

From Canning to Contraceptives

Cooperative Extension Service Home Demonstration Clubs
and Rural Montana Women in the Post-World War II Era

by AMY L. MCKINNEY



The Montana Cooperative Extension Service provided information and instruction to members of locally organized Home Demonstration Clubs intended to educate women about home economics. By the 1950s, club lessons highlighted the growing trend of consumerism as well as home efficiency and convenience. Manufacturers familiar to rural families promoted consumerism and domesticity with products like the International Harvester “femineered” refrigerator in this ad published in the *Montana Farmer-Stockman*, April 1, 1951 (p. 30).

On February 20, 1951, the Girard Homemakers Club of Richland County met in the home of Mrs. Charles Daniels. President Marie Noah called the meeting to order. Fifteen women answered roll call, three of them new members. For the day's lesson, Florence C. and Georgia P. presented on window treatments, passing around an assortment of curtain materials as well as booklets explaining the use of different patterns. A discussion followed and then the members turned their attention to other business items: the club secretary was asked to send a going-away card to the county's home demonstration agent, Miss Alice Finey; three birthdays were recognized; and club members exchanged homemade paper valentines. The group ended the meeting by singing "Let Me Call You Sweetheart." A social hour followed the meeting with good food and conversation.¹

The Girard Homemakers Club was just one of the 582 Cooperative Extension Service Home Demonstration clubs active in 1951 in Montana.² Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, these clubs were important in the lives of rural women.³ They instructed farm and ranch women in domestic skills, home economics, and how to make use of new consumer goods and technologies. More importantly, however, they helped rural women overcome isolation and provided validation for their work—both in the house and on the farm.⁴

Home Demonstration clubs had their beginnings in 1914 with the passage of the Smith-Lever Act, which created the Cooperative Extension Service in Agriculture and Home Economics, a partnership between the U.S. Department of Agriculture and land-grant colleges. The main goal of the act was to provide the latest information in agriculture and home economics to rural people who were unable to attend college. Supporters of the bill believed that rural people would be able to apply the knowledge they obtained through the Extension Service to "practical situations in everyday life," which would "raise the level of living" for rural people. In signing the bill, President Woodrow Wilson observed that "next to the Federal Reserve Act, this [legislation] is our greatest contribution to the national welfare."⁵

The Extension Service in Montana recognized that providing information was a key element of its mission, but explained the distinct nature of how Extension education worked in a nontraditional classroom: "[E]xtension work is not a systematic course of instruction, but deals with problems of practice and

business on the farm, in the home, or in the rural community." In line with this goal, the Extension Service fostered Home Demonstration clubs—or Homemakers clubs—that focused on women's domestic roles.⁶

The effort to make the same information available to rural people as to those attending college was not lost on those the programs targeted. Remembering her club participation in the 1940s and 1950s, Betty Norby, a charter member of the Girard Homemakers Club in Richland County, commented on the importance of this training: "If I think back on it now it was almost like a college, going to college and learning, only we did it together and did it at Homemakers, and we were able to put it to use in our homes." Another Home Demonstration club member, Alene Stoner of Great Falls, clearly grasped the goals of the Extension Service and what it meant to the people it reached: "[F]or the nonworking woman, especially, it was an out for them and a way to learn things, without actually going to school and paying a tuition; the education came to the people."⁷

The Extension Service used a variety of methods to reach rural homemakers: Home Demonstration agents visited homes, made telephone calls, took office appointments, held workshops, broadcast programs on radio and television, and wrote newspaper articles, bulletins, and circulars. The Home Demonstration clubs that met in individual homes, however, were perhaps the most popular and productive way to reach rural women directly. Through demonstrations on a variety of topics such as preserving foods, sewing clothes, raising children, and being an active

business partner on the farm or ranch, members addressed some basic issues: What did it mean to be a rural woman? What skills should she possess? What should be her role in the home and community?

In the beginning—July 1914—the lectures provided by the Extension Service to Home Demonstration clubs across the state focused on meal planning, homemaking efficiency, and home convenience. But by the years after World War II, the Home Demonstration programs were changing with the changing times. Lessons stressing conservation and efficiency were developed alongside lessons that highlighted the growing trend of consumerism as more rural women began to work outside the home. These lessons were especially important to farm and ranch women whose productive labor—gardening, childrearing, cooking,

sewing, record keeping, labor in the fields, work in the barn—was crucial to the success of the family business (and were often the basis of their decision-making powers on the farm). Extension programs now reflected a tension that had become a part of women’s lives—rural women wanted retain their productive roles while still modernizing their homes and work. The social connections to the local community networks provided by the Home Demonstration clubs were also of great importance to rural women.⁸

Two counties in eastern Montana, Richland and Roosevelt, provide a particularly good example of the focus of Home Demonstration clubs. Both counties border North Dakota, and both are largely rural. Richland County, where the economy is based on a mixture of ranching and farming, has supported



Courtesy Girard Homemakers Club

Betty Norby of the Girard Homemakers Club in Richland County commented on the importance of Extension Service training for rural people: “If I think back on it now it was almost like a college . . . only we did it together and did it at Homemakers, and we were able to put it to use in our homes.” The Girard Homemakers Club, above, organized in 1946. It is still active in 2011.



