## Six Saucepans to One: Domestic Science vs. the Home in British Columbia 1900-1930

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"...very many young women of the present day fail to recognize homemaking as an art, and...regard it only in the light of drudgery of housework. This we believe to be largely the result of a lack of scientific knowledge on the subject, and for the remedy of which we look largely to the study of the subject in a scientific manner by our girls in the public schools."

o wrote the Corresponding Secretary of the Local Council of Women to the editor of the Victoria Daily Colonist in March 1903. That same year the Victoria School Board accepted the Council's offer to equip a kitchen in Central School for the teaching of domestic science. The board fulfilled its side of the bargain by hiring a teacher, Winnifred McKeand. In September, the Daily Colonist interviewed McKeand who explained that her course would teach the theory and practice of household management along scientific lines. Educational theory stressed the development of the whole child by training the mind, eye, and hand; this theory, applied to household management, taught the "household arts" through a combination of scientific explanation and practical work.<sup>2</sup> In February, after the Daily Colonist visited McKeand's classroom it noted the emphasis placed on cleanliness, exactness, and order as the students learned about the chemical properties of wheat and made muffins.3 Later in the school year, McKeand lectured on domestic science to the Local Council of Women, explaining that as there was not enough time in the home for teaching, the school had to train young girls in woman's "noblest" occupation, that of homemaker.4

Winnifred McKeand, graduate of the Boston School of Cookery and the Montreal School of Cookery, had taught domestic science classes at two

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schools in Nova Scotia. Her approach to the teaching of domestic science incorporated the most up-to-date social and educational theories supporting its inclusion in the school curriculum:

- a) the school had a duty to develop the child's habits and character so as to produce a responsible and useful
- b) girls needed formal training, which the home was not able to provide, to prepare them for their future careers as homemakers, or, in some cases, servants; c) education in the household arts would teach girls to apply scientific principles to the management of the home;
- d) domestic science classes would provide a practical education to train the hand and the heart as well as the head

These ideas fuelled the struggle to establish domestic science as an accredited subject in the public school system of British Columbia, as in the rest of English Canada. Behind the ideas lay strong convictions about the role of young girls and women in the home, the role of the home in society, and the role of the educational system in strengthening both.

The period 1900-1930 encompasses two key points in the development of domestic science in British Columbia. Although needlework had been introduced as an optional subject for girls in Victoria schools in 1895, the first formal classes in domestic science in British Columbia began with the hiring of Winnifred McKeand in 1903. This was made possible through the initiative of local women in persuading their school board to establish the subject. Local initiative remained the essential factor in the spread of domestic science classes over the next decades.<sup>5</sup> In 1926, the province appointed its first Director of Home Economics. In this year, British Columbia had fifty-five home economics teachers supervising 11,455 girls, or twenty-three percent of all girls enrolled in primary and secondary schools across the province. The appointment of a full-time, professionally trained home economist as director served notice that the province, or at least the department, recognized the need to provide a standardized approach to domestic science in teacher training, in classroom theory and practice, and in the relationship of domestic science to the school curriculum and to the provincial educational system.

While the struggle to prepare British Columbia's girls to take their places as homemakers was underway in classrooms across the province, these same girls continued to be trained as girls had always been - at home, by their mothers. This was confirmed through interviews with thirty-six women who had spent most of their childhood in British Columbia and who had taken domestic science in the province's elementary schools between 1910 and 1930. The majority had been raised and had attended school in an urban locale, usually Victoria or Vancouver; their backgrounds were Anglo-Saxon and mostly middle-class.7 The interviews shed light on established household practice and the real conditions of domestic labour in British Columbia homes during the first decades of the twentieth century.

Frances' family came to Victoria from Ireland in 1911 when she was nine years old. She could not remember a time when she was not helping her mother with the housework required to keep a family with nine children. She and her sisters washed the dishes, made the beds, scrubbed the linoleum floors on their hands and knees, and peeled vegetables. When Frances was high school age, she quit school to stay home. She became the full-time family cook so that her mother could do the laundry, ironing, and cleaning. The family could not afford to hire help. Kathleen was born in 1909. By the time she was six years old she was washing dishes and setting the table; when she was older she vacuumed, made beds, and cleaned windows. Hired help assisted with cleaning, kitchen work, and other household chores. Her mother preserved "quarts and quarts" of fruit and vegetables from the garden, salted green beans, and canned salmon and other fish. Lauretta, born in 1916, was busy in the kitchen when she was six years old. As her mother was often ill, she made most of the family's meals. Every Saturday she made five pies for the week; every Monday morning she phoned in the grocery order for delivery. She spent the summer putting up preserves. The laundry was done commercially as the family had no hired help.8

At home, as in the school system, although there was individual variation from one household to the next, patterns are discernable. These patterns reveal that the girls who grew up and learned how to keep house in British Columbia during the nineteen-teens and 1920s were the generation of change. They bridged the transition from older, traditional forms of learning watching and imitating their mothers - to the new, state-imposed structure of the classroom. The content of learning was also different. In place of family customs in diet, menus, and methods, the girls were introduced to new foods and recipes whose selection was justified on scientific grounds and whose preparation was taught according to standardized procedures. Finally, many girls may have first been introduced to new consumer goods - the carriers of new technologies - and new patterns of consumption through domestic science classes. This transition in domestic work in British Columbia will be considered by using the teaching of domestic science in primary schools as a counterpoint to the work of women in the home during the period of 1900-1930. The study will focus primarily upon food preparation in examining the tension between school and home with respect to theory, practice, and material conditions.

The impetus for teaching domestic science to British Columbia's girls had its beginnings in ideas about Canadian society and education which were gaining acceptance and influential adherents in the first decades of the twentieth century. One of these was the concept of the school as an agent for forming children to be mature and productive adults, and thereby improving Canadian society. The school had not only a role to play in shaping the young, but also a responsibility to produce "practical men and women, who would make themselves useful to society and their country." What came to be called "technical education" in British Columbia developed in response to this obligation. The Department of Education's Annual Report of 1919-1920 cited the recommendation of an earlier study that "the experiences of the school should tend more directly towards the inculcation and conservation of

a love of productive, constructive, and conserving labour". 11 In this respect, for example, another Annual Report described Vancouver's high school technical course, established during 1916-1917, as one which from either an academic or vocational point of view prepared a boy or girl for life as a citizen and a worker.12

Contemporary beliefs held that industrialization had seriously dislocated Canadian society and that with the disintegration of traditional institutions, such as the home, the school had to take an active role in shaping those who would shape the social order. 13 An essential part of the moulding of future citizens was to train them for their work which necessitated a broad range of vocational courses. In its 1918-1919 Annual Report, the Department of Education recognized that "a Dominion-wide system of industrial training is necessary to the economic prosperity and supremacy of Canada".14

