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A Model House Scientifically Designed and Managed: “America’s Little House”

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Art History

by

Kristina Marie Borrman

2015

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

A Model House Scientifically Designed and Managed: “America’s Little House”

by

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Master of Arts in Art History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Dell Upton, Chair

“America’s Little House” was a model house built by the organizers of the Better Homes in America campaign in 1934. Constructed at the intersection of 39th Street and Park Avenue in Manhattan, this single-family Period house appeared wildly out of place when viewed alongside neighboring skyscrapers. Intending to promote the virtues of homeownership and improvement, the Better Homes movement allied with the federal government to organize demonstration houses in cities across the country. One of their primary goals was to communicate the benefits of scientifically managed households. “America’s Little House” was an urban spectacle that showcased new and improved methods of performing household labor based on Frederick Taylor’s philosophy of scientific management. This paper will examine the ways in which “America’s Little House” was a testing ground for a new symbolic language that combined scientific objectivity and physical productivity to define the “modern” woman and her house.

The thesis of Kristina Marie Borrman is approved.

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2015

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I. Introduction

“America’s Little House” was a spectacle rooted in the incommensurability of the big city and small house. Constructed on the corner of 39th Street and Park Avenue, this single-family house was backed by Midtown Manhattan skyscrapers and fronted by a white picket fence.¹ Standing well below the city skyline, what made “America’s Little House” so spectacular was its modest size and conservative style. The three-bedroom, Georgian style Period House looked wildly out of place across from Grand Central Station. An “L” shaped plan organized the Little House along the corner of one of the most heavily trafficked blocks in Manhattan. The visual contradictions of the urban site and small house were reinforced by Richard Averill Smith’s photographs, which used low angles to emphasize the jarring differences in scale between the two-story demonstration house and its high-rise neighbors (Figure 1).

Smith was commissioned by the government organization Better Homes in America to photograph exterior and interior views of its most ambitious project to date.² His photographs appeared in popular magazines and newspapers that publicized the opening of “America’s Little House” in November of 1934. Visitors were told that the limited space so often referred to as the “problem” of the small house occasioned a unique research opportunity.³ Spatial restraints could compel small-house dwellers to break with impractical traditions, inspiring scientific analysis of day-to-day household activities and the reorganization of household labor. For Better Homes directors, their Manhattan model house had national significance as a potential template for

¹ The million dollar plot was donated by Bowery Savings Bank, with taxes paid out of the ten cent admission fee. For more on this, see R.H. Scannell’s essay, “How the Little House was Built,” *The Parents’ Magazine*, February, 1935, 29, 78.

² Smith’s photographs were originally commissioned by Better Homes in America. However, they were also published in numerous contemporary magazines and newspapers. “America’s Little House” publications, Richard A. Smith, 1934-45, box 1, folder 6, Call phrase: PR 26, Mattie E. Hewitt and Richard A. Smith Photograph Collection, New-York Historical Society.

³ *America’s Little House* (New York: Better Homes in America, 1934).

middle-class housing. Hence, what “America’s Little House” lacked in size, it made up for in ambition.

The ‘Little House’ title chosen by the Better Homes committee had historical import, engaging the nation’s interest in a recognizable (albeit imprecisely defined) architectural category: the small house. The term had long been associated with house pattern books, which used descriptive and prescriptive language to characterize small-house plans. A circular argument was maintained from Andrew Jackson Downing’s *Cottage Residences* (1842) to Gustave Stickley’s *Craftsman Homes* (1909) that insisted the ideal small house both reflected and produced the moral character of its owner.⁴ The exact means by which the house accomplished the self-actualization of its inhabitants had always been rather murky territory. Downing’s plans often demonstrated how a particular house could be designed to fulfill the needs of a specific resident.⁵ However, there was no standardized method by which house design could assure domestic bliss for all.

Although no quintessential small house existed, certain general characteristics *did* come to be associated with an idealized single-family dwelling. The best small houses were those that positively structured a family’s physical and social development. While proper ventilation and sunlight promised good health, a tasteful arrangement of furniture and home décor assured the cultivation of high-minded aesthetic principles. Pattern book authors advocated privacy through the proper arrangement of rooms and hallways. House plans created for well-to-do owners

⁴ More on Downing and Stickley’s emphasis on individuation in small house plans can be found in John Archer’s *Architecture and Suburbia, From English Villa to American Dream House, 1690-2000* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 178, 184, 188.

⁵ David Handlin, *The American Home: Architecture and Society 1815-1915* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 332.

showed separate halls and staircases as a means to avoid the collision of family and servants.⁶ Popular housing literature assembled these general ideas into a patchwork of housing criteria. The primary objective was to discover design solutions that adjusted these universal guidelines to the idiosyncratic tastes and needs of homeowners. For over a century, personal fulfillment was understood to be the sign and the achievement of the individualized house.

