

CLEAR THINKING, SOUND JUDGMENT, ESTABLISHED LEADERSHIP:

HELEN W. ATWATER

by

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(Under the Direction of Sharon Y. Nickols)

ABSTRACT

This thesis research examined Helen Atwater's contributions to the field of home economics as a writer, editor, administrator, and leader. Atwater's career began during the Progressive Era, a period that shaped the development of the field of home economics and influenced Atwater's career.

Using historical research methods, this study attempts to untangle the complexity of historical circumstances and situations influencing her life. The primary sources used included the American Home Economics Association Archives, Smith College Archives, and Wesleyan University Archives. This research used the theoretical foundation of constructionism, the idea that meaning is not found, but constructed.

This historical narrative creates a broader awareness about helping to shape the field of home economics, as well as women entering careers. The narrative illustrates Atwater's impact on home economics, and how she contributed to the field through the dissemination of information during the first quarter century of its existence.

INDEX WORDS: Helen Woodard Atwater, Home Economics, Historical Research, Archives

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CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

Home economics developed as a field of study and profession in the United States during the Progressive Era (1880-1920). In the context of dramatic change in industrialization, urbanization, and immigration at the turn of the 20th century, home economics (now known as family and consumer sciences) focused on improvement of living conditions, which also led to opportunities for women to have careers outside the home. The credit for founding home economics has been attributed to a group of scientists and educators who met at Lake Placid, New York in the early 1900s. Among the attendees at the 1901, 1902, and 1903 Lake Placid Conferences was W.O. Atwater. Atwater was also invited to the 1899 conference, but was unable to attend and sent his regrets (Lake Placid Conferences on Home Economics Proceedings, 1899-1907).

W.O. Atwater was a chemist who pioneered in the field of nutrition research (Cravens, 1990; Stage and Vincenti, 1997). While he helped to shape the field of home economics, it was his daughter, Helen Atwater, who was among the first professionals whose work as a writer brought home economics knowledge to the public. Helen Atwater's story has yet to be fully explored and told. The social and economic conditions of the times and Helen Atwater's contributions during an era when gender roles were being redefined is the focus of this thesis.

Little academic research has been completed on Atwater and her work, as she is overshadowed by her father, W.O. Atwater, in scholarly publications and biographies. Although overshadowed in history by her father, his work probably led her to a strong understanding and

enthusiasm for the field of nutrition and home economics as a whole. (See Appendix A for a timeline of events in Helen Atwater's life and career.) Following her graduation from Smith College in 1897, Atwater assisted in editing and preparing her father's research results for publication, including consumer publication (Smith College Archives, *Smith Alumnae Quarterly*, 1947). This work likely taught her the importance of accuracy when presenting scientific facts to the general population.

Atwater worked for 14 years with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in the Office of Home Economics from 1909 to 1923. While at the USDA, Atwater produced bulletins that disseminated information related to nutrition and other home economics topics. Specifically, Atwater worked extensively to make rural women aware of the importance of scientific information in food preparation (Finley & Siegal, 1985).

Atwater left the USDA in 1923 to work for the American Home Economics Association (AHEA) as the editor of the *Journal of Home Economics*. As editor, Atwater worked to inspire interest in home economics that, as she said, "helps us to understand how we can utilize our family resources of money, time, and personal talents to bring us the greatest returns in health, enjoyment, and useful" (Atwater, 1929, p. 3). Upon her death, colleagues proclaimed that Atwater's work with the *Journal of Home Economics* strongly contributed to the growth in stature and understanding of the field of Home Economics (Bane, Baldwin, & Van Deman, 1941).

Atwater's impact on the field of home economics shaped what the field is today as family and consumer sciences, but her impact needs to be reviewed through further in-depth study. Her journalism and editorial work was among the first of its kind in home economics. It is important

for family and consumer sciences professionals to remember where we came from and how we can continue to shape the future of our field through what our early leaders created.

The goal of this thesis is to conduct a review of Helen Atwater's work and contributions to the professional field of home economics. While conducting this research, the goal is to find information that will answer two primary research questions. These questions are as follows, but are not limited to only these questions.

What were Helen Atwater's contributions to the field of home economics/family and consumer sciences? (A specific focus is, exploring Atwater's contemporaneous contributions to the field.) How did the social and economic conditions of the Progressive Era influence Helen Atwater's professional work?

Secondary research questions are as follows: What or who were early influences in Helen Atwater's life (pre-college)? How did her college education foster professional growth for Helen Atwater? What influenced Helen Atwater as she progressed through the stages of her professional career?

The introduction and background for this research have already been presented. The remainder of this thesis is written in the following format. Chapter 2 presents a review of literature to provide information on the contextual setting for the development of home economics. The Progressive Era was the formative period for the field of home economics. An understanding of this era provides greater insight into the influential happenings of the time period for the profession of home economics and for Helen Atwater's life.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used to conduct this research: the techniques used for conducting the research, what sources of information were used, and the theoretical framework for the research. The methods are primarily qualitative in nature, mostly from

historical research methods. This chapter also presents why these methods are appropriate for this thesis. Chapter 4 presents a historiography of home economics, reviewing the historical work previously conducted on home economics, specifically looking at how historians have viewed home economics in past research. Chapter 5 presents the historical narrative about Helen Atwater's life. The final chapter presents the discussion, limitations, and conclusions from the results of the historical narrative.

CHAPTER 2.

LITERATURE REVIEW/CONTEXTUAL SETTING

This literature review presents the historical context for Helen Atwater's life and career. This section reviews literature about the Progressive Era in general, women in the Progressive Era, home economics emerging as a field of study and profession, and the history of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Office of Home Economics and the Cooperative Extension Service.

The Progressive Era was a defining period for the field of home economics as well as the life of Helen Atwater. An understanding of this era allows us to have greater insight into the influential happenings of the time period. This chapter helps to set the stage to examine and understand Helen Atwater's life and career.

Progressive Era

The decades between 1880 and 1920 constituted a period of such vital reform activity that they are referred to as the Progressive Era (Kulter & Katz, 1982). Millions of Americans organized in voluntary associations to find solutions to the problems created by industrialization, urbanization, and immigration (Jaycox, 2005). During the Progressive Era, the United States went through a period of major political, social, and economic reform. Although many of these wildly energetic reformers united in the Progressive Party of 1912, progressivism was not a single political movement, but a collection of coalitions agitating for changes (Gould, 1992).

By 1914, the national government had adopted policies to intervene in the workings of the economy and to regulate the behavior of individuals and corporations in society that would have seemed inconceivable to the politicians and public 25 years earlier. During Woodrow Wilson's term as President of the United States, the Federal Reserve System was created as a central banking mechanism, an income tax was adopted, national regulatory agencies (e.g., the Federal Trade Commission) were established, and the constitution was amended so that the people rather than state legislatures elected senators (Cooper, 1990).

The way Americans governed themselves in cities and states also underwent significant changes during the Progressive Era. Municipal governments saw a shift from a reliance on strong mayors and geographically-based city councils to newer concepts such as rule by commissioners linked to specific responsibilities such as fire and police or even city manager (Rice, 1977). The larger thrust was toward removing politics from how cities were run and relying on non-partisanship (Gould, 2001). Americans identified major social problems, called for an expanded role for the state, and pursued a more active regulatory government. The increased perception of urban problems was a major force in the progressive reform spirit. The ways in which Americans ran their government and ordered their lives were very different in 1914 than how they had been in 1890. Social and technological changes accounted for some of these transformations, but there was also a significant shift in the attitudes toward what government should do and how its affairs should be conducted.

In the process of reform, the United States became a more just and equitable nation than it had been in 1890 (Levine, 2000). Not all ills had been cured, but significant advances had taken place. Most importantly, the Progressive Era had defined the agenda of American domestic reform for much of the twentieth century that followed.

Higher education also changed as a result of these reforms. Academics were questioning the doctrines of limited government that had been part of the orthodoxy of college courses throughout the period after the Civil War. Before the 1870s, higher education in the United States consisted of small denominational colleges. These colleges had small numbers of faculty members that taught a fixed curriculum of classical languages and philosophy, trying to instill mental discipline and morality in students. Post-Civil War, scholars pursued specialized research, created modern academic disciplines, and taught preparation for the growing number of new academic disciplines (Diner, 1998).

New professional organizations, strongly linked to higher education and dedicated to expanding the role of the state, soon appeared (Gould, 2001). The economists, historians, and political scientists who taught these newer ideas in their classrooms during the 1880s and 1890s instilled a generation of their students with the precept that men and women of energy and devotion could create a better world for the people of the United States. Scholars created professional societies to disseminate the latest developments in each field through conferences and publications (Diner, 1998).

Women in the Progressive Era

The optimistic, can-do spirit of the age inspired many well-to-do and middle-class women to improve the lot of others. Even desperately poor women “lifted as they climbed” (Gould, 2001). American women believed that human nature, certainly human behavior, could be changed for the better, by education, societal reform, improved housing, healthier working conditions, and goodwill to others (Schneider & Schneider, 1993).

Women built upon their mothers' heritage of women's organized and informal networks as their main instrument to reform society. While their mothers had focused on educating and improving themselves and their families, women of the Progressive Era looked to improve communities and their nation through municipal housekeeping. Women's membership in existing societies and clubs increased and new associations were created (Frankel & Dye, 1991).

Although women were denied the vote through most of the period, nevertheless they exercised what they saw as their rights as citizens to shape public policy and create public institutions. Acting through such organizations as the Young Women's Christian Association, the National Consumers' League, professional associations, and trade unions, female reformers were at the forefront of the movement against child labor as well as the women's suffrage campaign (Frankel & Dye, 1991).

Women activists won minimum wage and maximum hour laws for women workers, promoted public health programs for pregnant women and babies, improved educational opportunities for both children and adults, and created an array of social welfare measures at the local, state, and federal levels. They even succeeded in creating the Children's Bureau (1912) and the Women's Bureau (1920) in the U.S. Department of Labor. All in all, women's activism created a more intimate relationship between citizens and their government during the Progressive Era (Frankel & Dye, 1991).

One institution that epitomized women's activism was the settlement house. Some American women started opening settlement houses around 1890 (Schneider & Schneider, 1993). Settlement houses were places where middle-class women (and sometimes men) went to live in working-class, usually immigrant, neighborhoods. Here, native-born women sought to acquaint their neighbors with "American" culture and government and to learn about the cultures

of the newest Americans. Over time, hundreds of settlements opened in cities all over the country, and they routinely offered day care and kindergartens for the children of working parents, health care, English and citizenship classes, a space for community theater, all kinds of classes and clubs for children and adults, libraries, and organizational space for unions and political associations (Gould, 2001).

Settlement houses tried to help the people by bringing activities, education, and a sympathetic presence to the neighborhoods. They were an attempt to relieve the over-accumulation of wealth at one end of society and the destitution at the other (Gould, 2001). Settlement houses became hotbeds of progressive reform. Progressive reformers, many women, created many agencies and policies that became institutionalized as a part of society in the United States.

Historical Beginnings of Home Economics

At the end of the nineteenth century, the higher education system was composed of institutions that were designed to prepare men in liberal arts education and for traditional careers. Women were mostly not allowed in this world. There was a small place for women in the system, mostly women from affluent and prominent families. In higher education, these women were allowed in elite schools to study in limited curricula.

Home economics as an academic field, as well as the education and social reforms that occurred during the Progressive Era, opened a door for women into academia. This change is demonstrated when viewing Census data from the National Center of Education Statistics. For example, in 1870 there were 11,000 women enrolled in institutions of higher education. Growth was seen in 1890 when there were 59,000 women enrolled in higher education. The growth

trend continued through the Progressive Era with 85,000 women enrolled in 1900, 140,000 women enrolled in 1910, and 283,000 women enrolled in 1920 (Solomon, 1985).

In 1862, the Morrill Land Grant Act was passed to increase the number of land-grant colleges in the United States. The government program provided land for state universities that agreed to begin a program to train students for practical fields. The newly created land-grant colleges opened programs to women.