Far from being excluded from these educational reforms, girls played a central role in the new order - the most crucial one, according to the rhetoric of the day - because of their unique responsibility for the home: "our first and greatest social institution". 15 An impassioned article in the Vancouver Daily Province argued for the teaching of domestic science because "the home instinct which is endangered must be nurtured, the love for home must be cultivated."16 Supporters of domestic science declared that by helping to restore the home to its proper place of dignity and importance, domestic science would not only make family life happier, but would also produce greater cohesion and harmony in the Empire.<sup>17</sup>

The Department of Education's Annual Reports included regular pleas by the Organizer of Technical Education for the expansion of domestic science classes in the province. A particularly eloquent appeal appeared in the memorandum which the Educational Committee of the Local Council of Women in Victoria presented to the Putnam-Weir survey of British Columbia's schools:

> We believe that the home is the natural and rightful domain of women, and therefore that home economics, the science of the home, is pre-eminently the proper and logical study for womankind; we believe that as women are largely the spenders of money, national thrift would dictate that they be taught to spend wisely; that as the keepers of the health of the nation we believe they should be taught the principles of hygiene and dietetics; we believe that in the different branches of this subject there is ample scope for the varying abilities of the most brilliant minds of the sex; we believe that much undesirable and unnecessary competition between the sexes will be avoided, and many other social problems solved when the dignity of homemaking is adequately recognized and home economics given its rightful place in a national and international scheme of education. Finally, let us never forget that upon the physical stamina, the mental and moral fibre of the mother-tobe, depends the character of the life, yea, the very life of tomorrow.18

The training of future servants had been part of the initial impetus to establish home economics on the part of the National Council of Women and was one of the anticipated results from domestic science classes:

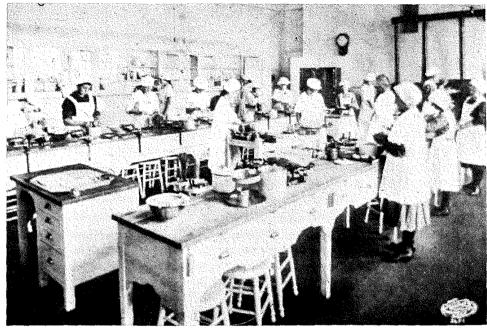
The recognition of the scientific importance of this subject will do much to raise the status of the hitherto "looked down upon" domestic help and make it worthwhile for our efficient and educated girls to take up housework as a sphere of employment that does not carry with it the stigma of degradation. In thus raising domestic work to the dignity of a scientific study we not only educate the housekeepers and homemakers of the future, but provide a stimulus to the production of a class of helpers sadly needed in British Columbia.<sup>19</sup>

This objective was acknowledged in Putnam and Weir's report in 1925:

Home economics for girls is not on the school programme merely or mainly to train them to be housemaids or cooks or seamstresses or laundresses, but because while doing these things, in some degree, it also gives the girl a sane attitude toward life by requiring her to solve life problems and deal with real projects.<sup>20</sup>

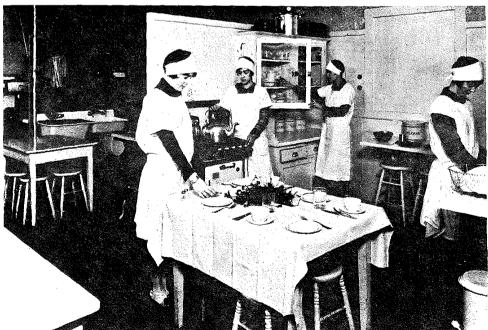
Occasional references to the existence of servants appeared in the department's approved programs of studies under such sub-sections as "Paid help in the home", "When no servant [is] possible", "Dinner served without a maid, dinner with a maid." Over time, concern for occupational training through domestic science courses focused on work opportunities outside the home. In its recommendations on home economics to Putnam and Weir, the Provincial Parent-Teacher Association requested the establishment of technical and vocational schools for girls throughout the province since many girls who did not attend high school had "abilities along purely vocational lines, such as cookery, home decoration, commercial art, dressmaking, etc., for which there is at present little or no training". Employment based on domestic science training also opened up "many interesting and lucrative careers" for women as dietitians in hospitals and sanitariums, as managers of cafeterias, tea rooms, hotel dining rooms, and university halls, in nutrition clinics, laboratories and factories, and as financial counsellors in banks. 23

The major thrust of the argument for domestic science, however, focused on the future role of girls as homemakers. In order to undertake the weighty duties of homemakers to their families and to the nation, it was essential that girls were properly trained in all aspects of domestic responsibility. Such training had traditionally been given in the home, but now the home was no longer capable of fulfilling this obligation and so society, in the form of the school, had to come to the support of the home. Of all the arguments for and against the establishment of domestic science in British Columbia schools, the issue of home training probably provoked the most heat. Opponents of domestic science charged that the school denigrated the mother's role in educating the daughter and undermined her authority at home. The corollary of this was that domestic science classes were an unnecessary expense. Supporters of domestic science responded that mothers had no time to teach



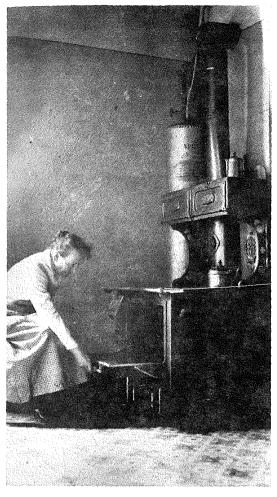
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Girls of the home economics course, King Edward High School, Vancouver, c.1918. The environment of the laboratory is evident in the arrangement of work tables in a rectangular pattern, the organization of individual work stations (each with its own utensils and cooking apparatus), and white uniforms and caps worn by the students.



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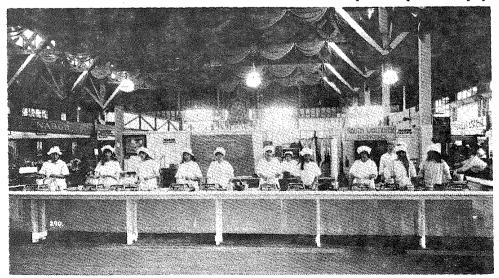
Foods laboratory, Templeton Junior High School, Vancouver, c.1927. A comparison of this photo with the above, taken nine years earlier, illustrates how ideas about the need for "home practice" affected the classroom. These students work in a space organized to resemble a home kitchen and furnished with a cupboard, stove, table, sink, utensils, and dishes necessary to prepare food for a family.



