

# Farm to Table: The Home Management House as Rhetorical Space for Rural Women

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**Abstract:** *This paper explores a university archival collection of documents and student exams from the long closed Home Economics Department of Texas A&M University-Commerce. Through the use of departmental records and final exam student essays from the 1930s and 1940s, the project argues that home management house residency created a unique rhetorical space for rural women as they pursued higher education, professional opportunities, and class mobility.*

**Keywords:** *women, home economics, archives, Texas, education, rhetorical space*

In their book, *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*, Jacqueline Royster and Gesa Kirsch assert that “academic women’s voices, visions, and experiences have not been fully heard, represented, or taken into account in writing the history of academic institutions or in imagining their future” (5). As I read *Professor Mayo’s College: A History of East Texas State University*, I found Royster and Kirsch’s statement to be true. In a quite thorough text about the history of my alma mater, now named Texas A&M University-Commerce, the voices of women are few, and their experiences are often diminished to “Sadie Hawkins Day” (Reynolds 128) or “panty-raids” (131). The book does mention the university’s home economics department, but it is only referenced a few times within the 210-page book. Most of those references are in regard to building booms on the campus and how the home economics department benefited from new facilities. One photo caption remembers the department as a space that taught “home management to co-eds, most of whom expected to be wives and mothers” (71). A final mention of home economics explains that the department was simply eliminated altogether in 1989 due to budget cuts (190). Surely the public memory of the rural women who attended East Texas State (ET) and their educational experiences during the mid-twentieth century should not be reduced to quick lines about facilities or social engagements. Surely a more substantial story should be recovered.

On a spring afternoon in 2011, I discovered that story. Boxes housed on the fourth floor of Gee Library at Texas A&M University-Commerce contain

long forgotten archives revealing the extraordinary stories of ordinary rural Northeast Texas women who studied home economics at ET. These women of the home economics department had names and faces and voices. Their experiences have been preserved in scrapbooks, student records, and final exams, rhetorical artifacts that reveal East Texas State's home economics department—more specifically its home management house—as a space where young women practiced a new set of domestic skills and exercised a new confidence in a way that could not have occurred anywhere else. Illuminating the lived experiences and rhetorical agency of these women contributes to larger efforts, for example those of Shannon Carter and Kelly Dent, who consider how “[l]ocal literacy scenes like [Northeast Texas] have much to teach us about the ways that historically marginalized rhetors garner rhetorical agency” (152). The local home economics department records reveal that the home management house at ET was much more than just a place where women – that is white women, at least until 1964 when East Texas State University finally desegregated – learned to cook and clean. Instead, the home management house at East Texas State served as a rhetorical space for women in Northeast Texas by providing a place for young rural women to assert newfound authority as homemakers and teachers that would afford them the opportunity for a modern middle class home or a career of their own. This residency would provide the space for rhetorical agency necessary to move from the rural farms of East Texas to the middle class tables of the future.

## Defining Home Economics

While “historians largely dismissed home economics as little more than a conspiracy to keep women in the kitchen,” scholarship now reveals how the work of early home economists paved the way for women in the academy, the laboratory, the boardroom, and the home (Stage, “Introduction” 1). Since the discipline of home economics’ beginning, a debate has existed over what to call the field because the work of the home involves such a broad spectrum of skills including food preparation and sanitation, child development and rearing, and sewing and textiles. At the field’s inception, the name needed to encompass the large field while elevating the status of homemaking. In 1899, at the first of the Lake Placid conferences<sup>1</sup> (1899-1907), selecting a name was important business. Scientist and home economics pioneer Ellen Richards preferred the name *domestic science* because she wanted to elevate the work

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1 “In 1899,...the founders of home economics met at Lake Placid to launch a formal home economics movement. The record of their conference demonstrates that the last thing they had in mind was to keep women in the kitchen, a charge that has been leveled at home economics by generations of feminist critics” (Stage, “Ellen Richards” 19).