Land-grant institutions offered courses that covered a much wider range of subjects than other institutions of higher education. Land-grant institutions focused more on hands-on and skill-based practices, such as agriculture and mechanical arts. By the 1870s, many Midwestern land-grant institutions were beginning to offer courses in domestic economy, domestic science, or home economics for women. The Iowa State Agricultural College (now Iowa State University) was the first to offer a course in “domestic economy” in 1872 (Iowa State University, 2006). These courses were aimed at teaching the management of the home and family through a more scientific approach. This was the beginning of the home economics discipline, and home economics soon became one of the basic offerings of land-grant schools.

In 1899, Ellen Richards called together leaders working in the evolving field of home economics to launch the formal home economics movement in the United States (Stage & Vincenti, 1997). A group of highly respected figures in early 20th century academics met at this conference to lay the groundwork for a home economics curriculum. They believed that it was important for students in primary and high schools to be offered courses that would open up professional opportunities for women in that time. The term “home economics” was accepted during the first Lake Placid Conference in 1899 (Lake Placid Conferences on Home Economics Proceedings, 1899-1907).

Ellen Richards and those attending the third Lake Placid Conference outlined the home economics movement as:

Home economics stands for:

The ideal home life of today unhampered by tradition of the past.

The resources of modern science to improve home life.

The freedom of the home from the dominance of things and their due subordination to ideals.

The simplicity in material surroundings that will free the spirit for the more important and permanent interests of home and society. (Weigley, 1974)

The Lake Placid Conferences were considered a success as they were the force behind the establishment of the American Home Economics Association (AHEA) and the beginning of publishing the *Journal of Home Economics*. AHEA began publishing its official organ, the *Journal of Home Economics*, in 1909. The *Journal of Home Economics* (now the *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*) was the principal source of information for all Association members. This journal is unique because it serves the interests of the home economics field as a whole, containing information in all subject matter areas.

Over the course of the 20th century, many federal government acts were passed that helped to contribute to the progression of the home economics discipline. The Smith-Lever Act in 1914, the Bureau of Home Economics Act of 1927, and the George-Dean Act of 1937 all issued funding for research in continuation and support of the field of home economics. Without funding and support from government legislation, it is hard to imagine that the home economics discipline would be as widespread as it is.

USDA and the Office of Home Economics

In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln shaped agricultural history in the United States by signing several acts. First he signed the act authorizing the United States Department of

Agriculture (USDA). The Homestead Act, encouraging settlement of public domain lands, and the Morrill Land Grant Act as discussed earlier established land grant colleges in every state and placed instruction in agriculture and home economics in higher education (Brunner & Yang, 1949).

Congress soon realized that to be effective, the educational function of land grant universities needed to be supplemented with research capabilities. The Hatch Act was passed in 1887 to primarily establish experiment stations where universities could conduct research on issues primarily rural citizens faced. While individual research agendas were set by each station, most conducted investigations to solve problems and suggest improvements in the food and agriculture industries (Kerr, 1987).

The Smith-Lever Agricultural Extension Act in 1914 created the Cooperative Extension Service and provided funds for the cooperative administration of extension education by the USDA and the state land grant colleges (Kerr, 1987). The act expanded USDA's cooperative role in Agriculture and Home Economics. The history and formation of the Cooperative Extension Service established a cooperative bond between the USDA and the nation's land grant colleges by allocating annual federal funding for the dissemination of research. This was a way to improve the productivity of farms which in turn was expected to build up the economy and also help communities (National Agricultural Library Special Collections, 2007).

The basic philosophy of the program was to "help people help themselves." Home demonstration agents worked with farm families, community leaders, and urban families to help them analyze family living situations, recognize major problems, and develop programs that aided individuals and families in making desired changes (Rasmussen, 1989). One of an agent's major responsibilities was to convey the results of research in home economics to families in a

form which they could understand and apply to their everyday lives (United States National Archives and Records Administration, 1995).

County home demonstration and agricultural agents were employed by their state colleges and were responsible both to the college and to the people of the county for the development and conduct of the extension educational program. Home demonstration agents conducted their work through group meetings, clinics, office and home visits, and by using exhibits, radio, television, and the press.

The Cooperative Extension Service work consisted of three general areas: agriculture, home economics, and 4-H. The homemaking phase of extension work brought families the latest research and information to help them achieve better daily living (National Agricultural Library Special Collections, 2007). Agents encouraged women to use the time, energy, money, and abilities of the family members to achieve the goals that the family considered to be important. Extension workers offered advice on how to prepare good, nutritious, low-cost meals; select and buy clothes for the family; make the home more convenient, attractive, and comfortable; and make housekeeping easier.

At the USDA, historically home economics has been housed in several agency units. A partial list of the agencies have included the Office of Experiment Stations (1894-1915), Office of Home Economics in States Relations Service (1915-1923), Bureau of Home Economics (BHE, 1923-1942), and Agricultural Research Administration (1942-1943) (United States National Archives and Records Administration, 1995).

The functions of the Office of Home Economics during Atwater's career, as well as the other agencies, included conducting research on food, fiber, and other agricultural products; housing and household buying; textiles and clothing; use of income; and household management

and equipment. The Office of Home Economics was established in the State Relations Service to carry out certain provisions of the Smith-Lever Act and to continue nutrition studies conducted since 1894 by the Office of Experiment Stations (United States National Archives and Records Administration, 1995).

CHAPTER 3.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the techniques of how this research was conducted, what the sources of information were, and why these methods were appropriate for this thesis. The first section of the chapter discusses the general methodological framework that was used for this research. The next section presents the theoretical framework that guided the analysis and interpretation of the research. The following section will discuss the sources used for this research and then the final section discusses some of the limitations of the research.

Methodological Framework

Historical research, including this research, attempts to go beyond constructing and describing the way it was, and seeks to untangle the complexity of causes that move human events. In historical research, there are two basic ways to develop and answer research questions, deductively and inductively. Deductively is through a critical review of existing historical literature, while inductively is through the direct inspection of primary or archival sources. This research, as in previous studies, incorporates both methods of framing questions, alternating between critical reviews and archival visits to refine and answer research questions.

When choosing research procedures to conduct historical research, there is tremendous methodological latitude. This has strengths when reworking research, but also causes problems when not knowing how to proceed. The only requirement for selecting research procedures is that they clearly tie the data to the research question in a way that allows the development of

interpretation (Smith & Lux, 1993). This research uses a combination of case study, library, and archival research as appropriate methods of procedure.

Historical analysis involves investigation, synthesis, and interpretation. (Refer to Appendix B for the conceptual model of historical research from Smith and Lux (1993)). The purpose of the investigative research stage is to answer the research question by using the selected procedure. It involves discovering the data sources to establish the facts and events that surrounded Helen Atwater's life and career. The critical task here is to distinguish between facts (those lacking causal relevance) and the special category of historical facts (those bits of knowledge from which we derive causal understanding) (Carr, 1961).

Historical facts furnish the raw data used for historical analysis, but the possibilities for uncovering new facts in documentary remains are so vast that historians differentiate between mere facts and those special historical facts that can contribute to causal explanations of change (Carr, 1961; Smith & Lux, 1993). The criterion that guides the selective process for differentiating mere facts from historical facts is relevance. The status of historical facts depends on their relevance to a causal explanation of change and what is deemed relevant or not relevant is a question of interpretation (Smith & Lux, 1993). The selection of relevant historical facts moves from the investigation stage into the synthesis stage. This stage looks at historical causes and explanations, while the researcher brings these facts together into an explanatory narrative. Historical narrative is a form of explanation that tells a story about what possibly caused the change between two historical moments.

A valid historical narrative must satisfy several criteria. First, the narrative needs to contain all of the facts relevant to the question that is under investigation. Secondly, the

narrative cannot contain facts that are not relevant to that question. Finally, it must adequately explain the change that is the question's subject (Danto, 1985).

To develop any explanations of change, this research recognizes that factors distant in time are necessary to create an environment in which the focal time period can occur, but are insufficient alone to precipitate it (Smith & Lux, 1993). Explaining change also requires the researcher to consider Helen Atwater's state of mind and motivations for actions. Events and actions are not solely a result of environmental or situational factors; they are also shaped by human reactions, and these reactions may be motivated at a transparent, unconscious, or conscious level.

At this point, the researcher's primary task changes from identifying and explaining change to sorting information and events into categories. Then an analysis must be developed. This development occurs after articles of information have been collected to create the data set being used for the research (Megill, 1989). There are no listed steps to follow when conducting an analysis of archival materials. Without specific guidelines, it is the responsibility of the researcher to review the materials in the mindset of the time period, in order to make the appropriate interpretations from the materials (Babbie, 2001). The understanding that the researcher develops is what brings meaning to what is being analyzed (Babbie, 2001).

In addition to having the right mindset when reviewing materials, it is important that researchers have a keen eye and deliberate questions to ask when reviewing the documents. The specific analysis will vary by each specific document, but the general thought will be the same throughout the analysis. Aminzade and Laslett (1995) provide appropriate guidelines in their contribution to a 1995 book from Earl Babbie. It is first important to review who created the materials, why they were created, and how they were created. The second set of things to

analyze include what possible biases there are in the documents, what was represented and contained in the document, and how these documents impact the vision of the researcher. It is also important to review how the document was organized and what categories the author used. Finally, they recommend thinking about what issues the documents shed light on and what type of conclusions can be made from the documents.

Once the research has been woven between the historical facts from the investigation stage into a causal narrative during the synthesis stage, it is time to enter the final component of historical analysis, the interpretation stage. This research about Helen Atwater attempts to have a causal narrative that answers the presented research questions, developing its interpretive significance. It is here that the research addresses the implications of the narrative for the research questions. The task at this point of the research process is similar to interpreting experimental results. The historical narrative may be subject to various interpretations, but it is the researcher's job to determine what the appropriate and best interpretation is (Smith & Lux, 1993).

Like experimental data, the narrative imposes some empirical limits on interpretation; however, historical questions are, by definition, open-ended and thus permit some latitude. The answer to the research question constructed at this stage of historical analysis ties the research to possible interpretive ends.

Theoretical Framework

Historical research in the content areas of family and consumer sciences has made use of methods and theories developed by the social sciences. Historical research is traditionally more descriptive than explanatory and more concerned with illuminating specific events than with

generalizing across time and space. As a result, much historical research in family and consumer sciences has been limited and mostly concerned with theory development and frameworks.

Historical researchers, with their fundamental interest in great changes over the past several centuries, have often adopted theoretical models developed by social scientists to help interpret historical changes. This research on Helen Atwater works under the theoretical foundation of constructionism. Simply put, constructionism is the idea that meaning is not found, it is constructed.

Crotty (1998) illustrates that “constructionism is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p 42).

The constructionist viewpoint is that an object does not just have meaning, but meanings are to be constructed when researchers interact with the setting they are interpreting. For this research, the author is attempting to construct meaning in the life and work of Helen Atwater. The Progressive Era is the world that is being entered to construct appropriate meanings from Helen Atwater’s life. This world includes understanding the workings of the economic, political, and social environments at this time period as the context in which the field of home economics and Helen Atwater’s career developed.

Sources for Research

This study was conducted primarily by accessing secondary historical documents related to Helen Atwater’s work. These documents included for example, government publications,

publications from AHEA, records of work from AHEA, and records of Atwater's scientific research.

As stated previously, Atwater worked for 14 years (1909-1923) with the United States Department of Agriculture in the Office of Home Economics. While at the USDA she produced bulletins that disseminated information related to nutrition and other home economics related topics. Specifically, Atwater worked extensively to make rural women aware of the importance of scientific information in food preparation. Through a search of the National Archives, there was minimal information located about the Office of Home Economics and nothing located about Helen Atwater's work while there. Neither was the USDA a viable source for information for this research.

Atwater left the USDA in 1923 to work for the American Home Economics Association (AHEA) as the editor of the *Journal of Home Economics*. To locate information about Atwater's work with the AHEA, historical research was conducted on site at Cornell University. Cornell is the location of the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS) Project Archives. The American Home Economics Association (AHEA) – AAFCS historical collection is housed at the Carl A. Kroch Library at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.

The AHEA – AAFCS Project Archives permits viewings of historical documents, allowing for absorption of important information often within historical context. Working with these documents increased the ability to assess and understand what was happening historically when these documents were written giving greater insight into the contributions of Helen Atwater. Materials from Helen Atwater's years as editor of the *Journal of Home Economics* are not available anywhere other than these archives.