Vancouver Public Library #12972

Margaret Clements in her kitchen, Kamloops, c.1919. The interviews conducted for this project indicate that a wood and coal stove was the standard cooking appliance in middle-class, urban kitchens in British Columbia throughout the period under study.

South Vancouver schoolgirls cooking display, probably prior to 1920. The advertisements for Nabob tea & coffee which appear in the background suggest commercial sponsorship of the display.



Vancouver Public Library, Dominion Photo Collection #20050

at home, that because of school girls had no time to be taught at home, that girls entered marriage from working careers rather than from their mothers' homes and hence had no preparation beyond what the school could provide, and that trained teachers could explain the theory of domestic science as well as demonstrate the practice; further, some mothers did not have good home practice, were impatient, and did not know how to teach.<sup>25</sup> A darker side of the need for domestic science is revealed in references to the "inexcusable ignorance of housewives", "untrained and unorganized women", and the "thriftlessness of the poor".<sup>26</sup> The needs were clear. Whatever her home environment, the British Columbia girl should have

systematic and well-directed instruction and practice in those activities - cooking, sewing, washing clothes, ironing, mending, darning, sweeping, making beds, scrubbing, simple nursing, judging and testing textiles, marketing, budgeting - which are fundamental to home-making and therefore fundamental in building up and preserving a healthy nation.<sup>27</sup>

The educational method whereby these goals would be achieved was based on the application of scientific principles to the management of the home. Scientific management gained prominence in North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and from its initial application to industry and corporations it soon spread to social institutions such as the school and the home. The scientific approach predicated that all processes could be broken down to their component parts and measured as to efficiency, and that the knowledge gained could be used to promote more efficient productivity. In a 1916 address, educator Alice Ravenhill defined efficiency as the effort to accomplish certain definite ends without loss of substance or motion. She went on to demonstrate the principle with respect to the prolificness of unfit families and the limitation, slow growth and final elimination of alert, intellectual and generally valuable families. "In the discouragement of the one and the encouragement of the other she saw the best inductive conclusion of the logic of efficiency."28 This somewhat ruthless example was in keeping with the public policy of the day which sought to solve social problems through the reorganization of society along more efficient lines.<sup>29</sup> Ravenhill later identified the sciences which had a bearing on the daily routine of home life as biology (diet and cooking), chemistry (cleaning products and processes), physics (light, heating, ventilation, fuel), bacteriology (preservation of food and resistance to germs), physiology (clothing, sleep, exercise), as well as psychology, child study, hygiene and sanitation, sociology, education, music and decorative art.30

"Scientific" and "efficient" were the watchwords in the domestic science classroom. The Department of Education reported in 1915-16 that while teachers used various methods to teach the subject, they all practised those which were "more or less scientific in character and discarded those of a purely empirical nature". Even with the later emphasis on practical methods, teachers still paid "due attention to the theoretical and scientific side of the subject."<sup>31</sup>

In 1913, the Department of Education issued its first domestic science

text, the Girls' Home Manual, as a three-year course outline in the subject. After acknowledging its debt to the recent scientific status of homemaking, the Manual stated its objective:

On investigation, it was found that only a small percentage of housekeepers possess any library bearing on their work with the exception of an occasional cook-book and manufacturers' sample cook-books.

This Manual was prepared in the hope that girls, not only at school, but in after life also, may find it helpful in making them more efficient in the noble art of "home-making".

The Manual advised that the kitchen should be the first room furnished "since the health of the inmates of a home depends upon the efficiency of the work done there", and emphasized the necessity of proper kitchen tools, the lack of which affected the housewife's strength and the efficiency of the work. In the thirty-four chapters devoted to "Cookery", the Manual discussed the source, composition, nutrient value, digestibility, preservation, storage, and cooking of foods, invalid cookery, how to set and clear a table and serve the meal, proper table etiquette (the knife should never be put into the mouth), how to wash up after the meal and dispose of garbage, a list of "first-class" kitchen equipment, house plans and furniture, and directions for making a cookery uniform. Throughout, the directions stress quality, simplicity, and convenience.<sup>32</sup>

What did the scientific approach mean in the classroom? Thirteen-yearold Olive Dean, a student at Sir Walter Moberly school in Vancouver, wrote down the aims of the household science course in her notebook for September 1922:

- 1. to make household management an interesting lifework
- 2. to make each day's duties an instructive lesson
- 3. to make of housekeeping a modern science
- 4. to develop business methods
- 5. to preserve health and prevent disease
- 6. to reach the highest development possible
- 7. to raise the ideal.

According to the notebook, Olive learned personal cleanliness in handling food, the importance of a clean, screened, and ventilated kitchen, the need to have pure water for drinking and soft water for laundering, how to wash dishes and saucepans and clean the woodwork, sink, and stove, the principles of combustion, foods and their digestion, how to keep milk and meat properly, how to sort and prepare the laundry, and how to boil, wash, starch, dry, dampen, iron, and fold clothes. The notebook had recipes for cocoa, oatmeal porridge, stewed beef, and suet dumplings. Directions for measuring ingredients reminded her to be accurate in order to ensure success. 33 At Vancouver's Lord Nelson School in 1917, Lois Kinley carried out experiments which demonstrated the properties of yeast and gluten and the effects of boiling, lukewarm, and cold water and of the combining of

different flours and grains. She drew a diagram of a cross-section of a grain of wheat and took down recipes for brown bread, gingerbread, plain cake, and baking powder biscuits. Each lesson on a particular food or process was followed by appropriate recipes. A lengthy section on preserving described both canning and drying methods and concluded with a canning chart for various fruits and vegetables.34

Reporters and other visitors to domestic science classrooms commented on the attention to order, cleanliness, and good equipment found there. One noted that the instructor gave her pupils

> a thorough training in systematic methods, the work of her classes being performed with almost military promptness and precision, each dish in each girl's cupboard being in its exact place, and even the knives, forks and spoons being ranged like a row of little soldiers.35

The Daily Colonist praised the emphasis on cleanliness (noting white pinafores and caps on the girls and white paint on shelves and cupboards) which guaranteed that "the virtues of fresh air, pure water and sunlight and the dangers of unswept floors and uncleaned sinks will be understood." The girls were taught to make exact calculations in measurements, to work quickly and deftly, and to recognize that "housekeeping is a business that requires not only skill and resourcefulness, but ability and knowledge". To this end they learned practical lessons in chemistry, biology, personal hygiene, geography, and market values. Their equipment was the best and thus a "lesson in true economy". 36 The domestic science classroom at Nelson was a model of up-to-date equipment with aluminum cooking utensils, stationary washtubs, drying rooms, electric irons, a large, built-in refrigerator, and twenty-four electrical discs on which all the individual cooking was done. Nelson was only "the third school on the continent of North America equipped with electrical utensils".37