of the home and promote the ordinary kitchen to a sophisticated laboratory. She possessed “a passion for science, a commitment to furthering women’s education and careers, and a belief in the home as source for social change” (Stage, “Ellen Richards” 20). Her tenacity helped to bring home economics to the forefront while creating a modern landscape for new literacies and vocations for women. Others wanted to highlight the area of the field that involved sewing and textiles with a name like *household arts*; however, this title seemed to eliminate such important homemaking elements like nutrition and child development and reduced the field to simply beautifying the home. Another potential name was *domestic economy*, which seemed to “focus on the housewife and her problems, particularly the ‘servant problem’” (Stage, “Introduction” 5). Eventually the Lake Placid group settled upon home economics as a compromise (Stage, “Introduction” 6). This name seems to encompass all areas of interest including science, arts, and economy.

Today the field, still struggling with its identity, has again reinvented itself into the likes of Human Ecology, as it is called at Cornell University, or Human Sciences as it is called at Oklahoma State University. Further, American high schools now teach courses under the umbrella of Family and Consumer Science (FCS) rather than the standard and familiar ‘home ec.’ No longer are high school students members of Future Homemakers of America (FHA); now boys and girls alike join an organization called Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) – if their school even still has room for a Family and Consumer Science curriculum. Over one hundred years later, even though the home and family are arguably the most important of social institutions, home economics still struggles to elevate the workings of the home and to validate its place within educational and professional spheres. The ET home economics archives reveal the close relationship between local concerns and national trends.

## Localizing Home Economics

East Texas Normal College, founded by William Mayo, began operation in November of 1889 in Cooper, Texas (Reynolds and Conrad 3). Just a few years later in 1894, the college building burned to the ground, but Mayo was not discouraged. He chose to rebuild and move the college 15 miles southwest to Commerce, Texas (4). Professor Mayo certainly embodied his school’s motto, “Ceaseless industry, Fearless investigation, Unfettered thought,” as he himself taught Latin, Greek, German, civics, history, and pedagogy (6). Mayo “was long remembered after his death for providing educational opportunities to thousands of ambitious rural students who would have otherwise been unable to attend college because of limited funds or inadequate previous schooling” (Gold 114). Mayo was so dedicated to serving the population of rural East

Texas that he provided a flexible schedule for students from farming families and began the second term of the school year “about the end of cotton picking season” (11). Rural young girls and boys alike were expected to work in the cotton fields from an early age, so this accommodation was certainly necessary as records reveal that on into the 1930s “[i]n Texas where white families were predominate in cotton, 75% of all children aged six to sixteen counted as laborers” (Temple 156). Even though Mayo’s students came from the surrounding rural areas, many of them having received their primary schooling in country one-room schools, Mayo encouraged a rigorous curriculum (8) and believed in learning through doing (10). Therefore, home economics was a natural addition to the course offerings as new presidents succeeded Mayo and maintained his early visions for the college.

The home economics department first opened on the East Texas State campus “in 1917 just after the Mayo School became a state institution” (“Development” 1). This timing is not surprising since it coincides with nationwide federal funding for vocational programs that became available in the early twentieth century. In 1914, the signing of the Smith-Lever Act supported the improvement of rural American life through the Department of Agriculture, and the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 created a clear purpose for collegiate home economics departments: to train home economics teachers for the primary and secondary schools (Stage, “Introduction” 9). Texas historian Walter L. Buenger notes that after the United States entered World War I, “women’s roles in public affairs increased” (174) as they overwhelmingly opposed Jim Ferguson in the Texas Governor’s race of 1918, in part because of his position on education. Buenger writes, “Perhaps education mattered more to women for reasons other than filling their traditional roles of nurturing the next generation...wartime conditions opened new opportunities for women, but taking advantage of those new opportunities required education” (178). East Texas State offered a space for that educational opportunity as it maintained its historic reputation as a “normal” school (Reynolds and Conrad 72). David Gold notes in his text, *Rhetoric at the Margins*,

Mayo’s institution also served a constituency long overlooked in histories of rhetorical education: white rural students, both male and female, of modest economic means. For these students, normal schools served a similar function as private liberal arts colleges did for African American students, providing them with a means of socio-economic advancement and community pride (115).