Specific work was conducted with the assistance and supervision of Sarah Keen, Cornell archivist for the AHEA – AAFCS Project Archives. She supplied the researcher with the master list of contents of the AHEA – AAFCS Project Archives. The list was then analyzed by the researcher looking for areas in which Helen Atwater was involved. Areas specifically examined included *Journal of Home Economics* while Atwater was Editor, other publications from Atwater, records of speeches by Atwater, and other areas in which Atwater was potentially involved.

The materials from the AHEA – AAFCS Project Archives were somewhat varied in type and contents. The researcher was able to locate materials related to Atwater’s work with the *Journal*, international committee work, and also general information about work at AHEA. This material was in various forms including correspondence, essays, published materials, and written reports.

Materials retrieved from the archives were reviewed and analyzed. The specific analysis conducted varied by specific items but focused primarily on content and impact of the item on internal (within the field of Home Economics) audiences and external (specified or general population) audiences. The analysis was constructed according to historical research methods and also using qualitative and quantitative research analysis methods as appropriate.

To piece together Atwater’s life and career contributions it was important to access information on Atwater’s biographical information. A source for biographical information was through links at her alma mater, Smith College. From the Smith College Archives, the researcher located information about Helen Atwater receiving an honorary doctorate and a photograph of all honorary doctorate recipients from 1943. Twenty-nine pages of letters written in support of Atwater receiving an honorary doctorate from friends and colleagues were also

retrieved from these archives. This information was pieced together to form an appropriate time line for Atwater's work (See Appendix A). The letters, mostly from 1941, gave personal accounts of Atwater's personal life, career, and impacts from those that worked with her and knew her well. Also available in the Smith archives was a copy of the *Smith Alumnae Quarterly*, a publication that contained an obituary for Atwater. The obituary contained information related to her career and also other professional involvement.

Another source of information was archival material from Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. Wesleyan University was where W.O. Atwater was employed for some time and Middletown was where Helen Atwater spent much of her childhood years. The archives at Wesleyan University contain a collection of the Atwater Family Papers. This collection was rich with information about the Atwater family and contained information specifically about Helen Atwater.

To begin this search, the researcher started by looking at sources of biographical information on Atwater primarily focusing on information from Smith College. With only some information at Smith, the researcher moved to the AHEA—AAFCS Project Archives. A large part of this search took place onsite at the AHEA – AAFCS Project Archives. This search started by communicating with the project archivist, to attempt to become acclimated with the contents of the archives before visiting the archives. During the visit, the researcher viewed documents deemed relevant to Atwater's work. Copies and notes were made onsite at the archives and then were reviewed and analyzed following the visit to the archives.

Following the Smith and AHEA—AAFCS Archives, there was still a gap in the information about Atwater. To locate more information and to increase the validity of the research, the researcher contacted an archivist at Wesleyan University. While unable to visit the

archive on site, communication was sustained with an archivist familiar with the Atwater Family Papers. The archivist reviewed the materials in the collection and prepared an inventory of topics materials relevant to Helen Atwater and sent the notes for the researcher for study offsite. Following the review, the researcher requested copies of the materials which were sent to the researcher for review off-site. In total, 718 pages (copies) of archival materials were provided by Wesleyan University.

There were two specific boxes in the Atwater Family Papers that contained materials related to Helen Atwater and were utilized by this research. The boxes were designated as box 6 and box 7. Box 6 was labeled as biographical information. In this box, there were a few copies of short biographies that summarized her career and work in Home Economics, accounts of international travel, surveys that Atwater completed for the National Roster of Scientific and Specialized Personnel, information related to the Helen W. Atwater International Fellowship, as well as work and personal correspondence.

Within box 7, there were two major categories of materials. First was information relating to Smith College. This was mostly about working with other Smith alumnae and also the possibility of starting a home economics curriculum at Smith. Correspondence was mostly with Smith colleagues but also included correspondence with the President of Smith College. The other major category from box 7 was speeches and articles written by Atwater. This was a collection of a great deal of her articles, as well as speeches, notes for speeches, radio show programs, and articles in the media (technical and popular publications).

After collecting information and viewing the historical documents, the next step in the research process was to organize the information. The organization of this material was broken down into categories based on types of material. The materials were broken into categories by

the type of career work and materials from professional involvement in the field of home economics. Type of career work included scientific research, work from the USDA, and work from AHEA as editor of the *Journal of Home Economics*. Materials from professional involvement in the field of home economics included speeches delivered, professional articles, and other fruits of her labor. A final category was personal information, relating to information describing Atwater's personal characteristics.

Following the organization and formation of a narrative, interpretive analysis occurred for all documents found, as discussed above. Following the analysis and interpretation of the documents, discussion of any lasting effects of Atwater's contributions is presented (See Chapter 5).

Limitations of Sources

This research used several forms of primary and secondary data, but has limitations based on the data sources used. The various sources utilized, American Home Economics Association—American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AHEA—AAFCS) Project Archives, Smith College Archives, and Wesleyan University Archives, all contained information from Atwater's life and career. Unfortunately there was little information in relation to specific daily tasks that Atwater performed at her jobs. This limits inferences about what Atwater's responsibilities were on a regular basis. There was also a lack of information about Atwater's childhood and college years, but there was limited information located from that time period but it was not a substantial amount. The researcher was not able to make many inferences for this time period in her life and the impact those experiences had in her professional career.

The National Archives, which house the materials of the United States Department of Agriculture and also the Office of Home Economics, were not a useful source of data. They lacked information and materials that were accessible and related to Atwater specifically. This leaves some questions unanswered not only about the impact of her work and career from her position at the Office of Home Economics, but also the field of home economics at this time period.

The primary sources used for this research consisted mostly of personal correspondence, essays, and other statements written about Atwater by colleagues and friends who admired her personally and professionally. This gives bias to the results, but other data sources were not found. This bias may be seen in the extent of positive writings and comments about Atwater. While these items are still valid, they may be more positive than the reality due to when and why they were written.

This research used some secondary sources, consisting mostly of materials and documents published by Atwater or professionals that worked with Atwater. There were three main categories used. The first category included materials published by Atwater. These materials were reviewed for the target audience, depth of knowledge, and quality. The information derived from these documents was used along with primary sources to create the narrative. The second category was much more limited and consisted of published information about Atwater and her work. This was also used with the primary sources to see how others viewed Atwater. The final type of secondary source used was materials relating to the developments in the field of home economics, AHEA, and general happenings in the United States. This helped to create the environment and illustrate the social and political values of the time period being reviewed.

While there was personal correspondence from friends and colleagues of Atwater that discussed her editorials and writing in the *Journal*, it was not possible to specifically identify these editorials. The editorials in the *Journal* during this time were unsigned and varied in titles. It was not possible to document the information as Atwater's work; to keep the narrative valid, the editorial writing was not included as a separate source for analysis in this research.

CHAPTER 4.

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF HOME ECONOMICS

Historians have not extensively studied the field of home economics. When it has been a topic of research, the treatment could be described as ambivalent. Many female historians and feminists have primarily viewed home economics as little more than a conspiracy to keep women in the home. For example, feminist Robin Morgan spoke at the 1972 American Home Economics Association convention, declaring, “As a radical feminist, I am here addressing the enemy” (What Robin Morgan Said at Denver, 1973).

Historians’ approach to home economics fits primarily within three frameworks of thought. The first framework emphasizes the work of Catharine Beecher and judges the area of home economics as a perpetuation of the nineteenth-century “cult of domesticity.” The second framework focuses on the careers of Lillian Gilbreth and Christine Frederick, underscoring the relationship between home economics and scientific management. The final framework utilizes the views from the 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan.

Catherine Beecher was one of the chief proponents of the “cult of domesticity,” devoting much of her writing to domestic and household topics both ideological and practical. The purpose of her exercise was to discover how ideology affects the built environment. In her teachings and writings Beecher announced the power of women in the family by advising them to assume control over domestic affairs (Beecher, 1841; Beecher, 1869). To Beecher, the role of women as mothers served a great purpose in the health of American democracy (Stowe, 1884). She believed women’s education should prepare them for roles of responsibility and that higher

education for women should train them as teachers – a natural public extension of women’s role in the family (Beecher, 1841; Beecher, 1869).

In the second framework focusing on the relationship between home economics and scientific management, Gilbreth and Frederick both were influential efficiency experts and promoters of new products for the home at the beginning of the twentieth century. Frederick defended and promoted advertising on the grounds that it affirmed women’s role in the home by encouraging them to buy new labor-saving technologies. According to Frederick, the purpose of scientific management was to save time, effort, and to make things run more smoothly (Frederick, 1925). Similarly, Gilbreth viewed homemaking as the finest job in the world, and her work aimed to make homemaking as interesting and satisfying as it is important (Gilbreth, 1927).

Some women’s historians have used the works of Frederick and Gilbreth to construct gender-specific spheres to explore woman’s place in the nineteenth century. The concept of two domains, public and private, male and female, can still be useful largely because nineteenth-century social commentators themselves used the metaphor (Kerber, 1988). In 2003, Janice Williams Rutherford reviewed the life and work of Frederick in her book, *Selling Mrs. Consumer: Christine Frederick and the Rise of Household Efficiency*. Rutherford’s work adds important depth to the understanding of the domestic side of America’s efficiency movement and the sources of its appeal.

Third is the framework heavily influenced by Betty Friedan, who in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) blamed home economics for the creation of “the happy housewife heroine” of the 1950s. Home economics as an academic discipline was blamed by second wave feminists for oppressing women into domestic lives. Friedan believed that home economics was forced on

female students, leading them to lives as housewives. Work of other feminists has supported Friedan's writings (Ehrenreich & English, 1978).

In 1987, Glenna Matthews depicted the changing attitudes toward domesticity in the United States, from widespread reverence for the home in the nineteenth century to the lack of respect and attention received by housewives into the late 20th century. Matthews argued that the culture of professionalism in the late nineteenth century and the culture of consumption that came to fruition in the 1920s combined to kill off the "cult of domesticity." She also denounced the home economics movement as an "unwitting" force for the further erosion of the homemaker's prestige. Matthews pointed out the modern women's movement has emphasized competition for male power, and only recently has recognized the central importance of the home as an institution (Matthews, 1987).

In the more recent reviews of home economics, a new approach has developed. This work views the issues and information from both politics and professionalization from the lenses of women's history. Paula Baker and Anne Firor Scott broadened the definition of politics to move beyond voting and office holding and include the work women have done organizing for change. Baker's article on the "domestication of politics" moved women into the center of studies of U.S. political culture, before the movement for women's suffrage (Baker, 1984). Scott's book *Natural Allies* (1991) depicted the way women's voluntary associations shaped America's social and political landscape.

In 1997, Stage and Vincenti argued that home economics constitutes a classic case of the interplay of politics and domesticity in women's history. At the turn of the century, home economics politicized domesticity by urging women to use their skills in "that larger household the city" (Lake Placid Conferences on Home Economics Proceedings, 1899-1907). Home

economics, with the social movement of settlement houses, promoted women's involvement in public policy under the rubric of social and municipal housekeeping (Stage & Vincenti, 1997).

Stage and Vincenti edited the compilation of essays while coordinating research on various aspects of women and home economics, seeking new ways to examine developments over the twentieth century. This process explored the ways in which race, class, and gender have influenced women's educational options in colleges and universities, and career options in hospitals, business, and industry. The work of Stage and Vincenti has been the most comprehensive historical review of home economics to date, but other individual research efforts shed light on the development of the field at various historical periods.

As the study of home economics moved toward a more complex rendering of the dynamics which gave rise to professional home economics, a greater understanding of the obstacles women encountered and the strategies they employed to gain legitimacy as the field developed in the twentieth century. Through the book they edited, Stage and Vincenti attempted to permit a unified story of home economics, created by a willingness from the contributing authors to revisit the subject of home economics with neither condemnation nor defensiveness. The book, *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession*, was compiled with home economics professionals and historians working together to tell the story of home economics. The work included new ideas that place home economics in the twentieth century within the context of the development of women's professions.