Inherent in the scientific approach to domestic science was standardization. There was a correct way to dress oneself and wash one's hands to prepare food, can peaches, make apple sauce, roast a chicken, bake a cake, and select and purchase food for the family; there was proper equipment to use and a proper way of keeping it clean and in good working order; and there were proven methods for combatting the germs and diseases which lurked in improperly stored food and unsanitary, unplanned kitchens. Teachers were responsible for enforcing appropriate standards. According to the Organizer of Technical Education,

> care should...be taken to develop habits in domesticscience centres which are above reproach, and no girls should be found cooking without aprons and caps nor sewing without thimbles.<sup>38</sup>

Olive Dean's notes were accurate; domestic science did indeed aim to "raise the ideal" of housekeeping by making it a modern science based on business methods.

Whatever the appeal of the scientific approach for educators and social reformers, however, it did not immediately win the hearts and minds of British Columbia parents and taxpayers, at least not in its application to the teaching of domestic science in the public schools of the province. There was of course much public and private grumbling about the teaching of domestic science itself. Some of the arguments have been referred to above. Throughout the period under study, proponents waged a continuing public relations campaign on behalf of domestic science in order to maintain the classes established and to promote the spread of the new subject across the province.<sup>39</sup> This struggle is echoed in the Department of Education's Annual Reports where the customary optimism was tempered by the acknowledgement that public acceptance of the new subject was not wholehearted. Separating out criticism of the method (scientific) from criticism of the subject (domestic science) is difficult since the two were often not separate in the minds of opponents. Nevertheless, in the Department's response to public indifference or hostility to domestic science, one can read the problems created by what may have been a too narrow application of the scientific method and model of efficiency.

Teachers and school administrators employed various strategies in fighting for domestic science: improvement of educational methods, service to the community, and the demonstration that domestic science had practical value. The first strategy, improving the teaching of the subject, dealt with two different perspectives on the position of domestic science in the school curriculum: that of educational theory and that of provincial fact. A full discussion of the new educational theory behind the introduction of domestic science (and other related subjects such as manual training) is beyond the scope and purpose of this paper. In brief, the original intent was to use these subjects as a means of developing an integrated education which trained the child's hands, heart, and head. 40 This aim was never realized. The important point for the present discussion, however, is that school administrators believed that the solution to the better teaching and the greater public acceptance of domestic science lay in its closer ties to the traditional subjects on the curriculum. They were convinced of the need to train teachers who could "correlate the theoretical lessons of the class-room with those practical lessons given in the domestic-science centres," and that the best results were found with the "closest co-ordination between the hand-work [domestic science, manual training, etc.] and the class-room studies". 41 The Department stated that

> the complete success of the work depends in a great measure on the way the contents of these courses, which are inseparable from home-life, are linked up with kindred class-room studies.

> The educational authorities have always maintained that manual-training and domestic-science centres must be an integral part of the school system, and that the activities in the workshops and cookery centres must emphasize the book lessons of the class-rooms, making them more realistic and thus firmly fixing them in the minds of the pupils.<sup>42</sup>

The acceptance of the theory meant confronting the reality of domestic science's position in the province's school system. Teachers did not prepare

the three-year course outline necessary to ensure a "pedagogically sound" series of lessons; they did not check their students' notebooks; their courses of study were "frequently scrappy and poorly graded"; lack of recipe books meant class time taken in copying from the board; school principals did not ensure the correlation of domestic science and other subjects.<sup>43</sup> The most damning criticism is implicit in some of the recommendations by Putnam and Weir: that certain classes of municipalities be required to teach home economics, that regular reports on student progress be made to parents, that home economics be a high school entrance course equal with other subjects, and that the Normal School provide adequate training in home economics for student teachers.<sup>44</sup> Given the implied deficiencies, it is hardly surprising that many members of the public did not take the subject seriously.

The declared objective of domestic science was to enable girls to be competent and knowledgeable homemakers. It is ironic, then, that much of the criticism seemed to be directed against the subject precisely because it was not practical. As early as 1911-12, the school inspector for Vancouver reported that "a constant effort is being made to make the work in this department [home economics] as practical and intimately related to the home conditions as school equipment and teaching of large classes will permit." Later reports commented that there was still a tendency to teach too much theory during the first year. Administrators urged that "great care must be taken not to let the domestic science lessons evolve into talks. 'Learn by doing' should be the motto".45 One of the most effective responses to criticism evidently lay in "home practice", an approach which recognized the value of linking school lessons to the actual work of the home. This approach took a number of forms. Students learned to cook in family quantities rather than the individual quantities originally taught; change was gradual, however, because family quantities required new and larger equipment (with the concomitant need to increase costs) and a "market for the products" (presumably to offset charges of waste and extravagance). Students were also encouraged to practice at home what they had learned in class and in some cases were graded by their mothers. In 1927 the department published Recipes for Home Economics Classes to be sold to pupils for 25 cents. Recipes were adapted with an eye to economy and were reliable for use in feeding a family of six. Jessie McLenaghen, the first Director of Home Economics for British Columbia, hoped that

this book will not only save time in the class-room for more valuable work, but that it will also be a means of stimulating greater effort in home practise. By its very entrance into the home it should help to secure the interest and co-operation of the parents - something absolutely vital to the success of any home-economics programme.<sup>46</sup>

The foregoing has described the ideas which lay behind domestic science in the British Columbia school system and some of the practices which developed from the ideas, the problems which both ideas and practices encountered in achieving their objectives, and the ways in which the school system responded to these problems at the classroom level. The reactions,

sympathetic or otherwise, of various individuals and groups in the province have also been touched upon to suggest the impact which domestic science had at various points in British Columbia society. The picture is incomplete, however, without evidence of the impact which the teaching of domestic science had on its intended target: the girl in the classroom. Analyzing the effect of the classroom experience can indicate how domestic science measured up to its educational and social goals and the nature and extent of its influence on the new generation. More importantly for the purposes of this paper, domestic science can serve as a mechanism to help analyze change and continuity in women's work, as revealed by the students who, as the province's future homemakers, had been the subject of so much concern. The comparison between home routine and school instruction illustrates a period of transition in British Columbia kitchens, combining elements of continuity and change as mothers and daughters moved closer to the role of consumers.