This emphasis on training teachers and social mobility was especially evident for the farm girls of Northeast Texas as they enrolled at East Texas in hopes of earning teaching certificates.

Certainly the women of Northeast Texas began to feel the national movement of educational opportunities in the field of home economics—even if those expanded opportunities did limit women to the domestic sphere of the home and by extension the classroom. For better or worse, these federal acts of the early twentieth century created legitimate educational and professional opportunities for women everywhere – even in rural Northeast Texas—while clearly reinforcing gender stereotypes. Even so, Royster and Kirsch remind us that “stories matter” (3), so the stories of these students should be recovered and added to the public memory of women’s education and to the rhetorical history of rural Northeast Texas.

Texas, like much of the United States, enjoyed economic growth during the 1920s. The Texas Historical Association claims, “If electrical power was the basic regional builder in the Southeast, petroleum assumed that role in the Southwest – Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana. Oil diversified the region’s economy, which was previously based on agriculture and timber (Brown). In fact, this oil boom “channeled billions of dollars into public education in Texas” (Brown). Still, state appropriated funds did not necessarily keep up with both the broad curriculum expansions and the dramatic enrollment increases of ET during the 1920s (Reynolds and Conrad 64). Then, of course, Texas faced near economic ruin after the stock market crash of 1929 and the resulting Great Depression.

Even with the country in economic crisis, by the mid-1930s East Texas State housed an established home economics department. The early curriculum included courses for students who had no home economics training in high school along with classes in “sewing, cooking, millinery, laundry, and house-wifery” (“Development” 1). Not until the 1935-36 school year did the East Texas State home economics “department [meet] full requirements for vocational home economics” (“Development” 1). Those requirements included a student teaching program at Commerce High School, a nursery school, and “a new home management house, ready for occupancy in the summer of 1936” (“Development” 1) (see fig. 1). The home economics students could not be more pleased with the completion of this new practice home. In fact, one student, Mae<sup>2</sup>, writes:

On September 22, 1936, I entered the new Home Management House. I said new because only two groups had lived in the house before. I was so glad to think that all girls who came to ET desiring to get a Vocational Home Economics Certificate could now do so...I had dreamed of just such a house as we now have. So dreams do come true. (Mae 1)

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2 All references to students’ names are pseudonyms.

For this vocational certificate that Mae mentions, students were required to live together for up to nine weeks in a campus home that was considered a laboratory by its students and professors. On those college campuses, including East Texas State, the home management house was considered “the most important laboratory for the teaching of Home Economics on the college level” (“Presentation Booklet” 3). While living in the house, each woman fulfilled specific roles like cook or housekeeper or hostess in an effort to transfer the skills she had learned in the classroom to a real home setting. At the end of the semester, East Texas State students were given a list of questions for their final exam. Reflective responses to these questions from sixteen women between the years of 1936 and 1953 serve as student writing samples for this article (see fig. 2 & 3). These essays preserve both engaging memories of the women living and working with one another and earnest attempts at academic writing.



Fig. 1. Home Management House Photo. Presentation Booklet. 18 Jan 1944. Home Economics Collection. Special Collections Gee Library (Box 4, Folder 4). Texas A&M University-Commerce, Commerce, TX.