A framework to view home economics in terms of professionalization has emerged from recent scholarship in women's studies. Women were not allowed employment in male dominated career fields, so parallel professional fields were developed by and for women. These

fields worked to standardize and professionalize fields in which predominately women were working in order to gain legitimacy in a male-dominated world.

There have been two mindsets used to examine women and professionalization by historians. The first is highlighted in *Unequal Colleagues* (1987) wherein authors Penina Glazer and Miriam Slater argued that professionalization disadvantaged women and was essentially causing adverse work in social reform. On the other hand, Robyn Muncy in *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform* (1991) asserts that, in fact, professionalization did not oppose reform, but served as a central piece of the culture of female influence in American reform.

In 1982, Joan Jacobs Brumberg and Nancy Tomes raised issues about women and the process of professionalization. Their article is central to the study of women's occupations in the twentieth century. It examined how historical writing before 1982 handled the issue of women in the professions, both male-dominated ones (such as medicine, law, and the academy) and also the feminized service professions (such as teaching, nursing, social work, and librarianship). The article has also increased interest in research from academia in the areas of social work, nursing, and other gendered professions. Brumberg and Tomes noted that while historians have written extensively about upper class and working class women during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they have avoided the complexities of the middle-class female professional. The authors argued that due to the constraints family and society placed on women, the professionalization process was different for women than for men. Home economics is a prime example of a field that enables researchers to evaluate the structures and strategies women used to increase their activities and opportunities outside the home.

In contrast to viewing home economics in terms of professionalization, some historians have reviewed home economics in terms of household management and technologies. In 1983,

Ruth Schwartz Cowan, reviewed the efficiencies of the evolving household technologies from the pre-industrial revolution to the postwar years. The analysis provided some insight into how historians view housework and its technology as a whole, including home economics as a part of the developments (Cowan, 1983).

The topic of home economics in higher education also has been treated in various ways by historians. Some viewed home economics as a way to sideline women by relegating them to traditionally female spheres of home and child care. This interpretation ignores the fact that no home economics department was designed, organized, or run by a man (Elias, 2003), ignoring the fact that women were competent to be faculty and administrators in higher education. In addition, some educated women during the early 1900s expressed concerns that academic home economics would draw students away from other disciplines. They worried that the popularity of home economics would slow the process of women entering other areas of higher education and attaining educational and intellectual equality (Solomon, 1985).

The area of history has had few in-depth reviews of women and higher education and is even more lacking in specific studies of home economics in higher education. In 1990, Lynn Gordon addressed the broad issue of women in higher education in her book *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*. Her book includes reviews of the vast ways women entered the world of higher education, her approach is to use case studies of institutions. Her review included the University of Chicago where Marion Talbot was working to promote and incorporate home economics in the curriculum. Gordon's review was focused mostly on how the women were included on campus and how they found their own fit. Her review of Marion Talbot focused on setting up an academic department while working with women, rather than on home economics, a common occurrence in historical reviews such as this (Gordon, 1990).

More recently, family and consumer sciences professionals have taken an interest in historical research, to specifically review the heritage of their own field. This research has two major areas of interest. First is research reviewing the early beginnings of the field of home economics, focusing on the Lake Placid Conferences. The second area of research has been on specific leaders who have made contributions to the field. Much of this research has strong foundations in the meaning of the field and content areas as it was conducted within the field. The drawback is that these researchers for the most part are not trained historians; this becomes an issue when a narrative is not properly developed from the available original and secondary sources.

The movement of home economics developed as a response to modernity, offering women a way to manage their homes in a changing world. Home economics did not just offer technical education skills, but also an education incorporating philosophical concepts of life. It was also significant because it created roles of authority for female professionals (Tabit, 2004). This chapter outlined the context in which home economics has been reviewed by historians. The next chapter presents a historical narrative reviewing the life and career of one specific home economics leader, Helen Atwater.

CHAPTER 5.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The Early Years: 1876 -1897

Helen Atwater was born May 29, 1876 in Somerville, Massachusetts and spent most of her childhood years in Middletown, Connecticut (Wesleyan University, Box 6). Atwater was the daughter of scientist W.O. Atwater and his wife Marcia Woodard Atwater who was a trained musician (Carpenter, 1994). She was the oldest of two children in the family, her brother, Charles was nine years younger (Carpenter, 1994). From the ages 6 to 8 years old and also from 10 to 17 years old, she lived in Europe. Throughout her childhood Atwater attended various private and public schools in the United States (in Middletown), Germany, and France. While attending German and French schools, she spoke those languages instead of English (Wesleyan University, Box 6). The Atwater family lived abroad as a part of W.O. Atwater's career in nutrition research.

Throughout her childhood years, Atwater heard discussions of social and political issues, art, and literature, along with scientific research, by the distinguished men and women who came from all over the world for conferences or for study in W.O. Atwater's Middletown laboratories. These men and women were entertained at the Atwater home, where the young Atwater was exposed to their conversations. Even before starting university studies, she acquired the background for her interest in international good will. This exposure translated through Atwater's career in her strong interest in international affairs and often appeared in her

conversations and showed itself throughout her work (American Home Economics Association [AHEA], 1929).

Atwater attended Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts to pursue higher education. She entered Smith in 1894 with knowledge of French and German that she had gained from her time in European schools. She also exhibited an interest in the studies and experiments in human nutrition of her father (“Helen Atwater,” 1948). Atwater attended Smith College from September, 1894 to June, 1897 when she received a baccalaureate degree in Modern Languages (Wesleyan University, Box 6).

Smith College was part of an elite group of colleges that were called the Seven Sisters Colleges. The Seven Sisters were eastern schools, including Vassar, Wellesley, Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Mount Holyoke, Radcliffe, and Smith. These schools became fully developed in the 1890s and demonstrated a belief in a special mission for educated women (Gordon, 1990). Smith was founded in 1875 (Solomon, 1985). Collegiate women of the Progressive Era were a transitional generation. They were not of the Victorian teachings of separatism of gender, but not of equality in education. They became the bridge toward modern education.

In the time of the Progressive Era, women at gendered schools established a unique campus life. They linked what was being taught in the classroom with developing extracurricular activities. Schools created student government associations and honor codes, founding campus branches of settlements and other reform organizations, and began broadening their perspective on women’s careers (Gordon, 1990). Without male students, women were allowed to take on leadership roles on college campuses.

The changes in higher education through the Progressive Era enabled many of the schools to adapt goals of productivity for women. Dr. L. Clarke Seelye, the first president of

Smith College, set out to improve the standard for the higher education for women. He used the phrase “intelligent gentlewomen” to encourage the students to seek out and stimulate their intellectual curiosity (Bane, Baldwin, & Van Deman, 1941). This gave them a well-rounded education with grounding in science, literature, art, logic, and ethics. In this tradition, Atwater completed her college education in three years instead of four. She then went on to exhibit these characteristics in her professional career (Bane et al., 1941). Atwater was exposed to the many changes and opportunities developing at Smith College during her enrollment there.

A Professional Career in Home Economics

While Atwater did not earn her degree in home economics, it was the field that she considered her field during her career. When specifying her field of work, Atwater responded that home economics was her subject matter and editing was her skill. She indicated her specialization in the area of consumer organizations and education, with greatest specialization or proficiency in home economics, nutrition, use of family resources, and housing and household management (Wesleyan University, Box 6).

Atwater’s professional career was a unique career and the positions she held were inaugural positions. After 10 years serving in an apprentice-type role as her father’s research and editorial assistant, Atwater moved to develop her own independent, distinguished career. She served 14 years on the staff of the Office of Home Economics of the United States Department of Agriculture before becoming the first full-time editor of the *Journal of Home Economics* in 1923 (“Helen Atwater,” 1948).

Hands on Training: Apprentice to W.O. Atwater

After her graduation from Smith, Atwater went to work as research and editorial assistant for her father. During this time she also did some popular writing in the fields of home economics and nutrition under her own name. For example, Atwater published Farmer's Bulletins through the United States Department of Agriculture while working with her father. Examples of these include: Bread: The Principles of Bread Making (1900) and Poultry As Food (1903) (American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences [AAFCS] Records, Box 273).

In the work with her father, Atwater assisted in preparing scientific material for publication. Her unique knowledge of the scientists and leaders in social movements who visited in her home gave her a familiar acquaintance with new developments and social values of nutrition (Wesleyan University, Box 6). While specifics of this work are still unknown, it is believed that Atwater felt this apprenticeship was a very meaningful experience that she carried with her through her career. In 1937, when giving advice to home economics students interested in writing, Atwater encouraged students to complete an apprentice job to assist in developing important writing and editing skills (H. W. Atwater, personal communication, April 15, 1937).

Her early career opportunities may have been somewhat dampened by her father's declining health. Late in 1904, W.O. Atwater suffered from a disabling stroke, which confined him to his home for the next three years. During this time Atwater and her mother cared for him (Carpenter, 1994). It is believed that during this time Atwater continued working with her father's research and publications.

United States Department of Agriculture: Office of Home Economics

When Atwater joined the staff at the Office of Home Economics in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), she already had wide experience as an editor and author of scientific publications of both technical and popular character (AHEA, 1929). During her time in the Office of Home Economics she held various positions (specific titles unknown). Her journalistic-type duties included doing general editorial work, writing popular bulletins and articles, compiling reports, and editing manuscripts (technical, semi-technical, and popular writings). Atwater also conducted official correspondence in regard to the work of the Office, including cooperation with professional and business agencies, occasionally acting in charge of the Office, and she also represented the Office of Home Economics on committees and at conferences (Wesleyan University, Box 6).

Atwater's publications while at the Office of Home Economics were broad in topic, but they were always written for the consumer and generally about food and nutrition. In Farmer's Bulletins, some of the topics Atwater wrote about included Bread and Bread Making (1910), Honey and Its Uses in the Home (1915), and The Food Value and Uses of Poultry (1916) (AAFCS Records, Boxes 195 and 273). In a series co-authored with Caroline Hunt, the Farmer's Bulletins published "How to Select Foods" in 1917. The series contained three publications; I. What the Body Needs, II. Cereal Foods, and III. Foods Rich in Proteins (AAFCS Records, Box 273). While this is not a complete list, it illustrates some of Atwater's publications directed to consumers. Atwater also published technical information for professionals working in the area of home economics and nutrition. In 1917, Atwater published "A Guide to the Nation's Dietary Needs" in the 1917 *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* (AAFCS Records, Boxes 494 and 197).

As a pioneer in scientific work and publication in the United States, Atwater devoted her work to increasing the national interest in better knowledge of the value of food. She contributed to this through her publications spreading accurate knowledge of nutrition and the encouragement of research by staff in the Office of Home Economics. The organization she was largely instrumental in establishing became the primary means for providing the rapid dissemination of facts concerning nutrition and its importance to every part of the United States (M. M. Sampson, personal communication, February 9, 1943).

American Home Economics Association: Editor of the Journal of Home Economics

In 1922 at the American Home Economics Association (AHEA) meeting in Corvallis, Oregon the AHEA executive committee decided that the *Journal of Home Economics* needed a full-time editor. The decision was made for two reasons. First the *Journal* was growing and a full-time editor was needed to meet the growing demands made upon the *Journal* through the development of Association interests (K. Fischer, personal communication, November 2, 1922). The second reason was to address the increasing dissatisfaction with the *Journal* from Association members. The executive committee determined that appointing a younger and better trained editor to take action with the *Journal* would assist in combating this dissatisfaction (M. Sweeney, personal communication, May 2, 1922). With the intent to hire the first full-time editor starting in July of 1923, the Association worked to find the appropriate person for the editorship. Meeting the target date, Atwater began as the full-time editor of the *Journal of Home Economics* in July, 1923.

Atwater's work in scholarly editing of the *Journal of Home Economics* was credited with making the *Journal* an outstanding and authoritative publication in its field (C. K. Haskell,

personal communication, dated February 17, 1941). As editor, Atwater had many responsibilities tied not only to the *Journal*, but also to the Association as a whole. She was responsible for assembling, editing, and seeing through publication all the material in the *Journal*, including contributed articles both general and technical; for arranging for and writing book notes; and conducting surveys of the current literature. Atwater wrote six to ten pages of editorials each month for the issues of the *Journal* (Wesleyan University, Box 6).