F 2, box 19, Agricultural Engineering Records, 1906–77, 00007, Montana State University Archives, Bozeman

As representatives of the Extension Service, county Home Demonstration agents reached rural women with workshops, bulletins and circulars, radio and television broadcasts, and, most popularly, at meetings held in club members' homes. Here, circa 1945, agents Lois Knowlton Stephens, Frances Smith Patten, and Lillian Stone Mikkleson demonstrate electric roasters, one of many electrical appliances which became more commonplace in rural homes after World War II.

a continuous Extension program from 1917 to the present. Roosevelt County, which neighbors Richland to the north, hosted its first permanent Home Demonstration club in 1930. The county contains a large portion of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation, and in the 1940s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs contracted for one-third of the county's Home Demonstration agent's time. However, Richland County found it difficult to support a full-time agent, and by the early 1960s agent Dorothy Hofman was focusing on the three clubs on the reservation. Though she volunteered what time she could for the off-reservation clubs, their programs depended more and more on the leadership of individual members of the clubs, who were trained by the county's Extension agents

to give the lessons when Hofman was unavailable.⁹

Across the state, enrollment in Home Demonstration clubs grew steadily in the early postwar period. In 1950, there were 566 clubs across the state, with 10,153 members, or 5 percent of the state's women age fourteen or older. By 1960, the number of clubs had increased to 622, though total enrollment had dropped slightly to 9,843.¹⁰

The opportunity to learn about various issues pertaining to family life were probably the main reason many women joined Home Demonstration clubs. Alene Stoner explained that she and her friends joined because "being young and new mothers, we just thought maybe the Extension Office could teach us some things, and we'd have fun doing it as a

group.” With three small children, Stoner sought out help. She later explained that she had

met a group of young ladies at a bowling alley . . . and we got to visiting. They had young children, too, and we had a lot of the same problems and concerns with raising the kids. And so we’d heard about Extension Homemakers and decided to contact the Extension office and find out what it was about and how we could start one. So, six of us chartered our own group. And so we kind of gave up the bowling for the time being and met as a group of women and learned lots of things: home-making skills, child rearing skills, and all those kinds of things.

One club member from Custer County said that she joined the club when she and some other mothers were visiting at a playground, discussing how they would like more advice from experts on raising children.¹¹

Interested as women were in learning new and better methods of raising children, cooking, and cleaning, they remained well aware that their needs were different from those of urban and suburban women, and they sometimes complained about the “canned” programs offered by the Extension Service. Sisters Margaret Bradley and Pat Denowh of Richland County were both members of Home Demonstration clubs, and as Bradley explained, much of the information they received in their meetings was “a lot of stuff we already knew. . . . Well, town people probably didn’t know much about the gardening and canning

. . . like country people would have known.” In 1949, the two new clubs formed in Roosevelt County were, according to the county’s annual report, “made up of bonafide farm women who always have time to do more than some town women who just ‘think’ they are busy.”¹²

The names women chose for their clubs are instructive. Many named their clubs after the community or a local geographic area, such as Girard, Three Buttes, or Moon Creek, while other names reflect the members’ attitudes about what the clubs represented—O.N.O. (Our Night Out) and H.E.O. (Help Each Other). Avis Zoanni of Richland County, who helped organize a new club in her community, came up with the name C-Dars, incorporating the first letter of each locale included: Cherry Creek, Dug Out, Andes, and Sioux Pass. Names like the Merry Homemakers, the Jolly Twelve, and the Happy Homemakers also reflected the positive attitudes some women had toward their role in the home—and toward the chance to socialize with other homemakers. Still other club names, like Learn-a-Lot, Eager Beavers, and Live and Learn, stressed the educational focus of Home Demonstration and the members’ desire to receive the most recent and scientific home economics information.¹³

Home Demonstration clubs usually met once a month. Extension lessons would be presented at six to eight meetings throughout the year. Often clubs did not meet during the summer months but would hold a community picnic for members and their families. Some meetings had a particular purpose. For

Richland County Home Demonstration Clubs scrapbook, Richland County Extension Office, Sidney, Montana



Home Demonstration clubs usually met once a month in a member’s home and held occasional workshops and special events in public facilities. Though members looked forward to the educational aspects of their meetings, they also valued the opportunity to socialize. The women pictured here, dressed in traditional ethnic clothing, posed during the 1959 annual Richland County International Luncheon held in Sidney in observance of United Nations Day.

instance, one meeting was generally devoted to the election of officers, and one was traditionally given over to the annual Christmas party. Women made an effort to make their meetings special. When meetings took place in members' homes, they used their good china, made their best desserts, and cleaned their houses from top to bottom. They looked forward to the meetings and the information they gained, but most importantly, they valued the social connections. Marie Carlile explained that she looked forward to club meetings not just for the information she received, but also for "the sociability that was involved. It was just really the social 'life' of the community." Just as important were the various snacks and desserts the hostess provided for club members. Phyllis Picard of Culbertson in Roosevelt County stressed the importance to her of this aspect of the club meetings when

office encouraged group singing in clubs "because a singing America is a happier America." And every club member knew the national Home Demonstration Club song, which was sung at Home Demonstration Council meetings and other special affairs.¹⁵

Members of Home Demonstration clubs reached out to the community. They invited newcomers, especially new brides, to their meetings. They also held baby showers for members and had parties on birthdays. Many clubs had a Sunshine Committee that was responsible for sending flowers and notes to those in the hospital. Equally important to club members were the community charities and activities they supported. Every club donated money to local and national charities to support the fight against polio, cancer, and tuberculosis. Clubs also sent money to Shodair Children's Hospital in Helena, and club-

women were active in helping with local fund-raisers for the schools, churches, and hospitals of their communities. Richland County clubwomen were especially active with the Red Cross bloodmobile; in the mid-1950s they led all other organizations in the county for the number of blood donors and volunteers. Doris Goebel of Richland County explained, "Any community thing that we could help with we did. We put on pie sales to make money to donate for different things. We sponsored a woman out at Richland Homes [retirement center]." Clubwomen also believed they had a responsibility to help young women in the community who wanted to go to college or to a vocational school.

