examination of the composition, states, properties, manufacture, use and storage of water, soap, sodium bicarbonate, alkalis, starch, blueing solutions, and a range of chemicals for use as bleaches, disinfectants, and solvents. Rankin also detailed the structures and properties of common fabrics and discusses the preferred methods for cleaning and maintaining the fabrics. The author believed that hygiene was inextricably linked to quality of character, and her writing (Rankin 1904, 9) reinforced a lesson that the Institute valued highly for its aspiring Domestic Science teachers:

There is nothing more likely to aid in the development of character in children than the thorough inculcation of this science of cleanliness, and the teacher who is earnest and enthusiastic in the work will appreciate the importance of the relation between cleanliness and perfect health. While guiding the pupils into methodical ways of working, she will embrace the opportunity of instilling hygienic principles of cleanliness, tidiness, carefullness (sic) and order.

Additionally, Rankin's textbook series made recommendations on equipping and configuring laundry classrooms and guided teachers on the importance of preparation, presentation, association, generalization and application in successful learning. The Institute's faculty required students to read or purchase very few books, but this text was one of the few required

books and was intended to serve as a useful reference guide in the future.

In 1906, the decision was made to increase the academic rigour of the program by adding lessons in English and household accounting. OAC English Professor J.B. Reynolds taught the English classes and Urie-Watson provided instruction in household accounting. It is not clear if this curriculum change stemmed from Urie-Watson's efforts to lay the groundwork for a planned associate's course. It may also have resulted in part from faculty, student or alumni demands for improved literacy and numeracy skills in preparation for continued studies, but both subjects were perceived to be "sadly needed by the average student of the class" (Urie-Watson 1906). The readings for the English course equipped the women with adequate critical reading skills for engaged parlour discussions, but were also carefully selected to allow for direction and reflection into how the women should best shape their lives. In the first term, students read Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, which focuses on the theme of marriage and examines the relative happiness and success of those who marry for status, convenience, impulse, and love. Austen's book provided fodder for discussions on the centrality of parenting and family influence over the development of a kind, intelligent and moral individuals. The women also read from Alexander's *Anthology of English Poetry*, and were required to complete a short biography of Lord Tennyson who wrote largely on sentimental themes. They were also assigned the task of completing an exposition of the theologian and poet, Joseph Blanco White's, poem "Tonight" about the devastating cost of sin evident in the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. In addition to the examination of literary themes on venerated social values, the women

were also given instruction in the genteel art of writing letters and invitations. In the second term, the Homemakers read a selection of Canadian authors with the idea that, as Corea Cleghorn recorded in her notes, “a national literature commences only when the genius of the people expresses itself through native authors, upon topics of permanent interest” (1914-1915). The class considered the difficulties of building a national literature in Canada because of the size, diversity and political dependence of the nation. *Silas Marner* was the novel study for the second term and the students wrote on the role of faith and ethics in the social regeneration of George Eliot’s main character. Morality, femininity and faithful allegiance to home and country were the overriding themes of the English instruction provided to the women.

The Accounting course, which was intended to teach practical lessons in budgeting and simple, applied math relevant to the women’s likely future roles as home-makers, was not well-loved by the students. Efforts to tie the math to authentic problems did not help to ease the discomfort with the subject. The aversion to the content is apparent in this sarcastic notice printed in the April 1904 *OAC Review*, “We have to announce that after this the subject, ‘Business Methods’ or ‘Practical Arithmetic,’ will be dropped. The new girls will not have to try to find out, that, if in one minute one cat would catch one rat, how many rats in how many minutes would three cats catch? It might be added here, that, owing to the discovery of an instantaneous rat poison in the shape of home-made pie-crust this advanced system of feline mathematics can be dispensed with at the Macdonald Institute” (61). Whether it stemmed from anxieties about learning challenging mathematical concepts or a lack of confidence that accounting skills were necessary for success in the home, it is clear that there was

some degree of aversion to the subject matter. It is not clear what affect this aversion had on the assimilation, retention and ultimate application of the lessons.

A year after the courses in English and Accounting were added, a course in colour-harmony was devised in an “effort to lead the girls to apply the laws of colour and form to clothing and home decoration” (Urie-Watson 1907, 246). Taught by a male teacher, Mr. Evans, from the Institute’s Manual Training Department, this course:

began with a study of the primary secondary and tertiary colors with a watercolor box as a basis, for standards in their combination later. Thence they passed to a brief study of color-balance, which is the proper proportion of different colors in one combination. They took up a little elementary work in design, and immediately worked out simple designs suitable for cushions, curtains, etc. Some of these were carried out in cloth and color. Following this they carried out practical demonstrations of color combinations in dress using actual cloth, hats, etc. A small room was given over to their use and the girls worked in sections. Each group worked out a different color combination and decorated one corner, which was criticized and discussed before the next group had its turn. We have been trying to develop work along this line since the Institute’s opening year, but this attempt is the first that has proved at all satisfactory. This kind of work, like other practical work, takes a great deal of time, but we believe it to be of great value to the girls.