She was responsible for determining the policies as well as setting and maintaining the standards of this professional organ. Atwater contributed to the form and policy of all other publications of the Association. At the same time she represented the Association at many professional, education, and business meetings, and represented the Association on many other occasions (Wesleyan University, Box 6). In addition to editing the *Journal*, she edited the *AHEA Bulletin* and the *National Magazine of Home Economics Student Clubs* (Bane et al., 1941).

Atwater's responsibilities included preparing many pieces of information for formal release from AHEA. In 1935, Atwater's work was used before a United States Senate Committee. On behalf of AHEA Atwater wrote and submitted a statement to the hearing on the Wagner public housing bill before the Senate Committee on Education and Labor. The statement presented a brief background on the Association and its expertise. Atwater made general statements about the Association's belief about the impact of housing and family life with a theoretical base. She also included the fact that the Association had public housing as a current issue at their last business meeting. The memorandum concluded with the stance of "urging Congress to consider the possibility of federal assistance to a program of housing for low-income groups" ("Public Housing Need", 1935). The bill finally passed in an amended form

in 1937 and once signed by the President it created a federal program on long-term housing to improve low-rent housing (Pundt, 1980).

While editing the *Journal*, Atwater commented that the editing process is in some ways “like doing a jigsaw puzzle,” because the process was “putting together seemingly unrelated pieces so that together they made a picture of home economics activities and progress” (Wesleyan University, Box 6). While Atwater was editor, the picture that she created with the *Journal* needed to include information and activities of the five divisions of home economics subject matter. They were designated as: the family and its relationships, family economics, the house and its management, food and nutrition, and textiles and clothing. Atwater also found it important to include all the environments where home economics was being used – in schools, in the agricultural extension service, in social work, in institution management, and in commercial concerns, without forgetting everyday homemaking and family life in the *Journal*. The *Journal*, according to Atwater, was “to duly report progress in each of the areas and with the just amount of emphasis” (Wesleyan University, Box 6).

Under Atwater’s leadership the *Journal* kept up with the trends in home economics in the United States as well as abroad. Atwater’s influence pushed the scientific and literary standards of the *Journal* even higher. She added new departments, increased the size and circulation of the *Journal*, and improved the format. “All of which goes to show that though the official organ of an association steadily carries forward certain traditions, it is nevertheless largely what the editor makes it” (AHEA, 1929).

As editor, Atwater was aware of and sensitive to new movements and ideas in home economics. Through her selection of articles and her editorials she was able to educate readers not only about new scientific findings, but also about areas of application of these findings and to

new educational and social projects of possible interest for home economists. This work by Atwater was credited with assisting in defining the field of home economics by subject matter (Bane et al., 1941). In her early years at the *Journal*, Atwater made significant changes in the *Journal* creating a new department in 1928 to include more scientific research in home economics (Pundt, 1980). This change was made based on the belief that the *Journal* had a responsibility to encourage research in home economics (Pundt, 1980).

Atwater's position kept her closely involved with all aspects of the *Journal*. She was open in the editorial process, receiving insight from officers, committees, staff, and other home economics professionals about the contents of the *Journal*; however, Atwater was not always in control. Even if she did not agree with the decisions, Atwater gave due space to Association business. In a December 22, 1926 letter to Alice Norton, Atwater commented on delaying publication of an editorial on home economics in the Near East. Atwater had to move this article to make room for information relating to the Ellen H. Richards Fund. She commented, "I am using a statement from Miss Grace Reeves about giving home economics books, that was crowded out of January. This Ellen H. Richards Fund business is eating up a lot of editorial space" (H.W. Atwater, personal communication, December 22, 1926).

Atwater made state contacts through soliciting information from the state affiliates for the *Journal* and also by contributing to state and local newsletters as requested. In a 1930 message in the *California Home Economics Association Newsletter*, Atwater thanked the affiliate for their contribution to the *Journal* and also informed them of items to watch for in the future. Atwater discussed that the *Journal* was trying to increase the practical usefulness of information for school teachers and also to increase timely features such as consumer education and household purchasing (Atwater, 1930). Atwater's work was also reported in student club newsletters. In

the January 1936 *Newsletter of the Georgia Home Economics Clubs*, Atwater was highlighted in a cover story. The newsletter claimed that “Student Clubs owe much to Miss Atwater for her broad interpretation of home economics, thus making the *Journal* one of our best sources for program material, as well as an invaluable aid in developing a national and international outlook” (“Helen Woodard Atwater,” 1936).

While an editor generally deals with the written word, Atwater occasionally served as the voice of the Association through invited radio talks. These talks served as a way to promote home economics and also educate the public about what the real home economics was. In 1934, Atwater was an invited guest to the Woman’s Radio Review during the 1934 AHEA Annual Meeting in New York City. This report highlighted the topics of discussion at the meeting and also how home economists would be helpful for the listeners (Wesleyan University, Box 7). The following year, during the Chicago meeting, Atwater reviewed the contribution of home economics to better living through printed publications. Atwater highlighted various levels of publications—technical to popular—that were helpful for consumers, but focused on the promotion of the *Journal* (Wesleyan University, Box 7).

In 1924 Atwater made an impact on the Association that is still recognizable today. When working on the cover design for the *Journal*, Atwater and colleagues realized they needed some emblem for the middle of the cover. Atwater proposed that a committee be formed to review the need and determine a procedure for selecting the emblem. Atwater’s suggestion of offering a contest for colleges to design the emblem was accepted by the committee. This served a dual purpose as Atwater explained it; it performed a search for an appropriate emblem and also familiarized the competing students with the Association (H.W. Atwater, personal communication, January 15, 1924).

The *Journal* had been using an emblem on the cover that was designed by a Washington artist and based on the idea of a home. Atwater did not consider that emblem to be entirely satisfactory, but wanted the emblem design to embody the idea of home economics (H.W. Atwater, personal communication, January 15, 1924). The committee, chaired by Harriet Goldstein, kept in contact with Atwater through the development and selection of the contest and emblem. The first contest ran in 1925 and had 159 entries, but none were deemed completely acceptable (Pundt, 1980). In 1926, the Betty Lamp was selected to serve as the symbol of the Association. This symbol from Mildred Chamberlain's entry was selected in a second contest and made its public debut on the cover of the February issue of the 1927 *Journal* (Pundt, 1980). In March 1945 the *National Magazine of Home Economics Student Clubs* quoted a 1926 comment from Atwater saying that the symbol, "...suggests simple, American homeliness and combines with its idea of light that of the pleasant ordering of the household" (AAFCS Records, Box 96).

When Atwater was asked about her position and training, she often discussed how her position and background were rather unique. Her advice to students wishing to start a career with a professional magazine in the home economics field included "having a broad knowledge of home economics and its place in the world, technical ability in preparing manuscripts for the press, a sense of literary quality, and a nose for news" (H.W. Atwater, personal communication, April 15, 1937). She also identified the need to have a natural interest in language, writing, and reading. She recommended editorial and writing training to include courses in English composition, courses in literature to develop one's standards of taste, and as much work as possible in history and other subjects that develop a cultural background. Atwater concluded that these courses would assist in developing the ability to concentrate on a routine job,

developing one's own skill in writing, and also being able to judge other people's writing as good or bad (H.W. Atwater, personal communication, April 15, 1937).

In 1941, Atwater decided to retire from the editorship, but that decision caused some problems for the executive committee of AHEA. The committee had a difficult time finding an appropriate and satisfactory person to follow Atwater as editor. Atwater was more than gracious in working with the committee in searching for a new editor and willing to stay through September of 1941 as editor of the *Journal* (H.W. Atwater, personal communication, April 7, 1941). AHEA President Gladys Branegan expressed the committee's difficulties in locating a replacement. In a letter to Atwater, Branegan stated, "I don't believe there is a person in the country for whom it would be as difficult to find a successor as it is for you. You certainly have set a standard which is not easy for another to pick up" (G. Branegan, personal communication, April 19, 1941). Helen P. Hostetter was the person who followed Atwater as the editor of the *Journal of Home Economics*. Hostetter held a Bachelor of Science in home economics from Kansas State College and a Master of Science from Northwestern University (Hostetter, 1949). She served as editor of the *Journal* from 1941 to 1946, when she left the editorship for a position as a professor in journalism at Kansas State College (Hostetter, 1949).

Contributions of Helen Atwater's Career

Through her work, Atwater earned a reputation as an authority in home economics, an editor of distinction, and a leader of public opinion (H. James, personal communication, February 11, 1941). In her work she served as an interpreter of the physical and social sciences into terms of everyday living. Atwater's work was connected with work from the federal government, which was putting its force behind a drive for a nation of better-fed, better-clothed,

better-housed citizens. During Atwater's career there was a demand for an increase in nutrition information, food conservation in connection with the war efforts, and also increased awareness of inadequate living conditions for many. Colleagues commented that these were the things that Atwater urged for decades in her forceful, scholarly editorials in the *Journal of Home Economics*, which became daily headlines in efforts toward total defense (R. Van Deman, personal communication, February 12, 1941). Topics in the *Journal* during Atwater's editorship included information on legislative issues on welfare of the home, welfare of children, unemployment relief, household budget and management, and providing funds for expanding research in home economics, along with other related issues (Pundt, 1980).

It was not only professionals from home economics that praised Atwater's work, but also journalists and citizens. Atwater's colleagues from journalistic backgrounds benefited from her editorial and written work in the areas of home economics. Her work popularized areas of technical subjects to non-professionals and provided written information that was both helpful and accurate (G. F. Herrick, personal communication, February 3, 1941). Residents of the Washington, D.C. area expressed high levels of regard for Atwater's work. Her work assisted in making citizens knowledgeable in the areas of nutrition and home economics, making them among daily headlines in the press (D. H. Guider, personal communication, February 17, 1941).

Professionals in home economics held Atwater and her work in high regard. When Atwater was hired as the editor for the *Journal*, Alice Blood was serving as President of AHEA. Writing in 1941, Blood reminisced, "...I have watched with admiration the unerring judgment with which she has emphasized the wider implications of scientific research in relation to everyday living" (A. F. Blood, personal communication, February 19, 1941). When Atwater retired from the active editorship of the *Journal of Home Economics*, she was honored by the

Association at a testimonial dinner in connection with the annual meeting in Chicago (R. Van Deman, personal communication, December 5, 1941). Her work in home economics was also recognized when she was honored with honorary membership to both Phi Upsilon Omicron and Omicron Nu, both national home economics honor societies (“Helen Atwater,” 1948).

Professional Service and Recognition

In addition to her distinguished career, Atwater found time to serve on various committees and also serve in and out of the field of home economics. Some of the recognition that came to home economics from other national organizations after the First World War was through Atwater’s well-directed efforts (AHEA, 1929).

Part of Atwater’s early service included the executive chairman of the department of food production and home economics of the Woman’s Committee of the Council of National Defense from 1917 to 1919 (Wesleyan University, Box 6). Atwater’s work was to help with the war work policies of women’s organizations and was closely associated with the home conservation work of the United States Food Administration (AHEA, 1929). She worked with personnel representing many government agencies, especially with the Food Administration and the War Industries Board. The work also involved cooperation with the thrift program of the Savings Division of the United States Treasury (Wesleyan University, Box 6). Her work included preparing and editing publications, helping prepare plans for conservation programs, and occasionally going on speaking tours (Wesleyan University, Box 6). Atwater also worked as a liaison for the Women’s Committee, serving as a consultant for the Associated Country Women of the World (“Helen Atwater,” 1948). The Associated Country Women of the World was an

organization to serve as a place for women to communicate to improve the standard of living of rural women and families through education, training, and community programs.

Atwater's work in wartime was similar to war efforts from other professionals in home economics. At this time women developed strong efforts of conservation throughout the war. AHEA and the *Journal* reported on wartime innovations and emergency measures that members could be a part of in the war effort (Pundt, 1980). When the United States entered World War I, there was a nationwide effort for Americans to restrict their diets to free up food to send overseas. The United States Food Administration created its home-front campaign, declaring "Food will win the war" (Meatless Mondays, Wheatless Wednesdays, 2006). Home economics was central to women's participation in this domestic effort (Meatless Mondays, Wheatless Wednesdays, 2006). Along with participation at the federal level, the Food Administration appointed a Home Economics Director in every state who was responsible for creating volunteer networks and educating women about food conservation and preservation. Home economists created recipes and menus based on their knowledge of substitutions that had equal nutrition, such as corn meal or potatoes instead of wheat or pork and fish instead of beef (Meatless Mondays, Wheatless Wednesdays, 2006).