Most clubs supported the Home Demonstration Council Scholarship Fund, which awarded one hundred dollars to a high school girl who planned to pursue a college degree in home economics.¹⁶

Membership was often multigenerational, helping to create a community of women. In Richland County in 1946, young women under the age of thirty made up a third of club membership, another third was composed of women between the ages of thirty and



Richland County Extension Service, "Annual Report, 1948"

Home Demonstration clubs welcomed members of all ages. In Richland County in 1946, young women under the age of thirty made up a third of club membership, women between the ages of thirty and forty comprised another third, and the final third were women over forty. All shared their individual skills with the group. "Some of us were good at one thing," remarked Betty Norby, "and some were good at something else."

Above, Richland County women gather in Sidney in 1961 for a tailoring workshop, with children tagging along.

describing the typical program: "[We'd] have a little business meeting, sometimes have a game and eat. Naturally, that's the most important."¹⁴

Most clubs had their own song books and started their meetings with singing. Records of various Home Demonstration clubs list the titles of the songs, usually two or three, that were sung at the beginning of each meeting. Special occasions, like welcoming new members, merited special songs. The state Extension



The first Home Demonstration club on the Fort Peck Reservation was formed in the 1940s. By the early 1960s, there were three clubs on the reservation. Above, Wolf Point's Friendly Homemakers participate in a sewing workshop in 1949.

forty, and the final third comprised women over forty. The important thing, according to the agent's annual report that year, "is the fact that many of the new members are younger homemakers. Older women attend club meetings as social members and help take care of the children while the young mothers take part in the club activities."¹⁷

The older mothers offered support and advice to the new mothers. As Doris Goebel, member of the Happy Homemakers Club of Sidney, explained: "[A]t that time that was our support, really. You know when you are raising little kids, if you had problems, why you'd talk to other homemakers." Betty Norby, a charter member of the Girard Homemakers Club in Richland County, commented, "We had young mothers, we had the older ladies, everybody. That's why it was such a good social time too. Some of us were good at one thing and some were good at something else. . . . It kept us together, instead of being strangers." When asked about the most important things she took away from Home Demonstration meetings, Doris Rambur from the Ridgelawn Home Demonstration Club in

Richland County replied: "Just an awful lot of nice people. Good friends. . . . The Ridgelawn and Hardy schools was a quite large community, and we were just all good friends. Our kids grew up together."¹⁸

Club meetings on the Fort Peck Reservation followed the pattern set by the other clubs. According to Home Demonstration agent Reba Burright's 1949 report, members of the Poplar Indian Home Demonstration Club indicated a desire "to carry the same program as the white clubs," though she found that she needed to put extra effort into supplementing programs in order to suit the needs and interests of club members. Over time, though, neither the county agent nor the Home Demonstration agent felt that the segregated programs were as beneficial as integrated programs might be. For example, in his 1960 report, County Extension Agent Don L. Hunter noted that "the inter-dependence which exists between Indian and non-Indian people makes it evident that Extension does not always serve the Indian people best by working only with Indian people. Educational programs are forced to face whole problems . . . , regard-

less of national background, age, sex, place of residence or occupation.”¹⁹

Providing rural homemakers with information on home economics and the latest technology was the primary purpose of the Extension Service, which drafted a series of lessons for the year, often after consulting a member survey. While the Extension Service determined most of the demonstrations and lessons, club members had some input. Women chose from the list of programs offered and made suggestions about lessons that interested them.

Later, a Home Demonstration Program Committee was formed. Each club in each county sent one member to an annual meeting to develop the program for the year.²⁰

The series of lessons that was developed was broken down into six major categories: rural organizations and leadership development; farm and home buildings; public affairs and community development; health and safety; social relationships; and farm and home management. The largest category, farm and home management, was itself broken down into subcategories as well: clothing, foods and nutrition, house furnishings and equipment, family life, and home management and family economics. Between 1945 and 1965, the Extension Service office of Custer County in southeastern Montana offered 184 lessons to its Home Demonstration clubs, 60 percent of them on farm and home management. During that same period, Richland and Roosevelt counties offered 140 and 128 lessons, respectively; 67 percent of Richland County’s and 69 percent of Roosevelt County’s lessons were on farm and home management.²¹

The Home Demonstration agent led many of the lessons, but an important activity of the Extension Service was training project leaders who would then lead the lesson for their clubs. In this way, leadership abilities were not only encouraged but developed. Avis Zoanni, member of the C-Dars Club in Richland County, noted that “somebody from the club would go into the Extension office and [see a demonstration] and then that person would come back and tell the club what they had learned. That was important because in those [days], way back in the beginning,



Bulletin 166 (August 1938)

In the postwar years, Home Demonstration lessons stressed food preservation. The Montana Extension Service’s booklet *Home Canning by Safe Methods* (left, by Jessie E. Richardson and Helen L. Mayfield) covers selection and preparation of food, prevention of spoilage and botulism, and various methods of canning.

women didn’t get into town that much, you know.” Home Demonstration agent Pauline Blue Deem of Sheridan County commented on

the great pleasure she took in seeing once-reticent women becoming community leaders.²²