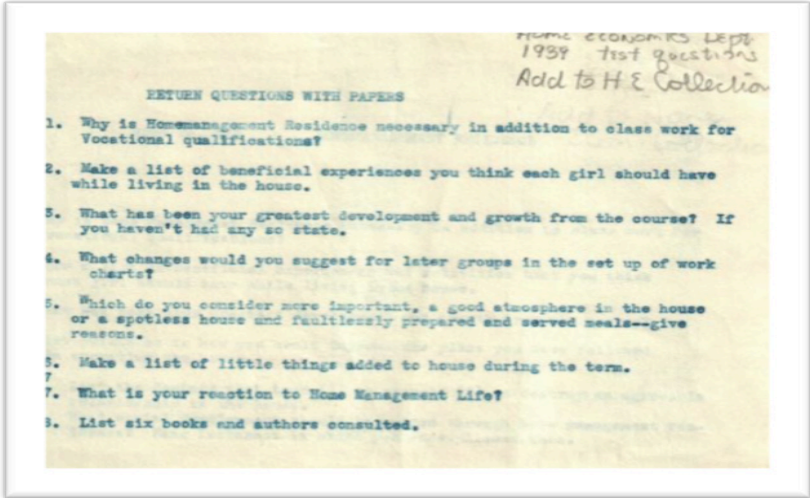


Fig. 2. Home Economics 326 Exam Questions. 1939. Home Economics Collection. Special Collections Gee Library (Box 4, Folder 9). Texas A&M University-Commerce, Commerce, TX.

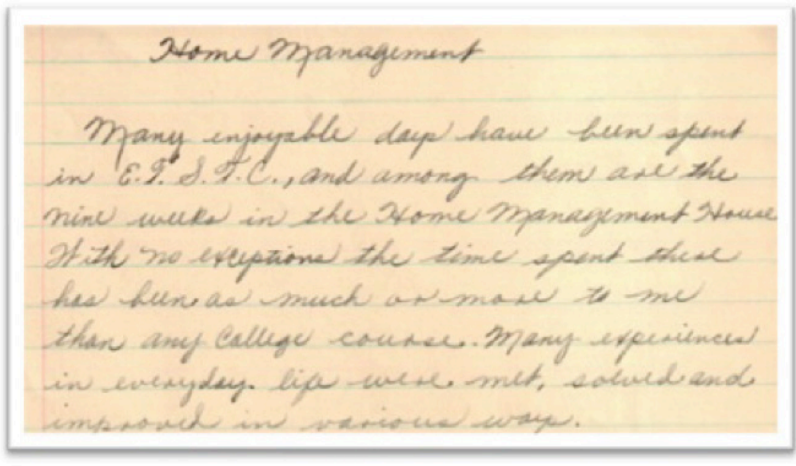


Fig. 3. Handwritten Exam Sample. Ruth. Student Essay. 1937. Home Economics Collection. Special Collections Gee Library (Box 4, Folder 9). Texas A&M University-Commerce, Commerce, TX.



## Defining the Space

Not until the turn of the century and beyond did women begin to have more educational and professional opportunities thanks in part to women like Ellen Richards. As the first female graduate of MIT and the founder of the home economics field, Richards saw the elevation of the home as women's way in to academia and professional space. She sought to recast the space of the home and kitchen beyond the labor of housework and create a space of scientific advancement and important innovation. Richards's work changed the language surrounding the domestic sphere (Stage, "Ellen Richards" 19). In 1911 she wrote, "Housekeeping has too often been drudgery, monotonous and wearisome, something to be endured. The merchant, the business man, the manufacturer, as well as the engineer, have been *stimulated* by the new problems of our time" (Richards 19). Richards encouraged women to seize the modernization of the home and become not just homemakers but engineers and scientists within the home.

Nan Johnson reminds her readers in *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life: 1866-1910* that until the years following the Civil War, the art of rhetoric was reserved for white men. She says,

Ministers learned to preach, lawyers learned to argue, politicians learned how to persuade the masses, and white, middle-class, young men acquired the rhetorical habits of speech and writing that marked their status as those who would surely make everything happen, and women learned little to nothing about any of it (3).