Almost all the women interviewed learned to cook and to perform other housekeeping duties at home, usually beginning well before they were old enough to attend domestic science classes at school. In most cases this was a gradual and informal process. The child started by peeling vegetables, setting the table, and washing or drying dishes, then learned more complex skills so that by age twelve or thirteen some could prepare a complete dinner. The learning process combined observation and practice; the girl watched her mother, then tried the same tasks herself, often with her mother's active encouragement and direct instruction. Only in a very few families did the daughter not learn to cook at home. This was usually because the mother either disliked cooking herself or disliked teaching her children. In the majority of families not only was cooking directly encouraged but the child's participation in this and in other domestic chores was expected, tacitly or by direct order.<sup>47</sup> In certain cases, the daughter could have very heavy responsibilities in the home, especially when the mother was ill or when the family could not afford to hire help. There was little discussion between mother and daughter about any larger objectives for the household apprenticeship. Interviewees recalled that no direct connection was openly made between their childhood responsibilities and their future as wives and mothers; the connection and the future were simply assumed.

Interestingly, in almost one-third of the families, the mother did work in addition to her normal family responsibilities: ten took in boarders or relatives; four helped in their husbands' businesses; others sewed piece-work for a tailor, sold milk, eggs or bread, or worked as a salaried clerk or housekeeper; three eventually helped to raise grandchildren when their widowed or divorced daughters went out to work. A similar proportion of the daughters worked for pay full-time or part-time during their adult lives. Of these, two worked in their husbands' businesses; three were divorced and one widowed; one's husband was disabled; three never married; and four worked for other reasons. Some also took in relatives at various times. Domestic science courses offered no advice on how to deal with the circumstances of women who undertook additional responsibilities such as working for pay. For that matter, neither did the students' mothers. Neither school nor home consciously recognized the reality of the lives of many women during the

decades under study.

One of the main objectives of domestic science advocates was to raise the level of housekeeping practice in the province by training homemakers to be more knowledgeable and scientific. Nutrition was an important part of the curriculum; students were taught what foods were best and why, and how to prepare them and why. Were British Columbia households in desperate need of dietary guidance? Most interviewees characterized their mother's cooking as good, plain food, with more heavy dishes than contemporary Canadians are accustomed to and a greater monotony of diet. Breakfast was usually porridge, sometimes corn flakes, toast, milk, or tea, occasionally stewed fruit, seldom juice; eggs and bacon were more likely to be a Sunday treat. The noon meal, if lunch, was often eggs or soup and sandwiches; dinner (noon or night) usually meant meat, potatoes, vegetable, and desert - either pudding or pie. Many were able to describe the progression of the Sunday roast through various reincarnations right down to shepherd's pie on Thursday night, with the week finishing on macaroni and cheese. On the other hand, most families had a great variety of fruit and vegetables available, thanks to the climate. Of thirty-six families, twenty-seven had a vegetable garden and sixteen had fruit trees or fruit bushes. Virtually all put up preserves: bottled fruit, jams, jellies, relishes, pickles, salmon, salted fish and vegetables.<sup>48</sup> Salads which were infrequent items on the family menu disappeared completely in the winter.

Some mothers' nutritional concerns were unusual. One considered cucumbers and bananas indigestible; others maintained that eating crusts produced curly hair, carrots were good for the eyes and fish for the brain, and that the white lining of oranges brought on epilepsy. On the other hand, this folk wisdom was not out of step with prevailing medical opinion. After the father of one interviewee became sick in the great influenza epidemic of 1918, the attending doctor told his wife not to let the children eat bananas. Domestic science classes did increase some pupils' knowledge of nutrition: the value of vegetable water, food values, proteins, carbohydrates, and the best way to prepare foods. The classes also introduced students to new foods and new ways of preparing food. This was not always a positive experience. One interviewee remembered suffering indigestion from a Waldorf salad which never was made at home because the family could not afford to buy celery or nuts. Neither could she understand what all the white sauce was for. She has never used it before or since. One girl, though she had cooked at home, learned to cook in many different ways in class and another learned to cook well using the class recipes. One of the other students found her domestic science textbook so useful that she gave it to her daughter to use when the latter married.

However, it was method, not content, which demonstrated the most significant differences between school and home. Data from the interviews indicate that many of the mothers cooked "out of their own heads". This approach had been passed from one generation to the other. The most usual cookbook consisted of hand-written recipes collected from or exchanged with family and friends; over a third of the mothers had such a collection. A distant second place was shared by Mrs. Beeton and a Five Roses Flour cookbook.<sup>49</sup> Even those women who had cookbooks, however, seldom used them. What

did it mean to cook "out of one's head"? First, there was no standardization: ingredients and amounts varied from one time to the next, as probably did the result - at least until the process became almost automatic. Measurements were not precise as individual judgement determined the relative proportions used. As a result, the cook could give full rein to her creative talents or to her ability to make do; on the other hand, the success of the final product could not be guaranteed. Also, the recipe could only really be learned from another person by observation and by repeated attempts to achieve the desired result. 50 Further, the "pool" of recipes available was restricted to what people knew through experience.

Many girls were first introduced to measuring cups and spoons in their domestic science classes. One learned that a wooden spoon was the correct utensil to use in mixing ingredients. She also learned there was a right and wrong way to make cocoa although her family had been making it at home for some years without knowing that. Girls were taught to sew and wear a proper "uniform" in the kitchen, consisting of white cap and full apron with a potholder and a towel hanging on the left-hand side of the apron. They also copied out many recipes which teachers encouraged them to tryat home; in a few cases the students were marked on their home cooking. Standardized methods, recipes and practices were taught to the younger generation with some success as these girls eventually used the recipes and measuring cups and spoons in their own homes. Was there an impact on the older generation as well? The evidence suggests a very limited one. Two mothers and one grandmother learned some of the new recipes; another girl's mother who bought measuring cups and spoons declared that she had better results by cooking with uniform amounts. Most mothers did not change their established methods of food preparation. Yet this did not mean that they opposed domestic science lessons for their daughters. Most seemed to have approved of the classes and many encouraged their daughters to try recipes at home - not surprising since these same mothers had been teaching their daughters to cook for some years.