Atwater spent twenty years as a member of the Women's Joint Congressional Committee (Wesleyan University, Box 6; "Helen Atwater," 1948). The Women's Joint Congressional Committee's purpose was "to serve as a clearinghouse of organizations engaged in promoting congressional legislation of especial interest to women" (Pundt, 1980, p. 191). From 1926 to 1928, Atwater served as chairman of the committee that represented some twenty national organizations; her election to chairman showed the committee's confidence in her leadership and judgment (Wesleyan University, Box 6; AHEA, 1929). A colleague on the committee, Elizabeth

Eastman, wrote on February 4, 1941 that Atwater's "leadership in matters of which I have personal knowledge has been of the highest order" (E. Eastman, personal communication, February 4, 1941). Harleen James, executive secretary for American Planning and Civic Association, wrote in a February 11, 1941 letter, "For the past twenty-three years, since the outbreak of the World War, I have lived in Washington and have had the opportunity of observing Miss Atwater during the time that she was chairman of the Women's Joint Congressional Committee, and on countless other conferences where her clear thinking, sound judgment, and established leadership were apparent to all" (H. James, personal communication, February 11, 1941). It was noted that Atwater's wide acquaintance and breadth of interest in many areas made her very useful as a member for the Women's Joint Congressional Committee (A. F. Blood, personal communication, February 19, 1941).

In connection with Atwater's editing background, she was an active member of the Women's National Press Club, of which she served as vice-president (Wesleyan University, Box 6). The Women's National Press Club was an elite group of women journalists who were trying to gain recognition in the male dominated field of journalism. The group was founded in 1919, when women were excluded from the National Press Club. The club offered women journalists in Washington, D.C. the opportunity to come together to find access to the news sources that male journalists had (Burt, 2000). Genevieve Forbes Herrick wrote in a letter of February 3, 1941 that, "I also write as a former President of the Women's National Press Club to pass on to you the high repute in which she (Atwater) is held by Washington's writing women" (G. F. Herrick, personal communication, February 3, 1941).

Atwater served for ten or more years as the chairman of the advisory committee for the *Journal of the American Association of University Women* (Wesleyan University, Box 6).

Atwater completed “sustained and valuable work that is held in high recognition in her field” (W. C. Huntington, personal communication, February 10, 1941). The American Association of University Women (AAUW) had strong ties to home economics, as it was early home economics leaders who were instrumental in the beginning of AAUW. In 1881, Ellen Richards and Marion Talbot invited fifteen alumnae of eight different colleges to meet to form an organization in which women college graduates would band together to open doors of higher education to other women and broaden opportunities from their training. One year later that goal was achieved when the Association of Collegiate Alumni was formed. This association later merged with similar associations to become the American Association of University Women in 1921 (American Association of University Women, 2005).

Atwater maintained membership in the American Public Health Association. She served as a member of the Committee on the Hygiene of Housing and also served as the committee’s chairman (“Helen Atwater,” 1948). Her active interest in modern housing, as related to proper living conditions, and her contributions to the subject of nutrition for the undernourished are observed in her publications, speeches, and general work in the field of home economics (C. K. Haskell, personal communication, February 17, 1941). The committee’s work was varied, but included discussion of research and publications. For example, the committee published “A New Method for Measuring the Quality of Urban Housing” in the *American Journal of Public Health* in June, 1943. Atwater also reported on AHEA annual meetings and events to the APHA. The purpose of this reporting was to help develop relationships and collaborations between the two associations (Wesleyan University, Box 7). These reports highlighted main topics and findings from AHEA and then demonstrated their relation to the work of the APHA and their members.

Again on the national stage, Atwater served as a member of the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection (Wesleyan University, Box 6). The conference was held in November, 1930 by President Hoover. The conference increased the interest in education for home and family life (Pundt, 1980). Committees from this conference were created and membership included physicians, social workers, educators, and home economists. The work from this conference was summarized and published in the "Children's Charter" (Wesleyan University, Box 7).

A year later, Atwater was on additional committees that were considering the problems of homemaking. In November, 1931 the President's Conference on Home Building and Ownership was held (Wesleyan University, Box 6). The charge of this conference was to assemble information to look more in-depth at the needed preparation for home and family life from the housing perspective (Wesleyan University, Box 7). Atwater was a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science ("Helen Atwater," 1948).

As a member of the Washington D.C. Smith College Club, Atwater maintained close ties with her alma mater, other Smith College alumnae, and current happenings on the Smith College campus (E. M. Kauffuianuer, personal communication, February 17, 1941). Atwater was dedicated both to her alma mater and also to the field of home economics. In correspondence with Smith College President William Neilson from 1927, it is apparent that the two interests coincided. Atwater was consulting with President Neilson about the possibility of starting formal coursework in the area of home economics at Smith (H.W. Atwater, personal communication, January 19, 1927). In the early 1920's Smith established an institute to examine the problems of modern homemaking to assist educated women in adjusting to the life of marriage and motherhood (Pundt, 1980). This was not the coursework that alumnae wanted at

Smith. Atwater was helpful in bridging the gap between the alumnae from Smith College and the administration reviewing the possibility of the course. Atwater gave suggestions on what type of course to offer, when to offer it, and what should be included in the course offering. She assisted in forming a review committee of alumnae, giving thoughtful recommendations of possible members, and also other institutions to review for course suggestions (H. W. Atwater, personal communication, May 26, 1927).

Atwater spent time with other Smith College colleagues when they visited in Washington, demonstrating some of her commitment to the college. For example in 1941, when President Davis (president of Smith College) was in Washington, he served on a committee with Atwater. In their work together Davis and Atwater shared pleasant Smith conversation and developed personal acquaintance to maintain strong ties with the College (R. Van Deman, personal communication, February 12, 1941). In 1943, Atwater was honored for her professional career and commitment to Smith College when she was conferred an honorary Doctorate of Science (“Helen Atwater,” 1948). When notified of receiving this honorary degree, Atwater was honored and grateful for what she described as a “most gratifying surprise” (H. W. Atwater, personal communication, March 3, 1943).

Atwater’s work with various groups and committees helped to demonstrate her “exceptional ability to see all sides of a question and to go direct to the center in passing judgment; a fund of information on all sorts and kinds of subjects related to and far removed from her profession; wit, lighting quick and keen, tempered by humor equally spontaneous, and whether of things or ideas a remarkable and immediate appreciation of quality” (AHEA, 1929). Atwater’s professional service allowed her to serve as an ambassador for the field of home economics and was well received and appreciated by her colleagues.

Global Perspective

Atwater was exposed to international affairs and travel from an early age, as early as six years old. While she lived in Europe for some of her childhood, she had a strong interest in traveling throughout her adulthood. She traveled frequently in Europe, primarily for pleasure, but also traveled to attend international education, housing, and management conferences. Atwater frequently prepared papers for conferences, both abroad and in the United States (Wesleyan University, Box 6).

With this background Atwater developed proficiency in several foreign languages. From her childhood, she had the ability to read, speak, and have auditory comprehension in both French and German. While she did not have verbal skills in Italian and Spanish, Atwater was able to read both of these languages (Wesleyan University, Box 6). Her interest in travel, international affairs, and language skills assisted Atwater in staying alert in the educational field looking for opportunities to work for international understanding (A. F. Blood, personal communication, February 19, 1941). Atwater used her ability with languages to serve AHEA at many international congresses and also coordinating papers and often writing papers to present (Bane et al., 1941).

Atwater traveled internationally for both professional and personal trips. When she was at the Office of Home Economics she went to Europe where she visited persons and institutions related to work in the areas of home economics. This included visits in London at the Household and Social Science Department of King's College for Women, University of London, and the School of Rural Economy in Oxford. In Brussels, Atwater met with influential persons in developing home economics and education there. While in Belgium she visited the Superior Normal Institute of Agricultural Home Economics in Laeken. In Switzerland she visited the

International Labor Office in Geneva and then the International Federation of Home Economics Instruction in Fribourg. Throughout this trip, Atwater viewed similarities and differences amongst home economics programs. Atwater assisted in arranging for the exchange of news in professional home economics journals and tried to use personal contacts to develop closer relations between American and European home economics workers. This trip with others must have helped Atwater develop contacts, skills, and knowledge that were helpful throughout the rest of her career (Wesleyan University, Box 6).

Within the AHEA, Atwater took an active part in the international committee. She served as secretary of the committee during many of the years while she was editor of the *Journal* and served as chairman of the committee for three years after her retirement (M. Steele, personal communication, September 18, 1964). Atwater was more than willing to assist on any work with this committee, even when she wasn't in a leadership role. In addition to her willingness, she was a go-to individual to many members of the international committee. For example, in 1926 when the committee chairman Alice Norton was unable to attend the AHEA meeting, Atwater was asked to present the committee report. Mrs. Norton commented that, "I'd much rather have you do it than anyone else" (A. Norton, personal communication, June 24, 1926).

The work of the international committee brought Atwater into correspondence with organizations and workers who were trying to promote education for homemaking in other countries or who requested information about home economics in the United States. Atwater's work on the committee included assisting with the foreign scholarship fund. This was a project in which contributions from student clubs were collected to make it possible for women from other countries to come to study in the United States in preparation for leadership in

homemaking education in their own countries. Atwater thought that this was “well worth doing not only because it promotes home economics but even more because individual personal contacts with people of similar interests in other parts of the world are one of the best roads to international good will” (Wesleyan University, Box 6).

In addition to her work with the student groups, Atwater was influential in developing a plan for having the Association offer fellowships to promising young women in other countries (K. McFarland-Ansley, personal communication, February 9, 1937). Following Atwater’s death in 1947, the AHEA International Committee started the Helen W. Atwater International Fellowship Fund (M. Steele, personal communication, May 26, 1948). The first award was given to Francine Van de Putte Gilles from Belgium in 1948 (Pundt, 1980).

Atwater’s high level of work and international experience made her the prime choice for assisting with international conferences and congresses in organizing and writing materials. She also served as a delegate to international conferences, representing home economics. This included contacting other home economics professionals for participation in these conferences (H. W. Atwater, personal communication, September 30, 1927). Atwater submitted papers to international conferences, including the World Conference on Education, International Congress on Scientific Management, and the International Congress of Home Economics (Wesleyan University, Box 7). In 1939, Atwater coordinated U.S. efforts for the International Congress of Home Economics in Denmark. She wrote a chapter of material in addition to the introductory note accompanying the U.S. contributions (Wesleyan University, Box 7). Outside of home economics, Atwater also submitted a paper to and presented at the International Conference of Social Work (Wesleyan University, Box 7).

Atwater served as the AHEA official delegate to the Dublin Conference of the World Federation of Education Associations in 1933 (Atwater, 1933). This Federation's main purpose was to bring together educational associations of all countries into closer contact to increase international understanding. AHEA was a member of this association from its inception. The conference served as an opportunity for Atwater to develop personal contacts from various organizations and countries.

In 1931, Atwater served as a member of the International Federation of Home and School's Committee on the Home and was its secretary. In 1932 and also in 1933, she took leadership of the committee serving as the chairman (Atwater, 1932; Atwater, 1933). This committee's work focused on homemaking education, trying to stimulate interest in the general subject by finding out what was actually being attempted in other countries. This work included requesting, organizing, and presenting information from the member countries about their current systems and taking it to the Federation as a whole (Wesleyan University, Box 7). One of the major findings from the committee was that all members of the Federation believed that the home was the best place for the individual to experience personal development and learn citizenship. The other interesting conclusion was that there was a large discrepancy in terminology being used in this area of work across the various countries. Atwater worked to decrease these discrepancies by writing and presenting at international conferences. At the 4th International Congress of Home Economics, Atwater submitted a paper entitled "Terminology," describing current American home economics terminology (AAFCS Records, Box 21). She also encouraged other countries to do the same type of work to increase understanding among international colleagues.