In these postwar years, home economics was a central theme in Home Demonstration work. Although lessons on canning food were later outnumbered by lessons on freezing foods, the value of food preservation as a whole continued to be stressed into the 1960s. Many of the lessons focused on learning how to cook different types of foods or on better methods for cooking. Lessons such as “Time-Saving Meals,” “One-Dish Meals,” and “Meals from the Emergency Shelf” reflected the common themes of conservation, efficiency, and economy. These lessons on producing at home rather than buying at the store increased in number during hard economic times. Agents showed the difference in the costs involved in baking bread versus buying bread and in using milk rather than powdered milk.²³

By 1955, consumerism had become more integral to Home Demonstration lessons. Forty percent of the Extension nutritionist’s time was devoted to providing marketing information for consumers. In her reports from 1958 through 1962, State Extension nutritionist Mary E. Loughead emphasized the importance of disseminating food-buying information to rural women. According to Loughead, “declining home food production by rural and village families brings the rural-urban patterns of spending the food dollar closer together.” The Extension Service offered lessons on “Buying Canned Foods” and “Food Facts and Fallacies,” which focused on understanding nutritional content on labels and how to spot misleading or false statements in food advertisements.²⁴

Lessons focusing on nutrition and providing well-balanced meals for the family's health were more and more common by the late 1950s and early 1960s. On the Fort Peck Reservation, the agent was particularly concerned with the uses of government commodities. Demonstrations were given on the uses of dry milk, cheese, rice, and cornmeal. She also encouraged members to establish gardens and to can what they grew. She reported that two club leaders "voluntarily worked . . . overtime so as to assure their neighbors of a supply of preserved food. One leader, Mrs. Walking Eagle, made a number of home visits to interest women in canning and personally furnished a good supply of her garden products for use by other community residents."²⁵

By the early 1960s, lessons on consumerism were ever more common throughout the Home Demonstration program. Extension family economist Alberta B. Johnston reported in her 1961 and 1962 annual reports of the growing need to educate rural women on consumer choices and marketing. Johnston began both reports by stating:

Many of the goods and services once produced in the home are now being purchased. Families today are confronted with many choices as they purchase

the necessities and the luxuries for home and family living. New developments over the past years have created a bewildering variety of durable goods, processed goods, and services which compete for a share of the family income and linked with this multiplicity of goods and services is the highly pressurized advertising that encourages them to buy. Consumers need basic information about commodities that are for sale, and an understanding of how to judge quality and performance features of the articles they purchase, and in addition they need information about marketing cost, credit cost, and pricing policies so families can determine which will yield the family the greatest value for money spent.²⁶

Handicrafts were especially popular with club members, who often requested craft lessons, though crafts were not a focus of the educational program. Home Demonstration agents in postwar Montana supported craft lessons as long as they did not overshadow the overall goal of the Extension program, which was to provide scientific and modern information on home economics. Richland County Home Demonstration agent Eleanor Farstveet echoed this sentiment in her 1952 annual report: "[B]ecause the

Roosevelt County Extension Service, "Annual Report of Cooperative Extension Work, 1949," 22



By the late 1950s and early 1960s, Home Demonstration lessons became more focused on nutrition and providing well-balanced meals. On the Fort Peck Reservation, demonstrations were given on the uses of the dry milk, cheese, rice, and cornmeal supplied as government commodities. Here, members of the Fort Peck Friendly Homemakers Club prepare to serve food at a fund-raiser for a children's Christmas party.

interest is keen for crafts, a crafts day is highly recommended in order to encourage hobbies, but yet we do not want to give the feeling that crafts is a regular part of club work.” By the mid-1950s, an acknowledgment of the social and economic value of hobbies for women engendered more support from the agents for the incorporation of crafts into Extension programs. Women were taught how to take common items from the home and transform them into something useful and interesting—useful especially in the sense that they were a way to save money by giving the items as gifts or by selling them.²⁷

Sara Thomsen, a member of the Merry Homemakers club of Roosevelt County, was especially appreciative of the crafts taught at club meetings. “One [lesson] I remember, I don’t know why, we did etching on glasses. That was interesting. I still have that glass cup.” Many of these lessons took place at “interest meetings” and were not part of the regular Extension program. Some clubs held a second meeting each month to focus on crafts. Alene Stoner commented that, since her club was “a crafty group,”

they would meet two weeks after the business meeting and “dream up some crafty thing” to do as a group. Custer County clubwomen’s interest in crafts led to the organization of a Craftateria Day in 1965, where they not only displayed their handicrafts but also held demonstrations on how to make several of the items. Over four hundred people from eastern Montana attended this Craftateria; the Home Demonstration agent reported that it was “standing room only for each demonstration.”²⁸

Clubwomen had several opportunities throughout the year to display what they had made and learned. Achievement Day activities, window displays during Home Demonstration Week, fall and spring State Council meetings, and county fair booths allowed women homemakers to “advertise” their achievements not only to one another but also to the local community.²⁹

A family life specialist, Amy Wold, was hired by the Montana Extension Service in 1949 to oversee program lessons on raising children, getting along within the family, cultivating family fun, solv-