Therefore, the establishment of home economics education allowed women to create a space where they could earn the same sort of specialized rhetorical authority as their male counterparts. Homemakers learned how to manage an efficient home.

In "On Gender and Rhetorical Space," Roxanne Mountford defines rhetorical space as a literal space – not just a metaphorical one. She claims:

'Rhetorical space' can be made a more useful concept for rhetoricians, however, if we apply it more narrowly to the effect of physical spaces on communicative event. I am thinking here of rooms, lecterns, auditoriums, platforms, confession booths...classrooms, all of which are interpreted by participants through social expectations, but which also have material dimensions that affect what we do there. (42)

The home and especially the kitchen have long been considered a part of the woman's place and the domestic sphere. However, the home management house space, as part of a collegiate home economics program, was something more. The house at East Texas State created a physical space where women



established authority and confidence in managing a home. Not only were women able to manage the daily functions of the home, but also they were given the opportunity to manage people since the residents held particular roles and fulfilled specific duties.

One student, Elaine, defines home management “as the planning, and the guiding or directing of the use of human and material resources” (5). Gertie expresses this sentiment even more plainly in her exam when she writes, “You learn to give orders and to take them” (1). A course in home management set in a classroom would not provide such opportunities because the teacher would still hold the authority. In a traditional classroom space, students would passively receive instruction from the professor rather than actually engage in the theories and employ the skills as they could within the walls of an actual home. Without the physical space of the home, students would not have a place to put their skills into practice on a daily basis. Gwen realizes the value in living in the home management house when she writes, “In the Home Management House we put what we have learned to a practical application, so it will not just be something learned in a book, but something which may be used...we also acquire a feeling of self-confidence not otherwise gained” (1). Even though the house did not provide a pulpit or lectern where students specifically performed a “communicative event” as Mountford defines rhetorical space, only the home management house could provide a physical space for developing a new rhetorical agency as an authority on the home.

As home economics education programs expanded across the country, the previously private space of the home manifested into a new public physical space of the home management house where women learned to practice the sophisticated work of homemaking. More and more the “[h]ousehold economics put the husband in the wings as an invisible source of income and moved the wife to center stage with new roles as budget analyst, sanitary engineer, and dietician...” (McArthur 34). When the home economics students of East Texas State reflect on purchasing groceries, planning meals, and solving problems, they reveal that such proficiency was the goal of home management house residency. Certainly, Richards’s influence remained as home management houses were used as practical laboratory spaces and became a part of home economics education around the country. The development of home economics departments and home management houses, while often criticized for reinforcing gender stereotypes or limiting women to the domestic sphere, still intended to fulfill Richards’s original goal of elevating the work of the home and creating a space of specialized authority.

A careful examination of the rhetorical artifacts these Northeast Texas women left behind can help us to understand what the home management house was and who occupied that space, and why that space still matters to

the public memory of women's education – even though the residents' voices were ignored or forgotten for many years. In October of 2015, Jessica Enoch discussed the home as rhetorical space in her Feminism(s) and Rhetoric(s) conference presentation, "Home/Work: Feminist Historiographies for Today's Working Mother." In that talk, Enoch defined *spatial rhetorics* as:

...the multiple and multimodal ways through which spaces gain meaning. They are the varied material, imagistic, embodied, displayed, and discursive understandings of what a space is and what it should be. Spatial rhetorics account for the actions that do or should take place within a space, and they designate, through these various modes, the people who should occupy them.

When the home management house is imagined through Enoch's lens, we must consider the items in the home, the women who lived there, the expectations of the students, and the self-perception of its residents. The rhetorical artifacts left behind by the home management house residents at ET allow us to do just that.