Advocate for Home Economics through Communication

Atwater contributed to many publications and various writings throughout her career. While, it seems obvious, since her job was in editing, many of these publications were separate from her work in the Office of Home Economics and with the *Journal of Home Economics*. She wrote various Farmer's Publications on home economics subjects and various magazine articles on home economics topics. Atwater wrote the book, *Home Economics: The Art and Science of Homemaking*, published in 1929, number 50 in the "Reading for a Purpose Series" from the American Library Association (Atwater, 1929; Wesleyan University, Box 6). In another effort to educate consumers, Atwater also wrote various pamphlets relating to home economics topics, including a pamphlet written in 1942 for high school boys and girls about being consumers in wartime (Wesleyan University, Box 6).

There were many popular publications in the market during Atwater's career. This included *The Silent Hostess*, published for the General Electric Company. Atwater was contacted in 1932 to be a feature in the publication's series "Vision Editorials." These editorials were meant to be personal talks with national leaders in home economics (Wesleyan University, Box 7). This publication was similar to other women's magazines of the times, but with a focus on household technology and developments related to refrigeration. Selection as the featured professional put Atwater in exclusive company with other distinguished leaders such as Flora Rose and Martha Van Rensselaer, both prominent leaders in home economics at Cornell University. In this editorial, Atwater discussed the development of Thanksgiving and other feast-type meals with the influence of technology. The "talk," written by Martha Sully, the editor of the publication, introduced Atwater as a member of the "rare group of women who are more than leaders, for they are leaders of leaders" (Sully, 1932).

Also in 1932, Atwater began work on a popular press article for the *Ladies' Home Journal*. This article was an informative article, titled "The Homemaker's Reference Shelf" (H.W. Atwater, personal communication, August 5, 1932). The article included general items of help in the area of home economics. Through the editorial process, at the request of the magazine, Atwater developed a circular to assist in addressing any inquiries that the magazine might receive on the topic following publication (H.W. Atwater, personal communication, October 7, 1932).

While Atwater's publications were primarily based on disseminating home economics subject matter, she also had work that promoted home economics as a whole and also AHEA. For example, in the Executive Section of *Retailing*, Atwater's article "Twenty Years of Consumer Education" highlighted the work of the Association and its members in consumer education (Wesleyan University, Box 7).

Another way Atwater's writing served as advocacy in the field was through promoting home economics educational opportunities and career opportunities in home economics. She wrote on the current status of home economics education in the primary and high schools in the popular press as well as academic journals. She discussed the progression of the field to its current status and also the foundation of the field in research and application (Atwater, 1925). She also wrote articles discussing home economics in higher education. She presented historical trends in the field and the current status of home economics in higher education at the given time, as well as opportunities for home economics graduates (Wesleyan University, Box 7). In other work Atwater wrote materials to educate about career opportunities in home economics including recommendations for students. In 1939 she collaborated with a nutritionist from the Children's Bureau in the US Department of Labor to present and publish in proceedings of the

conference about Opportunities in Public Service and home economics positions (Atwater & Heseltine, 1940).

In 1931, Atwater was asked to contribute to a series of twenty articles in the *Christian Science Monitor*, dealing with the general subject of “Effect of Women on Businesses and Professions” (M. J. Taylor, personal communication, August 8, 1931). Atwater was asked to write an article concerning the effect of women on the profession of home economics, specifically in the food industry, catering, and cafeteria management. The series invited women writers and women working in the specific fields to contribute to the series. Taylor commented that the editorial board felt “...that ideas you have concerning the development of these related fields due to women would be extremely interesting to the general reader” (M. J. Taylor, personal communication, August 8, 1931). Atwater compiled information on women working in the food industry from home economics professionals in the industry as well as those in academics to write an article covering the entry of women into various fields of catering business transforming culinary methods, school lunches, and changing the nation’s menu (Wesleyan University, Box 7).

In bridging her interests in press work and home economics, Atwater presented to the Radio Institute at their Milwaukee meeting in 1933 a paper entitled, “Homemaking Subjects in Radio Program as Reported by Broadcasting Stations” (Wesleyan University, Box 7). Data were collected by a committee from AHEA to assist in developing an idea about the value of broadcasting stations in commercial and education settings.

In addition to promoting and representing AHEA and the field of home economics in writing, Atwater was also engaged in various speaking events. There were primarily two types of speaking engagements that Atwater delivered. The first type was speaking to state affiliate

groups or committees of AHEA and the second was speaking to groups that collaborated with AHEA or had missions similar to the Association.

Atwater addressed broad topics when speaking to affiliate groups, based on their invitation and subject choice. In a 1930 speech to the Massachusetts Home Economics Association, Atwater discussed the three phases of international home economics and also the current status of home economics in various countries around the world (Wesleyan University, Box 7). Aside from discussing current trends in home economics, Atwater was well versed in the development of the field of home economics and AHEA. In 1934, Atwater addressed the New England Home Economics Association responding to their invitation to discuss the beginnings of AHEA, its philosophy, and trends (Wesleyan University, Box 7). Atwater was able to discuss the Association from its roots in home economics and also included personal observations from being a professional in Washington at the time when the Association was created and growing.

For Atwater, speaking to affiliates was different than speaking to groups external from the Association. In the speeches to external groups, Atwater was more engaged in promoting current developments in the field, applying home economics content to the targeted groups, and making connections with groups. Atwater had a wide base of audiences, which included the National Education Association's Department of Supervisors and Teachers of Home Economics, National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools, Department of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, and various state educational associations and universities (Wesleyan University, Box 7).

Personal Characteristics and Interests

To be effective as an editor, one must be able to do a more than select articles and write editorials (Bane et al., 1941). Atwater's friends and colleagues held her in high standing and frequently described abilities that made her more than just an effective editor, but an effective professional. Many stories and experiences helped to paint a complete picture of Atwater. In 1941, Alice Blood wrote of Atwater's able and devoted service to all. She discussed how Atwater was regarded with a high measure of affection and admiration by both Smith College alumnae and universally by her professional group (A. F. Blood, personal communication, February 19, 1941).

Atwater maintained many friendships with other alumni of Smith College. These friends commented on Atwater's always outstanding wit and fabulous memory on many subjects. "She could out wit anybody in any information game" (C. Imey, personal communication, February 1941). Her friends described Atwater as being "so quiet, so well-poised, that no one could be less of a self-advertiser than she" (E. Eastman, personal communication, February 4, 1941).

Atwater had the ability to know and to work with a great many kinds of people. She exhibited high levels of personability, allowing her to work happily with a great variety of people. Atwater was described as a delightful conversationalist. Her abilities allowed her to enliven almost any committee meeting (Bane et al., 1941).

Atwater was also praised for her sense of humor. In 1935, this sense of humor brought her national notoriety as one of the "Dionne Quints" ("Helen Atwater," 1948). Atwater with four other press women of Washington dressed as the famous babies to attend the First Lady's first costume party at the White House. She also served as a Supreme Court Justice during skits

at the annual dinner of the Women's National Press Club. Atwater's pantomime "brought down the house" (Bane et al., 1941).

CHAPTER 6.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The goal of this thesis was to conduct a review of Helen Atwater's work and contributions to the professional field of home economics. This research attempted to answer two primary research questions: 1) What were Helen Atwater's contributions to the field of home economics/family and consumer sciences, focusing on Atwater's contemporaneous contributions to the field? 2) How did the social and economic conditions of the Progressive Era influence Helen Atwater's professional work?

This research also tried to answer several secondary research questions, as follows: What or who were early influences in Helen Atwater's life? How did her college education foster professional growth for Helen Atwater? What influenced Helen Atwater as she progressed through the stages of her professional career? What were her contributions in the early development of home economics?

Conclusions

Helen Atwater made significant contributions to the field of home economics throughout her career. Her consumer-oriented publications increased consumer awareness about many home economics topics, including food and nutrition, housing, and household technology. Atwater's other publications and presentations, including those promoting home economics, increased consumer and industry awareness about the possibilities in the field of home economics. Her international impact was also significant; she contributed to numerous

international committees and conferences through her work, as well as using her language skills to serve as an interpreter for home economics professionals. More importantly, Atwater was able to work with others and produce publications to create understanding across countries about the field of home economics.

Mostly, Atwater's contributions revolved around the *Journal of Home Economics*. Her work increased the circulation as well as the quality of the *Journal*. Her keen sense of awareness kept her knowledgeable about what needed to be included in the *Journal* for it to be timely.

It is apparent that Atwater was influenced by the social and economic conditions of the Progressive Era, 1880-1920. This first becomes apparent through her pursuit of higher education. Although Atwater attended a women's college, Smith had already left the preparatory-only curriculum behind when Atwater started attending. She received a progressive education that led to her being involved in social and government reforms.

Atwater's career work and service had connections to improving aspects of society and everyday living and was very similar to the work of other well-educated women during the Progressive Era. While these women in the Progressive Era were developing formal networks and organizations and gaining admittance into the political arena, Atwater was able to use their efforts to pursue hers. She worked within the developed networks and organizations women had previously created. Her activities were mostly based in education and research seeking reform. It seems that she had fewer limits imposed on her work than women before her, probably a result of the reforms achieved by women in the Progressive Era.

It seems that Atwater's childhood as well as her professional life was greatly impacted by her father. His work in human nutrition opened her mind to the area of science and home economics. Because of W.O. Atwater's work, the Atwater family traveled and lived abroad

while Helen Atwater was a child. These experiences in several countries helped to form her attitude of international goodwill, something that she carried throughout her career.

W.O. Atwater was very dedicated to his career, causing him to sometimes be away from his family (Carpenter, 1994). This included a significant amount of time during Atwater's childhood. Even though he wasn't always with the family, his dedication and drive for his career was passed on to his daughter. Atwater spent much of her time developing her career and improving the field of home economics through her work, similar to the example her father set for her. There is little information on Atwater's mother, Marcia. While her father was away, during her childhood, Atwater was with her mother. Their relationship continued until Marcia's death, as demonstrated by personal correspondence until 1922. Atwater was influenced by her mother, but without more information on their relationship it is not possible to determine exactly how large of an impact her mother had on Atwater's life.

The colleagues of W.O. Atwater also played a role on Atwater's life. Once his research center was set up in Middletown, W.O. Atwater had a facility that was a place for international scientists and intellectuals to visit. Many times these colleagues were hosted at the Atwater home. These visits, as observed and experienced by Atwater, brought insight into new developments in various fields, new social values, and a general acceptance of the benefits of education. This possibly assisted in developing Atwater's strong social abilities with many types of individuals, developing a keen eye in editing and choosing information for publication, and acquiring the skills to mediate and work in committee settings.

While there is some information on Atwater's childhood, unfortunately, it is limited specifically to Atwater's experiences at Smith College. The researcher believes that her experience at Smith influenced her throughout her years working as a professional. When

Atwater was attending Smith, there was an environment of developing and increasing opportunities in education and extracurricular activities for their students. Even if Atwater did not participate in all of them, the activities and attitudes of the campus would have impacted Atwater's professional development. In her 1990 book *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, Gordon discusses that at this time women's colleges, such as Smith, had faculty members that were encouraging students to prepare for and pursue professional careers. Combined with her father's influence as a role model, Atwater was able to develop the ideas of having a strong professional career.

Atwater was a strong advocate for the field of home economics; she worked through promotion, education, and publications. Her work was not just within the field, but throughout her life. Atwater was like many of the educated women from the Progressive Era; she pressed for education and opportunities in home economics because it allowed women to pursue goals such as improving health, assimilating immigrant families into American society, obtaining professional careers in academia or social service, and gaining opportunities for skilled employment. Atwater with other Smith alumni worked to include home economics curriculum at Smith College, but they were not successful in forming an academic department. It was because of her desire to educate and create opportunities for others that Atwater worked to include home economics in the curriculum.

Atwater's professional positions were new positions at the time, requiring her to create the expectations and responsibilities of the positions. She rose to the challenge. Her positions were strong positions pivotal to the units in which she served. She had support from professionals in and out of the field of home economics. They did not have predecessors; it was her own work that created what the position became.