Richland County Extension Service, "Annual Report," 1948, 48

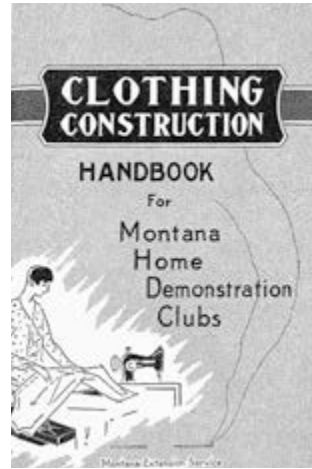
Home Demonstration agents in postwar Montana supported the inclusion of craft lessons as long as they did not overshadow the overall goal of the Extension program, which aimed to provide scientific and modern information on home economics. Club women from Richland County displayed their craft items at the county fair in 1948 (above).

ing problems of juvenile delinquency, reading in the family, and explaining the “facts of life” to children. Helping parents discuss puberty and sex was a common feature of the Family Life program. Clubs in Richland County joined with county health nurse Mary Rehbein, local high schools, youth church groups, and parent-teacher organizations to show the film *Worth Waiting For* to local teenage girls. It proved to be a “timely and worthwhile” program, as judged by the discussion it sparked, and generated a lesson on sex education for children the following year.³⁰

Family health was also a popular topic, and by the early 1960s more programs were focused on women’s health and sexuality. Lessons on nutrition for expectant mothers had begun in the early 1950s as Home Demonstration agents worked with county health nurses. The focus of these programs was the importance of diet and nutrition for pregnant women and their unborn children. In Custer County, Dr. William Hoskinson, a gynecologist, presented a leader-training lesson on women’s diseases. Roosevelt County clubs stressed the importance of gynecological exams. The goal was for each club to have 100 percent of its members have a Pap test and to encourage women outside the club to do the same. One woman’s club in the county also presented a program on the necessity of gynecological exams in the detection of cancer. In 1965, Richland County offered a lesson on birth control. The lesson was presented by a Sidney physician, who spoke of “methods, safety, cost, and some of the controversial issues” surrounding birth control. In her annual report that year, Home Demonstration agent Sharon Fiegle noted the goal of making sure “the women know about the problems and understand the usage of birth control methods.”³¹

High prices and difficulty finding ready-made clothing led many women to seek help from Home Demonstration agents. The Roosevelt County agent reported in 1945 that “[d]ue to the poor construction and high prices of commercially-made garments, help [should] be given in clothing construction problems, clothing budgets, and the selection of clothing and textiles.” As a result, lessons focused on the selection and maintenance of a wardrobe and how to care for new fabrics such as rayon.³²

In her annual report in 1947, Custer County cloth-



The Extension Service first released the *Clothing Construction Handbook* in 1940 and *Pattern Alteration* in 1950 for use by Home Demonstration clubs and workshops. The Extension Service often revised and re-released publications in later years.

ing specialist Lora V. Hilyard commented: “With the cost of living as high as it is, I think we . . . must learn to make some of our own clothing.” Hilyard organized a meeting with ten local merchants to discuss problems with materials. “Some of the results of the meeting included an attempt to clear up the poor thread situation, improvement of the merchant-consumer relationship, especially with regard to returning unsatisfactory goods, and the decision of at least one merchant to stock woolen materials.” Richland County Home Demonstration clubs had a lesson on “Consumer Buying and Clothing” as part of their 1962 and 1963 programs. Merchants from clothing shops in Sidney presented information on “the buying methods of their store and the consumer’s place in the buying picture.” Custer County club members met with local merchants in 1964 to discuss their shopping “gripes,” including the poor quality of ready-made clothing, the lack of variety in clothing choices, and the lack of patterns in larger sizes.³³

Throughout the same postwar years, Home Demonstration agents offered lessons and workshops on the construction of clothing. Lessons on different types of material, on maintaining sewing machines, and on mending and storing clothes were common. Lessons also focused on fitting problems and pattern alteration. A Roosevelt County woman who had difficulty finding patterns for dresses that would fit her because she was almost six feet tall learned how to alter patterns. Not everyone thought the lessons were

Throughout the postwar years, Home Demonstration agents offered lessons and workshops on the construction of clothing, different types of fabric, maintaining sewing machines, mending, and storing clothes. Right, Froid Homemakers learn to clean and adjust sewing machines at a 1949 workshop.



Roosevelt County Extension Service, "Annual Report, 1949," 56

helpful, however. One woman complained that the Extension agent who taught sewing never did understand her problem:

[S]he fixed the pattern so it fit your body, and she said my shoulder was lower than the other one, and to me, you would correct with your clothes what was wrong with your body. Somehow I never liked that dress and I never wore it. It's in these quilts, pieces of it. [laughing] I never wore it and so [the material] was real good yet. I thought that was kind of a strange thing, you know, because ordinarily your clothes are supposed to cover up whatever your defects are.³⁴

Agents also saw the importance of teaching homemakers how to make their homes attractive without spending too much money. Lessons in interior design, in the uses of color in the home, and in the arrangement of furniture became common. Immediately following World War II, many rural communities had difficulty obtaining furniture for the home, and not every family had the financial resources to purchase the limited and expensive items that were available. As a result, lessons on reupholstering and refinishing furniture became popular. The Roosevelt County agent noted that "besides a great saving of money there is personal satisfaction in this type of work," which helps explain why workshops in furniture reupholstering and refinishing remained popular into the 1960s, alongside lessons on how to buy furniture.