The women who lived in the home management house in Commerce, Texas, are a part of a specific community. Since I can no longer interview these women who majored in home economics during the 1930s and 40s or observe their activity within a particular space, "[t]he best that archival historians can do in terms of dialogue," writes Kelly Ritter, "is a reading of written products left behind, products both public and private, never meant to be viewed by non-community members" (467). This process allows for "recording and reporting without the community's express permission, exposing not only artifacts but also the real human experiences hidden behind those artifacts" (Ritter 467). The home economics archival collection at Texas A&M University – Commerce contains both private documents – like the final exams – and public documents – like the department's own historical narrative and its faculty presentation booklet of 1944. Together these artifacts allow readers to re-imagine the home management house at East Texas State as an important rhetorical space for rural women during a specific moment in history.

## Recovering the Local

Within the walls of ET's home management house, students asserted a new authority. Martha says that within the home management house location, "the girl is given the power or privilege of selecting menus, foods, preparation of foods, entertaining, directing her helpers in her assignment. She certainly shows the standards she sets in her work" (1). A classroom space would not provide such an empowering experience. Within the classroom, scheduling menus or budgeting for groceries would be hypothetical. Within

the house, students prepared for real meals that would be served to real residents and teachers. "Up until the time we moved to the Home Management House," Betty remembers, "our training had come from the classroom and laboratory, but we soon realized there was more to running a house than we knew, because now we had to prove ourselves" ("Presentation Booklet" 14). As Minnie simply states, "I have learned to do by doing" (3). Ultimately, Sue sums up the purpose of the house when she claims, "We should go beyond the organization and direction of household processes and think of the happiness and welfare of our family group. We always want to make the family environment happier, more refreshing, and satisfying to each member of the family group. Harmony is one of the essentials of a good home" (7). Therefore, living with one another in the house gave women perhaps their first opportunity to manage a household through practicing everything from budgeting the finances to arranging flowers.

Only the space within the walls of the house could provide the insight and experiences that these students describe by giving them a new sense of authority and community within the field of home economics. In the "Presentation Booklet," Katherine perfectly illustrates this newfound authority and community when she shares her personal experience as cook. She writes:

Each cook is responsible for one guest meal each time she is cook. If you will pardon the personal reference, I decided to cook a turkey dinner for twelve people and [Sandy] decided to join me as co-hostess. My mother said I couldn't do it and the day before, after picking "pin-feathers" all afternoon, I was ready to agree, but with the help of everyone in the house, we served the dinner with [Sandy] carving the turkey. ("Presentation Booklet" 10)

Undoubtedly, Katherine's turkey dinner accomplishment could have happened only in the home management house. The home management house created a rhetorical space that even her own home under the guidance of her mother would not provide. Katherine's reflection perfectly illustrates Enoch's definition of *spatial rhetorics*. Katherine reveals the kind of actions that took place in the space and confirms the type of person who should occupy that space which establishes how the space gains special meaning. Even though Katherine's mother did not believe Katherine was ready to entertain guests with such a big undertaking, the home management house created a safe space to experience risk in order to increase confidence and exercise new authority.

Many of the home economics students wanted to learn skills to use in their own homes as well as to use in their classrooms as they worked outside of the home as professional teachers and extension agents. Especially in

Northeast Texas where many of the students came from rural backgrounds and farm homes, the women hoped to establish careers and middle class homes for themselves. Over and over the students write about the value of cooperation and working together. Maggie says:

It was easy to work in the Home Management House because of the spirit there. This was also a learning experience, because we will be able to see how this feeling can be carried to the classroom. If we can create this spirit in the girls we work with we will be able to show them what cooperation can mean in any type of work they have to do. (1)

Not only did students learn to cooperate with one another, but also several share the importance of learning how to use new, electric appliances like a vacuum cleaner, a washing machine, or an iron – all items that would be considered markers of a modern middle class home (see fig. 4 and 5). By the 1930s and 1940s home economics education meant far more than teaching farm wives about sanitation and safe food preservation. It meant preparing for a career along with creating an efficient home, entertaining guests, and performing duties of the middle class home with poise and grace. The space within the walls of the home management house provided just this sort of location to perfect these skills.