Throughout her entire life, Atwater was exposed to many leaders in various professions, including home economics. The relationships Atwater built with co-workers and leaders in the field truly influenced her professional career. It was these people who worked with her and received her work that gave her the encouragement to continue her work. This links back to the strong women that were developed through higher education programs in the Progressive Era. They built a strong network encouraging professional careers and working to improve society. These relationships were also reciprocal in that those who worked with Atwater described the impact and motivation she had on their lives.

Limitations

Most limitations of this research surrounded the sources of data and were presented in Chapter 3. One last limitation is an unavoidable limitation of historical research. It is that the subject lived then, not now. The researcher is unable to experience events at a contemporaneous level, as it is in the past. While the research has attempted to create a contextual setting to think through while looking at the documents, it is impossible for it to be completely perfect. As it is, the documents were reviewed by a researcher looking at home economics and Helen Atwater; another researcher with different questions and views may consider the products differently and create another story. The historical narrative depends on the view the researcher takes when working with documents and writing the narrative.

Discussion

The basis of historical research is about telling a story, linking together and interpreting the life, events, and times to find the possible truth. The narrative presented was written to be a

valid historical narrative as presented in the methodology section. To do this, the narrative contains all of the facts that are relevant to the research questions presented and does not contain information that is not relevant to the research questions. The narrative attempted to explain the changes in Atwater's life by identifying the time period and conditions in which she lived.

From the historical narrative, it was concluded that Atwater was a well-educated woman. She came from a school that had started developing a progressive program for students, possibly shaping her attitudes toward her professional career. Atwater had a successful, lifetime career that impacted many home economists with her publications and editorial work. She was well-traveled and tri-lingual from an early age. This influenced her to hold a global perspective throughout her career, an attitude not held by all at this time period.

This historical narrative creates a broader awareness about working in the early field of home economics, as well as women working during a time when women generally did not support themselves with full-time employment outside of the home. The narrative illustrates Atwater's impact on the field of home economics, and how her clear thinking and sound judgment shaped the field through the dissemination of information during the first quarter century of the field's existence. It is important for family and consumer sciences professionals to remember where we came from and how we can take insights from our early leaders to continue to shape the future.

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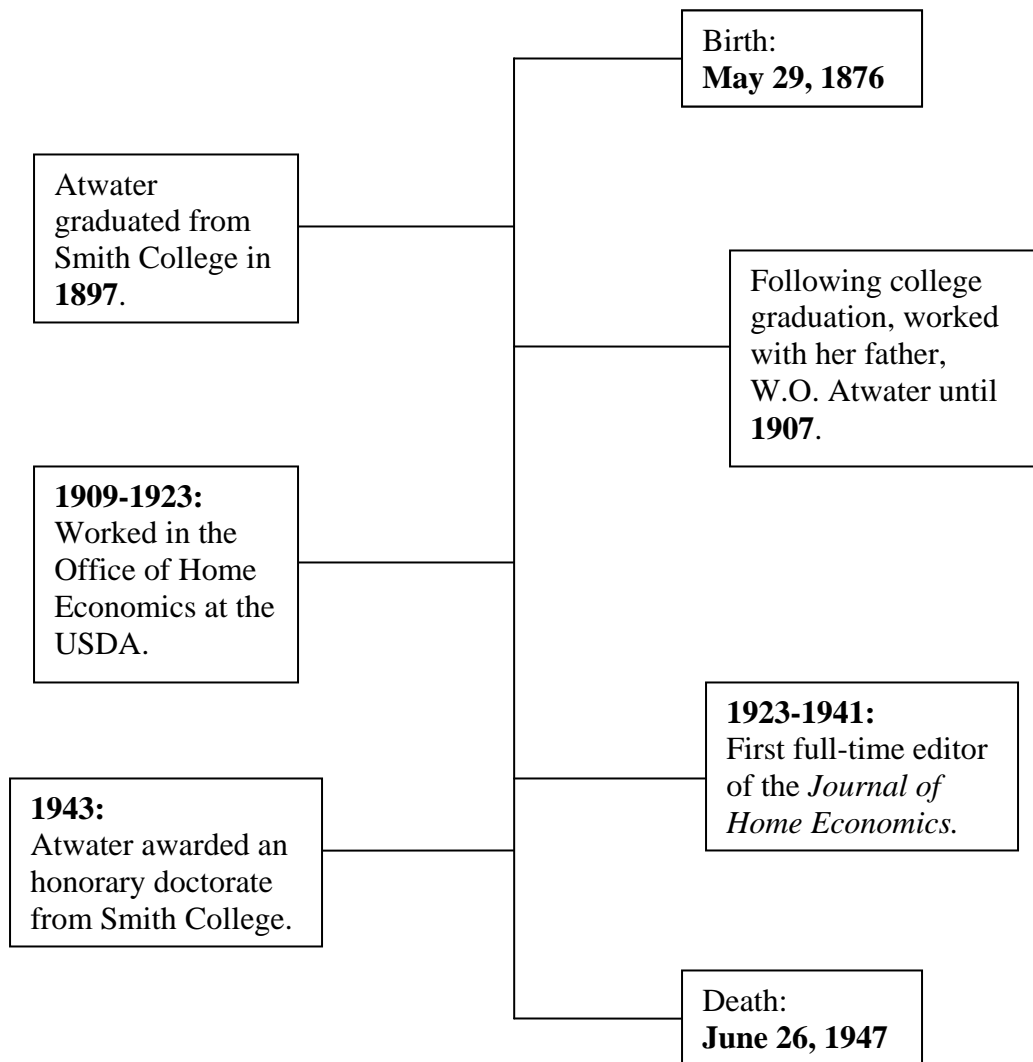
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A.

Figure 1.
Primary Timeline* of
Major Events in
Helen W. Atwater's Life and Career**

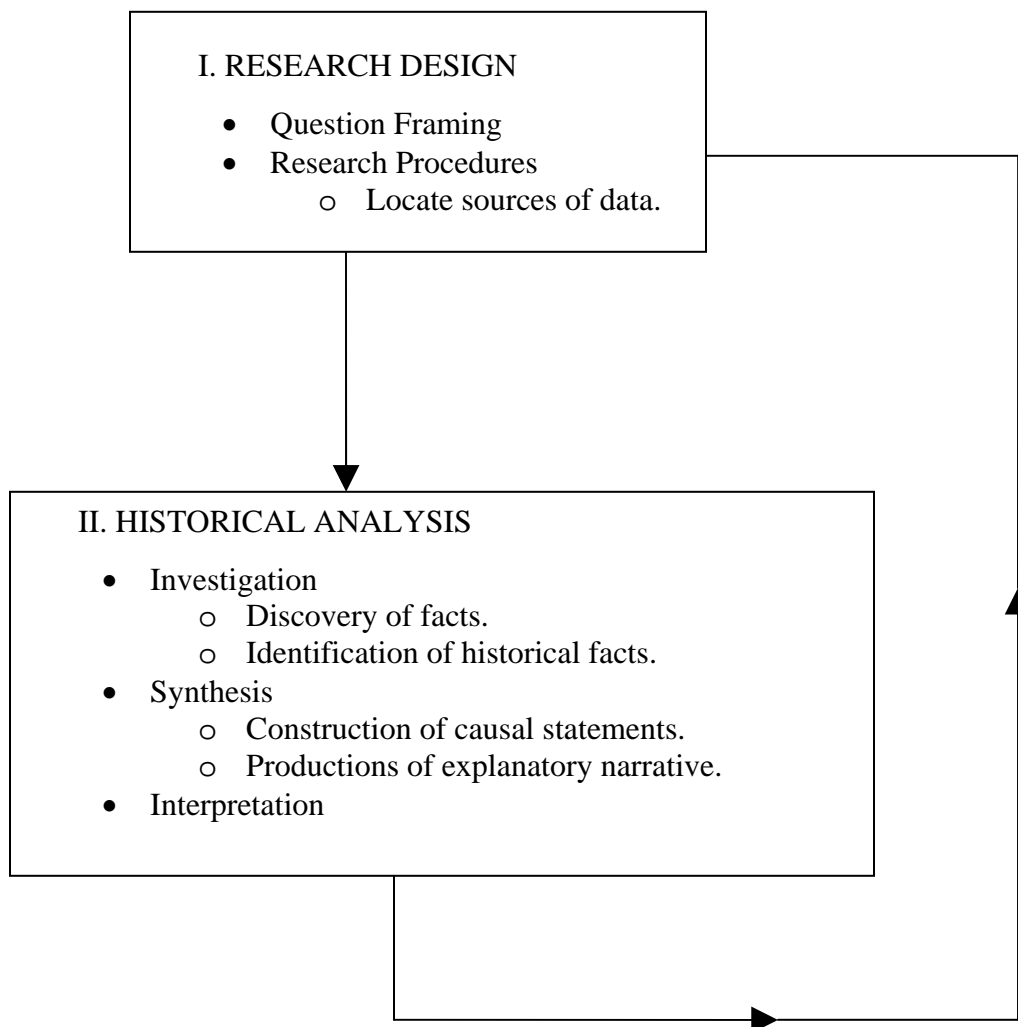


*Timeline is not drawn to scale.

**Includes general biographical information on Helen Atwater.

APPENDIX B.

Figure 2.
Conceptual Model of Historical Method
(Smith & Lux, 1993)



APPENDIX C.

List of Personal Communications Referenced in Chapter 5

Atwater, H.W. personal communication to H. Goldstein, January 15, 1924: AAFCS Records Box 96.

Atwater, H.W. personal communication to A. Norton, December 22, 1926: Wesleyan University Box 7.

Atwater, H.W. personal communication to W. A. Neilson, January 19, 1927: Wesleyan University Box 7.

Atwater, H.W. personal communication to W. A. Neilson, May 26, 1927: Wesleyan University Box 7.

Atwater, H. W. personal communication to M. Barrows, September 30, 1927: AAFCS Records, Box 21.

Atwater, H.W. personal communication to L. Bane, August 5, 1932: Wesleyan University Box 7.

Atwater, H.W. personal communication to L. Bane, October 7, 1932: Wesleyan University Box 7.

Atwater, H.W. personal communication to A. Eaton, April 15, 1937: Wesleyan University Box 6.

Atwater, H.W. personal communication to G. Branegan, April 7, 1941: AAFCS Records Box 35.

Atwater, H.W. personal communication to M. Clark, March 3, 1943: Wesleyan University Box 6.

Blood, A.F. personal communication to F. Snow, February 19, 1941: Smith College Archives Box 79.

Branegan, G. personal communication to H. W. Atwater, April 19, 1941: AAFCS Records.

Eastman, E. personal communication to C. Huntington, February 4, 1941: Smith College Archives Box 79.

Fischer, K. personal communication to A. Norton, November 2, 1922: AAFCS Records Box 35.

Guider, D. H. personal communication to C. Huntington, February 17, 1941: Smith College Archives Box 79.

Haskell, C. K. personal communication to C. Huntington, February 17, 1941: Smith College Archives Box 79.

Herrick, G. F. personal communication to F. Snow, February 3, 1941: Smith College Archives Box 79.

Imey, C. personal communication, February 1941: Smith College Archives Box 79.

James, H. personal communication to C. Huntington, February 11, 1941: Smith College Archives Box 79.

Kauffmanuer, E. M. personal communication to C. Huntington, February 17, 1941: Smith College Archives Box 79.

McFarland-Ansley, K. personal communication to S.S. Heide, February 9, 1937: Wesleyan University Box 6.

Norton, A. personal communication to H. W. Atwater, June 24, 1926: Wesleyan University Box 7.

Sampson, M. M. personal communication to G. Anslow, February 9, 1943: Smith College Archives Box 79.

Steele, M. personal communication to F.V.P Gilles, May 26, 1948: AAFCS Records Box 235.

Steele, M. personal communication to E. N. Todhunter, September 18, 1964: AAFCS Records Box 330.

Sweeney, M. personal communication to H. W. Atwater, May 2, 1922: AAFCS Records Box 35.

Taylor, M. J. personal communication to H.W. Atwater, August 8, 1931: Wesleyan University Box 7.

Van Deman, R. personal communication to F. Snow, February 12, 1941: Smith College Archives Box 79.

Van Deman, R. personal communication to C. Huntington, December 5, 1941: Smith College Archives Box 79.