For instance, in 1961, Richland County clubs held a leader-training meeting on buying furniture wisely. The meeting consisted of a panel of representatives from each local furniture store. The merchants discussed trends in upholstered furniture coverings, furniture construction, and carpet fabrics.³⁵

Many rural women were especially interested in home management, and Home Demonstration agents focused on efficiency in the home. Time and motion studies stressing how to streamline housework were presented during the entire twenty-year period following World War II. The logic behind the lessons did, however, shift slightly over time. Initially after the war, the main concern was how to lessen a woman's workload in order to decrease the drudgery, allow more time to help with other chores, or else enjoy some recreation. Women were encouraged to break down their tasks to see where they could eliminate steps or how they could combine tasks. A home management specialist reported the story of Grace Moore, a time-management leader:

Mrs. Moore has an invalid husband, does all the farm work herself and has done so for years. She wished very much she had had this help years ago but put her time management information to immediate use and by studying her outside and inside work with the idea of simplification, saved two hours a day and accomplished her work more easily. Neighbors say Mrs. Moore looks better than she has for years, she has control of her schedule

which was a back breaker and now allows her time to rest.³⁶

From the mid-1950s on, the discussion of efficiency was placed in the context of women's work outside the home. As more women began driving and running errands for the farm, they wanted more knowledge about cars. One Home Demonstration member explained that her club "took a class at the Buick garage to better understand the mechanics of the car. We were taught the general mechanics of how to change tires, check the gas, oil, and to do minor jobs as to see if there was a bit of trouble with the car."³⁷

Even though Montana had a largely rural population, the percentage of women in the labor force in the state roughly followed the same pattern as that across the United States—that is, there was a steady increase in the number of women employed outside the home in the postwar years. Whereas in 1940 women represented 20 percent of Montanans, aged fourteen and older, in the total labor force, by 1960 women composed one-third of the labor force. In part, this stemmed from the fact that as family farms

were becoming less self-sufficient, rural families were more dependent on cash. For Home Demonstration club members, employment outside the home was now "the accepted rather than the unusual."³⁸ Home Management specialist Alberta Johnston speculated that this increase in outside employment was due to "[a]utomation in the household and the many goods and services available on the market," although the reality for many women was simply that financial difficulties made their employment necessary to keep the farm or ranch going.³⁹

Women recognized the value of their labor for the family. Alene Stoner's job at the local bank enabled the family to buy a house: "I worked for the bank, oh, off and on for about five years. I kept having children in between. I'd quit and then I'd go back and they even finally [allowed me to take] my typewriter and work into the house, and I worked for them at home while I was caring for my children." Some rural women, like many urban and suburban women, enjoyed working because of the personal fulfillment it provided. Synove Lalonde of Sidney became interested in nursing because she "wanted to

Both photos: Roosevelt County Extension Service, "Annual Report, 1948," 39



In addition to the basics of home economics, agents also saw the importance of teaching homemakers how to make their homes attractive without spending too much money. Lessons in interior design, the uses of color, furniture arrangement, and reupholstering and refinishing furniture became common. The Roosevelt County agent noted that "besides a great saving of money there is personal satisfaction in this type of work," which helps explain why workshops on these subjects remained popular into the 1960s. Here, Mrs. Arthur Mohrs shows her chair before and after reupholstering it in 1948.



Montana representatives to the State Homemakers Council are pictured above in June 1962. In 1950, there were 566 clubs across the state, and by 1960 that number had increased to 622. In addition to learning skills to create modern homes, raise healthy children, and contribute to their families' economic well-being, club members also appreciated opportunities to build a sense of community and a sense of self-identity.

have something I could call my own.” Doris Goebel of Sidney worked at the county fair office and “really liked it. But it wasn’t anything I ever intended to do. I guess I got it first out of necessity and then after I [didn’t have to work], then I liked it so well I didn’t really want to give it up.”⁴⁰

Home management lessons were adjusted to meet the new reality. A series of lessons on “The Homemaker as a Business Partner,” or “Business Facts,” which had begun in 1947, five years later included “Business at Home,” “Business at the Bank and Business at the Post Office,” “Credit, Insurance and Social Security,” and “Estate Settlement.” The home management specialist noted that some of the women found these lessons the most helpful they had received in Home Demonstration work. For a woman in Custer County, the lessons helped her feel like her “home [was] run on as business-like a basis as my husband’s farm.”⁴¹

In the 1950s and 1960s, rural women were in a transitional period. They wanted to maintain their productive traditions and learn about new technologies; they wanted to retain their rural communities and values yet modernize their homes and work; and they wanted to learn about business practices as they

entered the workforce and took on new responsibilities as partners in the family enterprise. In their steadfast focus on ways for rural women to improve their quality of life, create modern homes, and raise healthy children, Home Demonstration clubs fostered these women’s domestic and productive labor within the family economy and placed value on their work. They helped women become active and educated consumers and to adapt new technologies to meet the demands of rural domesticity. Moreover, the clubs built a sense of community and a sense of self-identity. Betty Norby of Richland County spoke for many women across Montana when she said of her Girard Homemakers Club meetings, “It was just a special time.”⁴²

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Notes

1. Girard Homemakers Club, "Secretary's Book: Minutes of Meetings," 1945-1965, in possession of Girard Homemakers Club, Sidney, Montana.

2. Bessie E. McClelland and Martha Dunlap, "Annual Report of State Home Demonstration Leaders," 13, file 16, box 95, acc. 00021, Montana Extension Service Records, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University, Bozeman (hereafter Mont. Ext. Service Records). For more works on Home Demonstration clubs, see, for example, Joan M. Jensen "Canning Comes to New Mexico: Women and the Agricultural Extension Service, 1914-1919," *New Mexico Historical Review*, 57 (Oct. 1982), 361-86; Joan M. Jensen, "Crossing Ethnic Barriers in the Southwest: Women's Agricultural Extension Education, 1914-1940," *Agricultural History*, 60 (Spring 1986), 169-81; Merrill G. Burlingame and Edward J. Bell Jr., *The Montana Cooperative Extension Service: A History, 1893-1974* (Bozeman, Mont., 1984); Kathleen R. Babbitt, "The Productive Farm Woman and the Extension Home Economist in New York State, 1920-1940," *Agricultural History*, 67 (Spring, 1993), 83, 88-89.