A few interviewees, and their mothers, considered the classes a waste of time and money, impractical and unnecessary:

It's very hard to change the habits of a lifetime. And the things that I would learn in school - what had that got to do with our way of life?...If they had, say, taken a bunch of leftovers and mixed something out of that, why that would have been more to the point.<sup>51</sup>

Complaints focused on the introduction of strange recipes or unusual foods, the expense of supplying the food, the use of numerous and unnecessary utensils, or the belief that girls could learn everything necessary in their own homes. The recipes and methods used in class did seem to require the use of a greater amount of equipment than was usual at home. Mothers complained about the number of pots and bowls dirtied. Even the students who enjoyed domestic science admitted that they really learned to cook at home, not school, and complained about the finicky "dibs and dabs" of food which they were allowed to prepare in class. One woman recalled using half an egg to make custard, another a recipe calling for half a strip of bacon.

One of the justifications for teaching domestic science in the school was that girls entered marriage from a working career, not from a mother's home, and therefore had no preparation for scientific homemaking. The interviews suggest that this was true for many of those who went into middle-class occupations such as teaching and nursing; most boarded with families, lived in resident-type accomodation, or rented with others and hired a housekeeper who cooked. A very few young women shared an apartment with a friend or relative or stayed at home until they married. However, even though housekeeping experience was not part of the lives of many women who worked prior to marriage, it was clear that most had served an apprenticeship for complex household tasks as young girls.

One of the criticisms directed towards the teaching of domestic science was that it encouraged extravagance in equipping the classroom itself and in making girls dissatisfied with the equipment in their homes. Putnam and Weir acknowledged these complaints but considered them to be exaggerated:

There is a type of man, even among good citizens in rural communities, who will spend any amount of money for modern labour-saving devices about the farm and in the barn and stables, but who begrudges his wife and daughters anything except the most primitive necessities for kitchen or laundry. It is notorious that all over Canada - there are of course thousands of exceptions - women, in farm houses, have less labour-saving machinery than their husbands who work in the fields. And it might not be a really serious matter if sometimes school instruction in home economics created in a girl a discontent with the primitive furnishings of her mother's kitchen. Real economy has reference to the wise use of money and not to saving it for the mere sake of saving.<sup>52</sup>

The evidence suggests that classrooms were usually very well equipped. Departmental directions in 1912 for domestic science centres reflected the desire to teach efficiency:

The building itself and the equipment of a Domestic Science Centre should be of such a nature that from it lessons may be learned as to the best way to furnish and arrange a home kitchen. The newest and most up-to-date inventions should be installed.<sup>53</sup>

The Nelson domestic science centre boasted twenty-four individual electrical disc stoves, a large built-in refrigerator, aluminum cooking utensils, steel range, drying rooms, and electric irons. A plan for furnishing domestic science centres in Burnaby included the following: table tops of thoroughly seasoned spruce, I and 1/8 inches thick, electric stove (described as three-heat, six-inch disc stoves), a six-hole, Canadian-made range connected to a 30-gallon hot water boiler, a sink with enamel drainboard and splasher, and aluminumware equipment. The department's Supervisor of Technical Education noted that the aluminumware was more expensive than the equivalent enamelware and the three-heat six-inch stove more expensive than the single-heat four-inch model, but than in both cases the more

expensive choice would give better satisfaction and wear.54

Certainly some of the equipment used in domestic science classes would have been new to the students. In most classes the teacher demonstrated on a wood and coal range while the students used gas rings or electrical discs. Many of the girls would have been familiar with the gas rings as these were often used in homes to supplement the wood and coal range; however, electrical stoves were an unusual feature. Aluminumware and enamel drainboards were not standard equipment in kitchens at the time. One of the interviewees recalled that her mother had purchased the first set of aluminum cooking ware sold in Victoria. Manufactured by Wear-Ever, it consisted of triangular pieces which formed a circle when stored together and included a fry pan, steamer, large pot, and detachable handle. A woman who had studied home economics at the University of Alberta during the mid-1920s recalled that the aluminum fry pan was all the rage. 55 Several interviewees had wooden drainboards that had to be vigorously scrubbed to be kept clean. Flatirons, not electric irons, were the standard in most homes at this time.

There is some evidence that in spite of its endorsation of up-to-date equipment, the Department of Education was sensitive to charges of extravagance. It is also apparent that the new, improved equipment was not always reliable. In approving the electrical contract for wiring in the Armstrong domestic science centre, the Supervisor of Technical Education commented that the cost of installing electrical stoves was such that the department might have to eliminate them in the future: "the oil stove is just as satisfactory and less than half the cost."56 In advising the Prince Rupert School Board on establishing a domestic science centre, the Supervisor stated that the substitution of oil for electric stoves would lower costs and that oil stoves were being used successfully in various parts of the province.<sup>57</sup> Economical methods of equipping home economics classrooms were described in an inspector's report listing the materials which could be used by manual training teachers and students to make supply cupboards and fireless cookers. 58 The domestic science teacher from Coal Creek reported that she had encouraged her students to make their cookery uniform (apron, cap, sleeves) from flour sacks.59

One tantalizing question raised in connection with classroom furnishings is the influence of commercial suppliers upon home economics teachers and students. Manufacturers were alert to the promotional potential offered by the establishment of domestic science centres. For example, the Singer Sewing Company supplied a complimentary sewing machine to the summer school for home economics teachers and also sent someone to demonstrate the attachments. 60 The McClary Manufacturing Company complained to the Supervisor of Technical Education that American-made "Monarch" and "Majestic" ranges had been specified for domestic science centres under construction in the Okanagan. 61 The Hotpoint Electric Heating Company, based in California and with offices in Vancouver and Toronto, sent a representative to call on the Supervisor of Technical Education in Victoria, invited him to visit the Vancouver showroom to see the samples on display, and forewarded a brochure and price list of its products. The Supervisor was offered a twenty percent reduction, less five percent for cash within thirty

days, on the Standard Bake Oven "El Bako". The company had already installed cooking equipment in schools in Windsor and Collingwood. Ontario, and at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. 62 Suppliers offered discounts on equipment, as for example, on a minimum order of forty electrical disc stoves from Canadian Westinghouse and on the purchase of a "Perfection" oil stove specifically from the Imperial Oil Company in Vancouver. 63 Others donated items or supplies, as did Ridgeway's Tea of Vancouver whose donation was apparently to be accompanied by promotional material.<sup>64</sup> Some indication of commercial interest appeared in the pages of School Days, a monthly magazine published in Vancouver for pupils in grades five, six, seven and eight during the period 1919-1927. The heaviest advertisers among firms selling products related to home economics were BC Electric, Squirrel Peanut Butter, Fraser Valley Dairies, Empress Jams, and Pacific Milk.65 In her 1928-29 report, the recently appointed Director of Home Economics for British Columbia approved cooperation with commercial firms:

This year has seen a greater attempt on the part of the teachers to utilize the facilities available in the local stores. In February, David Spencer's Limited, Vancouver, made provision for a competition in homefurnishing which did much to broaden the ideas of the public as to the general conception of the scope of home economics. The prize for the most practical and most artistically furnished bedroom for a high-school girl was divided between Kitsilano High School, Vancouver, and North Vancouver High School. Fashion parades for the purpose of acquainting the girls with the prevailing styles for spring were provided by the Hudson's Bay Company. Commercial concerns, when approached, have been most willing to co-operate. 66

Although it is difficult to gauge the impact on young students of new goods and new technologies, and their manufacturers and their promoters, the domestic science classroom did provide an initial introduction to some household products.

