CHAPTER FIVE

Part III: Improving Home Life

A New Home for Home Economics

The Great Depression began by the end of the 1920’s but it did not disrupt the construction of a new arts building that had been in the works for some time. The building was completed at the beginning of 1930.

The new building, (later called McElhaney) provided accommodations for the Commercial (Business) Department on its first floor, the Art Department on the Second Floor, and the Home Economics Department on the Third.

Government Support for Home Economics Education

The new accommodations for the Home Economics Department, which had been housed in the basement of John Sutton Hall, were significant because they enabled the school to benefit from federal funding available to support such programs through the Smith-Hughes Act.

Passed in 1917, this legislation offered financial support to schools that prepared Home Economics teachers and required programs to have classrooms that were above ground and instructors with degrees to qualify.

Degree requirements had long been satisfied but the new location fulfilled remaining requirement and allowed the school to bring in badly needed additional funding. In 1934, the program was approved by the Federal Board of Vocational Education (FBVE) for Smith-Hughes Appropriations. This money paid for supplies, clerical services, the salary for the supervisors of student teaching, and traveling expenses for administrative and supervisors to attend meetings.
During the 30s, this program grew, even as other female dominated programs shrank. Between 1930 and 1939 enrollment in Home Economics Department grew from 100 in 1930 to 179 in 1939. The Nursery school, which had begun in the 1920s as an experimental child development lab of sorts, by 1930 had 31 students. By 1936-37, it had developed into a regular nursery school which met one afternoon a week for 12 weeks serving children between 2 and 4.

A new addition to the curriculum was infant care. Beginning in 1936, the juniors in the Home Management House had the care of a baby that was on loan from an orphanage. Each student had the care of the baby for a few consecutive days. The babies lived in the house from September to the end of the spring semester. It was then returned to the orphanage.

A somewhat controversial practice (not all programs in Home Economics did this), the ISTC community was reassured that the child was being cared for in keeping with the latest scientific training methods. (for related article, see Borrowed Babies)

**Home Economics Heavy in Science**

Though their white uniforms made them look like maids or cooks to modern readers, Home Economics professors saw themselves as practical scientists. Home Economics students took a considerable number of regular science classes such as biochemistry prior to taking their specialized science courses.
Home Economics activities were prominently noted in the *Penn* during these years. You could find them offering short plays to assemblies on topics from correct behavior at the table to good nutrition or application of the principles of scientific management to the household. They also played an active role in the yearly celebration of Health Week, covering topics from measuring weight, height, and general health, to advice on optimum nutrition, carrying out health inventories for the student body, or offering a healthy May Day breakfast.

**Improving Home Life**

In tune with the other New Deal programs, they applied their theoretical knowledge to improve society. Home Economics majors would go out into the schools and teach students, some from poverty-stricken homes, how to economically and effectively feed themselves and their families. They considered such enrichment essential during the tough times. Their motto, which appeared in the school’s *Teachers College Bulletin* was “Improving home life is the responsibility of public education.” (August 1933.)