Fig. 4. Student and Washing Machine Photo. Presentation Booklet. 18 Jan 1944. Home Economics Collection. Special Collections Gee Library (Box 4, Folder 4). Texas A&M University-Commerce, Commerce, TX.



Fig. 5. Student and Vacuum Cleaner Photo. Presentation Booklet. 18 Jan 1944. Home Economics Collection. Special Collections Gee Library (Box 4, Folder 4). Texas A&M University-Commerce, Commerce, TX.

In *Creating Consumers*, Carolyn Goldstein says, "Teaching women about their social responsibilities as consumers gradually emerged as the defining framework of home economics instruction in most college programs" (38). The frequent mention of budgeting and entertaining confirms this consumer curriculum at ET. "Early home economists recognized," Goldstein suggests, "that all American homes were not changing in lockstep with one another and that working-class families still made many of the goods at home that middle-class and elite women could afford to buy...early home economics educators adjusted their focus depending on the class of women they intended to instruct" (38). By the 1930s and 1940s home economics education for rural East Texas women included creating a consumer's home rather than a producer's home. Marilyn says, "I think most of the girls learned a great deal by purchasing groceries, because they hadn't done this too much previously" (4). Cora best illustrates this desired move from producer to consumer in her exam section entitled, "Old Home vs. the New Home." She writes:

The old home was the workshop. The new home is the sanctuary. Or at least that is what the new home should be in the heart of each member of the family. Physical and material influences are chiefly responsible for this changed feeling about the home. Very little labor is done in the home of today giving way to ease and enjoyment of living rather than drudgery and unattractiveness. The home of today

is a beautiful, well arranged place where each member of the family should spend his happiest hours. (4)

Without question, ET students like Marilyn and Cora were beginning to see themselves as smart consumers and modern homemakers who desired comfortable and attractive middle-class homes. The home management house space, beyond the traditional classroom space, helped students visualize themselves as taking charge of a modern middle class home.

Certainly, as illustrated by the “Home Management House Duties” list, students were expected to complete daily tasks like laundering the linens and mopping the kitchen. However, that list also includes polishing silver, setting tables, directing conversation, and arranging flowers – tasks potentially beyond the experiences of farm girls from East Texas. Jane verifies this assumption in her exam when she says, “Usually the girls who come into the home management house have not entertained to a great scale and from the duty of entertaining to doing the week’s laundry is taught” (2). N. Beth Bailey, author of *Meal Planning and Table Service* (a textbook listed on both Claire’s and Myrtle’s exams), assumes that, “The housewife in every home, no matter how simple that home may be, wishes to have the appointments of her table correct” (3). She goes on to say that, “This [text]book is intended for the home of that large number of women who have no maid, or at best, but one maid” (7). This statement suggests that home economics courses educated women – especially white women—in the expectations of a middle class home. Even homes without maids, the text claims, should practice customs of the finest modern households. On the mention of maids, as Gertie describes the duties of the housekeeper in the home management house, she writes in her exam, “[the role of housekeeper] gives one the opportunity to both give and receive orders...It gives the hostess a chance to learn how to give orders to servants...because [the hostess] must be able to give clear directions” (2). Again, this observation suggests that upon finishing school the women will serve as managers of a home or classroom where they must give directions to either servants or students, further reinforcing the authority that the home management space provides.

