

# FROM HOME ECONOMICS TO THE STUDY OF FAMILIES

**A**t the beginning of the 20th century women's separate "sphere," as the domesticated moral voice within the home and family, became the focus of a new discipline, home economics, created by Ellen Swallow Richards. She used principles from various disciplines to construct a scientific approach to women's traditional roles. In addition to becoming wives and mothers, college students prepared to be high school teachers, demonstration agents, cooperative extension agents and institutional administrators.

The origin of the Home Economics Program in 1913 rests with the daughter of Dean Charles Pettee, Sarah Pettee. She urged her father to establish a home economics program at the New Hampshire College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts.



Sarah Pettee, taught French, English and meteorology at New Hampshire College following her graduation in 1908. She advocated to her father, Dean Charles Pettee, to establish a program for women students.



Helen Bishop Thompson was appointed in 1913 as professor of home economics and the first dean of women. She earned master's degrees from Kansas State and from Columbia University. Previously she was professor at Rhode Island State College.



Ellen Swallow Richards, who was Lucy Swallow's aunt, was the national founder of the field of home economics and taught at NH College the summer of 1893. Richards applied the principles of chemistry, management, nutrition and economics to prepare women for enhancing the well-being of families. She is also credited with founding the fields of sanitation and nutrition and was the first to conceptualize the field of ecology.



This is the kitchen in the first home economics practice house, which was later known as Craft Cottage. All cooking was done on a wood stove. Students learned to apply the domestic arts through practicing home management techniques. By 1929, the house also contained the first nursery school on campus.

Irma Bowen began teaching clothing and textiles in 1920. By 1947 she had collected some 600 items of clothing from the 18th to the 20th centuries and is known by the Irma Bowen Textiles Collection.



The department gradually expanded and by 1920 two-thirds of the women students at New Hampshire College were enrolled in this program. Students took such courses as chemistry, physics, and bacteriology. Until 1983 students concentrated in one of the following areas: child development, clothing and textiles, food and nutrition, home management or institutional management and home economics education.



Here are students in the Home Economics Club in 1950. A popular club which began in the 1920s, it continues to exist today.



In 1926 Elizabeth Virgil was the first African American to graduate from this institution, majoring in home economics. Because she was unable to find employment in the north, she taught at a school in the south. Later she returned to live in Portsmouth, N.H.



Kristine Baber, appointed chair of the Family Studies Department in 1999, came to UNH in 1984 to teach courses on families. She created a course on Race, Class, Gender and Families, which reflects the diversity in American society today. She was a member of the President's Commission on the Status of Women from 1985-1987 and has been active in service to the surrounding community.

In 1983 the program's focus began to change. The proliferation of information about child development and family relations, changes in the available resources at UNH, and women's evolving perceptions of who they are and what they want to be, all contributed to the transformation of Home Economics into Family and Consumer Studies with a focus since 1988 on the study of families.

The mission of the Family Studies Department supports the well-being of individuals and families through teaching, research and service. Students now concentrate on child studies, teacher certification, family relations and general studies. A new graduate program in the renovated practice house, Craft Cottage, trains students as marriage and family therapists.



This student is working with a child at the new Child Study and Development Center, which opened in 1988 at the O'Kane farm on the edge of campus. As well as providing child care for about 135 families in the region, this laboratory trains students to be teachers through studying and working with young children. It is the largest child development laboratory in New England.