Home economics classes in elementary school introduced thousands of British Columbia girls to exact measurements, white sauce, electric stoves, and the importance of food nutrients. Some students found the classes helpful; some considered them a waste of time; most decided that they had learned more practical food preparation methods at home. Yet as adults all used the standardized methods, the authoritative cookbooks, and the new technological devices first introduced in the classroom. All eventually cooked, with no hired help, in standardized kitchens equipped with built-in cupboards, stoves, new fuels, and electric refrigerators. Domestic science instruction was not the only factor in this transformation, nor could it have been the most important. During 1900-1930, the period under study, seventy-five percent or more of the province's school girls did not attend home economics classes. These were also the years when an alliance of advertisers, manufacturers and mass circulation media were establishing the mechanisms necessary to induce women to consume.<sup>67</sup> The future homemakers who did

attend domestic science classes, however, caught a glimpse of new ways of working in the kitchen, defined and reinforced by the principles of scientific management and women's unique responsibility to nurture the individual and the nation.

The kitchen is the centre of the house. At meal times the centre of interest shifts to the diningroom. When the work of the day is over, mother and father and children and friends sit down to enjoy the evening by the open fire in the livingroom, or sit down on the porch in summertime to enjoy the evening air and the colours of the sunset and the pleasant view. The centre of interest is where the people are. But the kitchen is mother's workshop and factory and laboratory. There she keeps most of her tools and does most of her work, and while she is there, that is the centre of the house. (Helen MacMurchy, "How to Make Our Canadian Home", no. 3 in The Little Blue Books Home Series [Ottawa: Department of Health, 1922].)

## Footnotes

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- 1. C. Spofford, Corresponding Secretary, Local Council of Women, Victoria, Letter to the editor, Victoria *Daily Colonist*, 18 March 1903.
- 2. Daily Colonist, 6 September 1903.
- 3. Daily Colonist, 2 February 1904.
- 4. Vancouver Province, 7 April 1904.
- 5. Correspondingly, local dissatisfaction could also undermine domestic science at the local level. British Columbia, Annual Report of the Public Schools of the Province of British Columbia (hereafter Annual Report), 1916-17, p. A40; Annual Report, 1918-19: A31.
- 6. Annual Report, 1925-26.
- 7. The interviewees, born between 1897 and 1916, were located by the "snowball" method. The interviews have been deposited with the Provincial Archives of British Columbia as numbers 4088.1 4088.42.
- 8. Provincial Archives of British Columbia (hereafter PABC), nos. 4088.29, 4088.42, 4088.11.
- 9. See Neil Sutherland, Children in English-Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth Century Consensus (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976) for an analysis of the new social and educational ideas, their proponents, and their influence.
- 10. Annual Report, 1900-01: 251.
- 11. Annual Report, 1919-1920: C48, quoting from the Report of the Royal Commission on the Technical Education and Industrial Training (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1913-14).
- 12. Annual Report, 1917-18: D68.
- 13. Vancouver Daily Province, 6 March 1915; Timothy A. Dunn, "The Rise of Mass Public Schooling in British Columbia, 1900-1929," in J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones, eds., Schooling and Society in Twentieth-Century British Columbia (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1980).
- 14. Annual Report, 1918-19: A78.
- 15. Annual Report, 1917-18: V43.
- 16. 6 March 1915.
- 17. Daily Colonist, 20 January 1926. Racist appeals based on Anglo-Saxon supremacy sometimes figured in the rhetoric supporting the teaching of domestic science. See, for example, "Domestic Science Should Not Be Considered a Frill," Daily Colonist, 3 August 1924.
- 18. J.H. Putnam and G.M. Weir, Survey of the School System (Victoria: Province of British Columbia, 1925): 339.
- 19. Political Equality League, *The Champion* (October 1912): 5-6. See also "The Labour Question and Women's Work and its Relation to Home Life" in National Council of Women of Canada, comp. *Women Workers of Canada* (Ottawa, 1898):

- 254-62, reproduced in Ramsay Cook and Wendy Mitchinson, eds., *The Proper Sphere: Woman's Place in Canadian Society* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976); *Daily Province*, 19 April 1907; a reference to the solution of the "Chinese problem" with respect to domestic labour, *Daily Colonist*, 9 June 1898.
- 20. See section on home economics in Annual Report, 1925-26, p.R58.
- 21. Annual Report, 1916-17: A73; Department of Education, Courses of Study for the Public, High and Normal Schools of British Columbia, 1921, pp.52,55; Department of Education, Programme of Studies for the High and Technical Schools of British Columbia, 1928-29: 59; Department of Education, New Programme of Studies for the High and Technical Schools of British Columbia, 1930: 98.
- 22. "Resolution arising from the findings of a special committee on home economics, appointed by the executive of the provincial Parent-Teacher Federation," printed in Putnam and Weir, Survey: 540.
- 23. Victoria Daily Times, 20 October 1926; Daily Province, 6 October 1926.
- 24. Daily Times, 26 March 1927; Vancouver Morning Star, 30 September 1926. See also Robert M. Stamp, "Teaching Girls their God Given Place in Life", Atlantis 2, no. 2 (Spring 1977): 18-34.
- 25. Interview 4088.5; Putnam and Weir, Survey, chapter 6; Daily Times, 24 March 1924; The Agricultural Journal 3, no.8 (October 1918): 201; Vancouver Province, 7 April 1904; The Islander 1, no.6 (August 1920), p.15; Daily Times, 26 March 1927.
- 26. Daily Province, 21 October 1926; Morning Star, 30 September 1926; Helen Cameron Parker, "Technical Schools for Women," The Canadian Magazine 1 (1893): 634-7, reproduced in Cook and Mitchinson, The Proper Sphere.
- 27. Putnam and Weir, Survey: 91.
- 28. Vancouver World, 12 January 1916.
- 29. See Dunn, "Rise of Mass Public Schooling" for the impact of this approach on British Columbia's school system.
- 30. Daily Province, 21 October 1926. References to the scientific care of children and the role of domestic science in improving child welfare were noted in the 1920s (Annual Report, 1923-24: T75; Vancouver Sun, 5 and 6 October 1926; Morning Star, 7 October 1926).
- 31. Annual Report, 1915-16: A81; Annual Report, 1923-24: T75.
- 32. Annie B. Juniper, Girls' Home Manual of Cookery, Home Management, Home Nursing and Laundry (Victoria: King's Printer, 1913).
- 33. Olive Dean, "Domestic Science Notebook", Modern History Division, British Columbia Provincial Museum (BCPM).
- 34. Lois Kinley, "Domestic Science Notebook", Modern History Division, BCPM.
- 35. A.M. Ross, "The Romance of Vancouver's Schools", B.C. Magazine 7, no.6 (June 11): 450. Insistence on proper methods extended to all domestic science subjects. The Annual Report for 1924-25 noted that "good habits in sewing are also a necessity; perpetual vigilance is required on the part of the teacher against the child's tendency to work without a thimble, to hold the work the wrong way, and to dream over it" (p.M55).
- 36. 26 January 1912.
- 37. Nelson Daily News, 8 June 1912. Shortly after this account the Nelson school board had to deal with criticism of the extravagant cost of the equipment (Daily News, 21 June 1912). I am grateful to Patricia Roy for bringing these references to my attention.
- 38. Annual Report, 1918-19, p.A79.