Beyond managing the daily chores of the home, the hostess must also be fluent in entertainment etiquette as evidenced by another passage in Bailey’s textbook: “The hostess is always ‘the head of the table.’ It is her duty to guide the conversation into safe channels and to be watchful of the comfort of her guests” (12). Indeed the women of the home management house were taught similar lessons as Jane claims learning “how to be a better conversationalist” was one of the most personally valuable experiences during her stay at the house (2). Polished behavior was expected whether there were guests in the home or not. Bailey reminds her readers, “In the ideal family life, table service,

table manners, and table conversation should be essentially the same, whether there is company or whether there is just the family group" (Bailey 13-14). Bailey's text goes on to describe these household practices in chapters with titles like, "The Art of Entertaining and Being Entertained," "The Rules of Table Service," "Principles of Menu Making," and "How to Serve Food Attractively" (5). Simply put, at first glance it may seem that the home economics students were simply learning how to complete household chores efficiently, but in fact they were learning how to exemplify a modern homemaker through trying on the persona of middle class consumer and professional educator. The experience built confidence in the students and offered them an opportunity to explore a new rhetorical agency as they wrote with assurance about the value of their experiences within the space of the home management house.

## Questioning the Limits

While the students at ET express appreciation and enjoyment of their time in the home management house, it is hard to ignore the conclusion that such an educational space both liberated and limited women during this era. The pursuit of higher education in home economics provided women with professional opportunities, but those opportunities were limited to those spaces considered within the domestic sphere – the home and by extension the classroom. Many viewed the practice houses not as spaces that would afford professional opportunities but only as spaces for women to "play house" or "train[...] for marriage" (Elias 44). A dual discourse was certainly present. Home economics departments wanted their students to be able to perform household duties as well as participate in academic study and maintain personal interests. Megan J. Elias observes,

The ideal homemaker, then, was one who not only managed all household work well but also could work constructively with others and, perhaps most interestingly, make time for her own individual pursuits – her studies. The lessons that such experiences taught young women were strikingly at odds with traditional notions of married life (47).

Essentially, home economics education did much to further women's educational and professional opportunities while simultaneously reinforcing traditional gender roles. While some will believe that home economics intentionally worked against women's advancement and equality, Elias contends that these early home economists "may simply have been unable to look at gender roles as alterable, much as their personal and professional lives challenged them to do so on a daily basis" (49). Undoubtedly, the women of ET believed



the space of the home management house afforded them opportunities that would not be available anywhere else.

Also, as mentioned previously, these rhetorical artifacts are recovered from a time before East Texas State was desegregated. The 1930s and 40s were a time when African Americans could work as domestics or groundskeepers at the college, but could not attend classes. Clearly, the experiences preserved in these archival documents are not a reflection of all women's experiences during this historical moment. The essays supply a relatively small sample of only a handful of white, rural women's educational experiences. Certainly the mention of servants in both the textbooks and student writings complicates my argument, and with further research could create a rich commentary on race in mid-twentieth century America. Race in East Texas during this era deserves much further attention and study than this particular article provides.

Even with this artifact recovery project's clear limitations, "the local matters" (Carter and Conrad 101). Within a presentation booklet dated January 18, 1944, the home management advisor at ET defends the home management house residence experience when she writes:

Home Economics in its growth has long since passed the cooking, sewing, and house cleaning stage and is now a job requiring study and the use of more knowledge than any other profession...The Home stands paramount in the American way of life. Home Economics is doing its share to keep it there by bringing knowledge of many sciences together for better living...Home management deals with the administering of a home wisely so that the members will be happy and can take a desirable place in the life of the community. It offers an opportunity for the development of human relationships, group work, growth in personality and ability and skill in the use of material resources...(2)

Undoubtedly, the home is considered a gendered space where women of the past were allowed managerial authority and expert status within the confines of the home or classroom. The home economics movement that began with Ellen Richards in 1899 climaxed just as the women of Northeast Texas quoted within this presentation were seeking higher education at East Texas State Teachers College. Rural women from places like Bonham, Greenville, Sulphur Springs, Honey Grove, and Winnsboro, who time after time write on their applications that they were "reared on a farm" and cite experience in "car[ing] for chickens," prove that the home management house in Commerce, Texas, created a physical rhetorical space where women asserted new authority and expertise in homemaking and forging careers as they moved from the farms of rural East Texas to the tables of middle class America.

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