According to Helen Staebler’s January 1910 article in the *OAC Review*, the color harmony course, as part of the “whole scheme of handicraft

education” at the Institute, developed the lofty objective of instilling “enlightenment in the study of objective beauty” (229). Similar aggrandizement of home skills became evident in the subjects that made up the curriculum of the one-year Homemaker’s course, which increasingly focused on the “science or reasons at the bottom of practical operations” (Urie-Watson 1909, 234) as the first two decades of the Institute ended.

One of the pillars of the Domestic Science education movement noted in the March 1907 “Macdonald” section of the *OAC Review* was the belief that “the home is the social workshop for the making of men” (299), and women must be well equipped and trained to rear children, particularly male children, with care and intelligence so that they may become productive citizens who would contribute to the advancement of the nation. By 1914, lessons on mothercraft, as it was called, had debuted as part of the curriculum for the Homemakers. As Katherine Arnup (1990) and Cynthia Commachio (1993) have noted in their works on educating women for motherhood, at this time, the medical establishment and the state began to take on a much greater role in counselling women in modern motherhood techniques than it previously had. The curriculum developed at Mac was in keeping with this growing belief that women needed instruction rather than instinct and tradition to raise their children properly. Ross provided instruction on care of the infant – clothes to prepare, schedules of feeding and elimination, bathing techniques, and comforting a crying, colicky or teething baby – became part of the Home Nursing and Emergencies course. Lectures on Child Psychology were also offered to allow Homemakers like F. Ahrens to “study the mind of the child” and “to find the child’s place in the social world” (1914-1915). The

introduction of this content points to the rising influence of social sciences and the growing interest in the relative effects of nature and nurture in human development. The inclusion of child development theory in the curriculum emerged from the developing belief that children were sufficiently different from adults to merit separate study, and that, as “environment has a great deal to do with growth” (Ahrens 1914-1915), Homemaker students would benefit from a guided consideration of how to create spaces in which children could flourish. Through the lectures, the Homemakers were exposed to knowledge regarding the physical and psychosocial development of children. The influence of G. Stanley Hall, Educational Psychologist and President of Clark University, is evident in the emphasis placed on the importance of imaginative play and imitation in skill development. The women were taught that play was instinctive for children and could be directed toward the development of mind, body and soul. The injection of expert, predominantly male-generated, social science discourse into the curriculum was indicative of a heightened concern that women’s work outside of the home, in concert with poor training in child-rearing practices, was creating a social problem. The introduction of a formal curriculum in mothercraft was also revealing of an undercurrent of concern that ill-behaved or unhealthy children were the result of ignorant, careless mothers (Dyhouse 1978, 303).

Homemakers were meant to graduate with thorough training in establishing and running a family home. The curriculum was designed to unveil the theoretical and scientific underpinnings of their daily work and provide them with a rich understanding of importance and intricacy of their work thereby increasing their satisfaction with home life. Whether the Institute’s curriculum

succeeded in achieving these ends is not entirely clear. Some graduates may have taken their experience at the Institute and dedicated their lives to the application of its lessons, secure in the belief that their roles were difficult and valuable. Other graduates may have had difficulty in holding on to the vision of laundry, cleaning, food preparation and parenting as scientifically informed practices rather than drudgery. It is possible that for some, the exposure to theory and experimental method gained at the Institute lit a spark and generated a hunger for more of the same outside of the home rather than within it.

The non-professional programs offered by the Macdonald Institute from 1903-1920 were designed to teach practices, values and beliefs informed by the intersecting interests that defined the social reform groups behind the establishment of the Macdonald Institute. The young women who attended the Institute were taught that women were uniquely responsible for and uniquely capable of building a healthy, productive and prosperous nation one home and one community at a time. This responsibility was promoted as a privilege – something to take care and pride in – rather than as an encumbrance to the progress of women. Within the culture of the Institute, sheltered somewhat from contradictory ideas posited by liberal feminists or conservative traditionalists, a community of women formed and nurtured an idealized vision of the pre-eminent importance of women to take a leadership role in establishing ever higher standards for the quality of family and community.

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