- 39. See, for example, references to Educational exhibits featuring class work and the activity of domestic science teachers in the war effort. (Annual Reports, 1905-06, p.A18; 1911-12, p.A48; 1917-18, p.D66.)
- 40. See Sutherland, Children in English-Canadian Society for a thorough examination of the "new education".
- 41. Annual Reports, 1915-16: A81; 1918-19: A78.
- 42. Annual Reports, 1920-21: F47.
- 43. Annual Reports, 1917-18: D66; 1918-19: A78-A79; 1926-27: M64.
- 44. Putnam and Weir, Survey: 534.
- 45. Annual Reports, 1911-1912: A48; 1918-19: A79; 1924-25: M55.
- 46. Annual Reports, 1923-24: T75; 1924-25: M55; 1926-27: M63-64; PABC, nos. 4088.38, 4088.40; British Columbia, Department of Education, Recipes for Home Economics Classes. Home Economics Circular No.1 (Victoria: King's Printer, 1927).
- 47. This was true for both boys and girls. However, while girls were often expected to participate in the same chores as their brothers, for example, filling the woodbox or cutting grass, the reverse was seldom the case.
- Other foods were produced at home: twenty-one mothers made their own bread, fifteen families kept laying hens, and five kept a cow.
- 49. Commercial cookbooks, published by brand name companies such as Fleischmann's, Blue Ribbon, and Crisco, were the most common.
- 50. One woman described the impossibility of making her mother's recipes because the verbal instructions started with "a jugful of sour cream" (PABC, no. 4088.23).
- 51. PABC, no. 4088.6.
- 52. Putnam and Weir, Survey: 339. By contrast, some interviewees stressed that it was their fathers who insisted on acquiring the latest household equipment, and in their own households, their husbands (PABC, nos. 4088.25, 4088.26, 4088.31).
- 53. British Columbia, Department of Education, Manual of School Law and School Regulations, 1912, p.77.
- 54. Nelson Daily News, 8 June 1912; Vancouver Sun, 13 June 1912; PABC, GR457, DS III, 1915, correspondence between G.H. Deane and Mrs. M. Andison, Secretary of Burnaby School Board, 8 July 1915, 23 July 1915, 5 August 1915. In Armstrong the enamel drainboards were included in the original tender to furnish the domestic science centre, though these would have cost more than wooden drainboards. (GR457, DSII, 1915, Supervisor of Technical Education to MacPhail-Smith Hardware Company, Armstrong, B.C., 9 August 1915.)
- 55. PABC, nos. 4088.16, 4088.12.
- 56. GR457, MT III, 1915, Deane to J.M. Wright, Armstrong School Board, 14 August 1915. Deane's enthusiasm for electrical stoves may also have been dampened by continuing problems with the Canadian Westinghouse stoves installed in the Mission, Bridgeport, Ladner and Chilliwack domestic science centres. See GR457, correspondence from 31 March 1915 (micro B2031) to 28 December 1915 (GR457, DS 1, 1915).
- 57. GR457, DS I, 1916, Deane to W.D. Vance, Prince Rupert, 7 March 1916.
- 58. Micro B2032, 1916-1919, Mr. Kyle, Inspector's Reports.
- 59. GR457, Box 1, file 10, Winnifred May Townsend to John Kyle, 25 May [1916].
- 60. GR457, Miscellaneous 1915, Supervisor of Technical Education to Singer Sewing Company, 9 August 1915.
- 61. GR457, DS III 1915, McClary Manufacturing Company to the Supervisor of Technical Education, 21 June 1915.

- 62. GR457, Box 2, File 3, letter and printed material from Hotpoint Electric Heating Company to George Deane, 2 August 1915.
- 63. GR457, DS III, 1915, Deane to Andison, 23 July 1915; DS I, 1916, John Kyle, Organizer of Technical Education to W.A. McKenzie, Penticton School Board, 27 July 1916.
- 64. GR457, micro B2032, John Lillico, Ridgway's Tea, to John Kyle, Organizer of Technical Education, 5 October 1916.
- 65. School Days, 1919-1927. The magazine's Advisory Committee consisted of Vancouver's Municipal Inspector and the principals of several Vancouver schools.
- 66. Annual Report, 1928-29: 253. In 1919 the first year high school Household Science course included visits to market, grocery, and meat stores, dairies and manufacturies. (British Columbia, Department of Education, Courses of Study for the Public, High, and Normal Schools of B.C., 1919: 47.) Provincial government departments also recognized the opportunity presented by home economics classes. Brochures and recipe booklets extolling the virtues of British Columbia fruit and potatoes were distributed to teachers and students as a result of cooperation between the Provincial Horticulturist and the Organizer of Technical Education, who also invited the donation of crates of fruit which home economics classes could preserve for the Horticulturist to use in exhibitions. (GR457, DS I, 1915, R.M. Winslow to John Kyle, 20 October 1915, 23 October 1915; Bessie N. Allan to John Kyle, 12 December 1915; Elizabeth Berry to John Kyle, 14 December 1915).
- 67. Elaine Fisher, "Images of Angels and Whores: Wedding Women to Consumerism", paper presented at the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, Annual Conference, Vancouver, November 1983.