3. For more information on the Extension Service in Montana, see Heidi A. Broadbent, "Montana Women and the Defense Decade: Women, the Home, and the Struggle against Communism" (master's thesis, Montana State University, 2003); and Kathleen Elizabeth Werner, "Mobilizing the Rural Home Front: The Extension Service, Montana Women, and World War II" (master's thesis, Montana State University, 2003).

4. See Amy McKinney "How I Cook, Keep House, Help Farm, Too': Rural Women in Post-World War II Montana," (PhD diss., University of Calgary, 2011).

5. Smith-Lever Act of 1914, Public Law 95, 63rd Cong., 2nd sess. (May 8, 1914); "Memorandum of Understanding Relative to Smith-Hughes and Smith-Lever Relationships for Montana," 2, Extension Service, Montana State College, 1930, Montana Historical Society Research Center, Helena, Montana (hereafter MHS). The Smith-Lever Act provided ten thousand dollars annually per state to help fund programs and personnel. Additional monies could be obtained through matching funds from the state and county agencies.

6. "A Report of Roosevelt County on Activities and Accomplishments of the Roosevelt County Extension Service, 1960," 3, Roosevelt County Extension Service Office, Culbertson, Montana (hereafter Roosevelt Co. Ext. Serv. Office);

Burlingame and Bell, *The Montana Cooperative Extension Service*, 33.

7. Betty Norby, interview by author, Apr. 22, 2008, Sidney, Montana; Alene Stoner, interview by Laurie Mercier, July 23, 1987, Helena, Montana, OH 1010, MHS.

8. Laurie Mercier, "You Had to Make Every Minute Count: Women's Role in Montana Agriculture," *Montana The Magazine of Western History*, 38 (Autumn 1988), 53. Juliet Mitchell outlined the categories of production, reproduction, sexuality, and socialization in her work *Women's Estate* (New York, 1971). Reproduction, according to Mitchell, was the "female" compliment to male's productive role. In addition to having children and raising them, reproductive work is that which creates and maintains social relationships, such as sending Christmas cards or organizing community meetings.

9. "Annual Report of Cooperative Extension Work," Richland County, 1945-65, Richland County Extension Service Office, Sidney, Montana (hereafter Richland Co. Ext. Serv. Office); Ione Manning, "Home Demonstration Clubs," *Culbertson Diamond Jubilee, Seventy-five Years of Progress* (Culbertson, Mont., 1962); "A Report on Activities and Accomplishments, 1964," p. 23, Roosevelt Co. Ext. Serv. Office.

10. <http://fisher.lib.Virginia.edu/census>.

11. Stoner interview; Pearl Herndon, interview by Gayle Muggli, Mar. 19, 1982, Miles City, Montana, National Extension Homemakers Council Interviews, 1981-82, SC 1774, MHS (hereafter Homemakers Council Interviews).

12. Margaret Bradley and Pat Denowh, interview by author, Apr. 25, 2008, Sidney, Montana; "Annual Report of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, 1949," 18, Roosevelt Co. Ext. Serv. Office.

13. *Wolf Point (Mont.) Herald*, May 3, 1962, 8; Avis Zoanni, interview by author, Apr. 25, 2008, Fairview, Montana.

14. Marie Carlile, interview by Alene Stoner, May 11, 1982, Smith River, Homemakers Council Interviews, Montana, MHS; Phyllis Picard, interview by author, April 21, 2008, Bainville, Montana.

15. "Annual Report of Cooperative Extension Work, 1950," 19, Richland Co. Ext. Serv. Office; Custer and Powder River County Extension Service, "Annual Report, 1957," 59, file 1, box 15, acc. 00021, Mont. Ext. Serv. Records.

16. "Annual Report of Cooperative Extension Work, 1954," 40, Richland Co. Ext. Serv. Office; Doris Goebel, interview by author, Apr. 14, 2008, Sidney, Montana; *Wolf Point (Mont.) Herald*, Mar. 24, 1960, 6; *ibid.*, Apr. 19, 1962, 8; Locate-

Knowlton Homemakers Club, "Dear Em Letters," Apr. 1957, Miles City Public Library, Miles City, Montana.

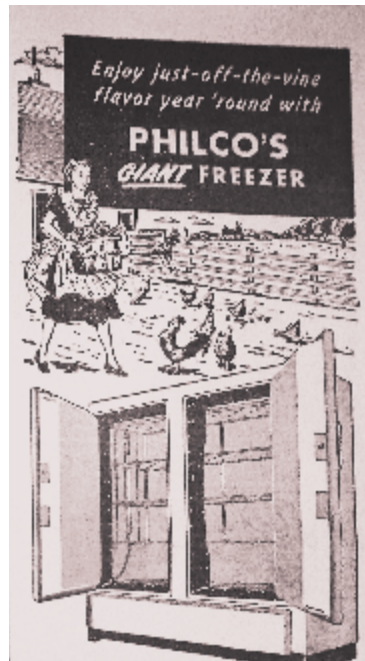
17. "Annual Report of Extension Work, 1946," 4, Richland Co. Ext. Serv. Office.

18. Goebel interview; Norby interview; Doris Rambur, interview by author, Apr. 23, 2008, Sidney, Montana.

19. "Annual Report of Cooperative Extension Work, 1949," 14, 15; "Annual Report: Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Fort Peck Agency, 1960," 1, file 11, box 71, Mont. Ext. Serv. Records.

20. Girard Homemakers Club, "Secretary's Book," 1945-65; Ridgellawn Club, "Secretary's Book: Minutes of Meetings," 1945-65, MonDak Heritage Center, Sidney, Montana; Happy Homemakers Club, "Secretary's Book: Minutes of Meetings," 1960-65, *ibid.*; Miles City Home Demonstration Club, "Secretary's Book: Minutes of Meetings," 1945-65, Miles City Preservation Office, Miles City, Montana.

21. "Annual Reports of Cooperative Extension Work," 1945-65, for Custer County, files 25-39, box 14, and files 1-9, box 15; for Richland County, files 29-34, box 48, and files 1-20, box 49; and for Roosevelt County, files 32-35, box 50, and



Montana Farmer-Stockman, May 15, 1949, p. 41

When electricity came to rural farms and towns, appliances like home freezers made preserving produce and other farm products much more convenient. Among its many publications, the Cooperative Extension Service published booklets with instructions on how to freeze food.

files 1–21, box 51, all in Mont. Ext. Serv. Records.

22. Zoanni interview; Pauline Deem, interview by Jackie Day, May 13, 1985, Plentywood, Montana, Small Town Montana Oral History Project, OH 868, MHS.

23. “Annual Report of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics,” Fort Peck Agency, 1961, 9, file 13, box 71, Mont. Ext. Serv. Records.

24. Mary E. Loughead, “Marketing Information for Consumers,” 1955–61, files 25, 29, 31, 33, 35, box 80, *ibid.*

25. “Annual Report of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, 1958,” 40, Roosevelt Co. Ext. Serv. Office; “Annual Report of Extension Work: Report of Fort Peck Agency, 1952,” 42, file 9, box 51, Mont. Ext. Serv. Records.

26. Alberta B. Johnston, “Annual Report, Home Management Project,” 1960 and 1961, 1, files 25, 26, box 83, Mont. Ext. Serv. Records.

27. “Annual Report of Cooperative Extension Work, 1948,” 68, Roosevelt Co. Ext. Serv. Office; “Annual Report of Cooperative Extension Work, 1952,” 31, Richland Co. Ext. Office.

28. Sara Thomsen, interview by author, Apr. 14, 2008, Culbertson, Montana; Stoner interview; “Annual Report of Cooperative Extension Work, 1965,” 31, file 9, box 15, Mont. Ext. Serv. Records.

29. Girard Homemakers Club, “Secretary’s Book,” 1945–65; Ridgelawn Club, “Secretary’s Book,” 1945–65; Happy Homemakers Club, “Secretary’s Book,” 1960–65; Miles City Home Demonstration Club, “Secretary’s Book,” 1945–65; and Locate-Knowlton Home Demonstration scrapbook and Miles City Home Demonstration Scrapbook, both in Miles City Public Library, Miles City, Montana.

30. Burlingame and Bell, *Montana Cooperative Extension Service*, 129; “Annual Report of Cooperative Extension Work, 1964,” 47, Richland Co. Ext. Serv. Office.

31. Custer County Extension Service, “Annual Report, 1964,” 26, file 8, box 15, Mont. Ext. Serv. Records, MSU; “Annual Report of Cooperative Extension Work, 1965,” 18, Roosevelt Co. Ext. Serv. Office; “Annual Report of Cooperative Extension Work, 1965,” 30, Richland Co. Ext. Serv. Office.

32. “Annual Report of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, 1945,” 42, 9, Roosevelt Co. Ext. Serv. Office.

33. Lori V. Hilyard, “Annual Report, State Clothing Program, 1947,” 5, file 2, box 75, Mont. Ext. Serv. Records; Custer and Powder River County Extension Service, “Annual Report, 1952,” 41, file

35, box 14, Mont. Ext. Serv. Records; “Annual Report, 1962,” 32, Richland Co. Ext. Serv.; “Businessmen Meet Their Public in Miles City,” *Montana Farmer-Stockman*, Oct. 15, 1964, 29.

34. Zoanni interview.

35. “Annual Report of Cooperative Extension Work, 1961,” 50, Richland Co. Ext. Serv. Office.

36. Mae Farris and Eleanor Wilson, “Annual Report of Home Management, 1954,” 14, file 17, box 83, Mont. Ext. Serv. Records.

37. Carlile interview.

38. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Census of Population, 1940, Vol. 1, Characteristics of the Population, Part 28, Montana*, <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/33973538v2p4ch5.pdf>; U.S. Department of Commerce, *Census of Population, 1960, Vol. 1, Characteristics of the Population, Part 28, Montana* (Washington, D.C., 1961); Alberta Johnston, “Annual Report, Home Management Project, 1961,” 1, file 26, box 83, Mont. Ext. Serv. Records.

39. Johnston, “Annual Report, 1961,” 6.

40. Stoner interview; Synove Bratberg Lalonde interview, OH 791, MHS; Goebel interview.

41. Mae Farris and Ermine Fisher, “Annual Report of Home Management Specialists, 1952,” 23, file 13, box 83, Mont. Ext. Serv. Records.

42. Norby interview.