“America’s Little House” was freighted with the single-family house’s historical promise of personal fulfillment. However, the Little House redefined the ways that homeownership could impart feelings of contentment. Through advocating objective methods of house design and maintenance, Better Homes organizers undermined the personalized house.⁷ Custom-built houses and improvised methods of household management were not necessarily the most efficient. The Better Homes committee stressed the importance of visualizing the house as a container for separate but overlapping work centers. The organization of cooking, cleaning, and laundering equipment required careful consideration in order to promote efficiency.⁸ Experts gave cost-effective, labor-saving advice to current and prospective homeowners. Couched in the language of domestic science, the Little House was consistently referred to as an “experiment,” the product of specialist research. As a monumental object lesson, “America’s Little House” promised to systematize homebuilding and homemaking.

The rewards for women who managed their houses scientifically were twofold. Greater efficiency meant the speedier completion of household tasks and increased leisure time. More

⁶ Ibid, 334.

⁷ The Better Homes committee asked specialists to contribute standardized methods of home construction and maintenance in their comprehensive book, *The Better Homes Manual*, ed. Blanche Halbert (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931).

⁸ See descriptions of household management by Lillian Gilbreth in *America’s Little House* (New York: Better Homes in America, 1934).

important, running one's household like a streamlined business was described as a source of satisfaction in and of itself. "America's Little House" promoted the paradoxical claim that personal fulfillment could be accomplished by an impersonal, objective system. Guided by new theories of business management, the Better Homes in America campaign stressed that empirical evidence could be used to produce standardized methods of house design and management. In doing so, they challenged the privileged position of the individualized small house in the cultural imaginary.

II. Homeownership Statistics Produce Middle-Class Identity

Philanthropic housing efforts faced significant difficulties when it came to accommodating personal tastes. Improving national housing meant addressing oneself to the "average" American. The Better Homes organization's belief in its ability to conceptualize a typical American audience was largely determined by the era's growing confidence in statistical research. Surveys sought to uncover the opinions and daily living and working routines of the majority. At the close of the Progressive period, statistical thinking seemed to demonstrate that the voice of the average American could be distilled from raw data and mapped onto tables, graphs and charts.

Statistical portraits of Americans shifted focus in the years following World War I. Earlier surveys had centered on marginal populations that posed a threat to urban society. Degeneracy, alcoholism, prostitution, madness and crime were social evils that promised to wane if their origins and patterns of dissemination could be understood statistically. Certainly, these surveys of "degenerate" groups persisted throughout the nineteen-twenties. However, the public's interest in these studies never matched that of popular publications concerning the

typical beliefs and practices of American citizens.⁹ The turn from demographic outliers to averages had a number of causes, including: the professionalization of social science, new sampling techniques, the development of modern market research, and the aforementioned popular interest in published surveys.¹⁰ Vital to the production and promotion of statistical data was the development of new communications technologies. Radio programs (and their advertisers) sought to uncover the wants and needs of the typical consumer. Considering Better Homes reformers' interest in addressing a national audience, it is not surprising that the radio became a powerful tool in the final years of their campaign.

The Better Homes in America organization worked in cooperation with Columbia Broadcasting Studios to produce a radio station inside "America's Little House." Architects Roger Bullard and Clifford Wendehack enlarged the size of the model house's "garage" to produce a makeshift broadcasting studio (Fig. 2). Three times a week, broadcasts concerning house construction and management aired from the Little House. In order to accommodate visitors and protect against disruption of the radio program, Bullard and Wendehack designed an observation room adjacent to the garage.¹¹ Across from Grand Central Station, the heavily trafficked location of "America's Little House" attracted constant visitors. Within a few months, over fifty thousand people had crossed the threshold of the educational demonstration.¹² Despite these impressive numbers, the Better Homes committee's cooperation with CBS amounted to the greater boon. The Little House radio program reached one hundred stations across the country

⁹ Sarah Igo discusses the shift from minority to majority statistical research in her book, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 11.

¹⁰ Ibid, 8-14.

¹¹ Published plans of the 'Little House' renamed this room and transformed it into a storage space, or 'Duffle Room.' *America's Little House*, 26.

¹² Architectural Forum reported the number of "America's Little House" visitors a few months after the model home's opening. "America's Little House," *Architectural Forum*, Feb. 1935.

(Fig. 3). Most Americans became acquainted with “America’s Little House” through its national broadcasts.

The model house constituted both a material reality in New York and a pseudo-environment structured by radio talk.¹³ Manhattan visitors could grasp “America’s Little House” through a direct, sensory experience. Questions of scale and room coordination were clarified for those that could observe firsthand the model house’s living, working and sleeping spaces. Comparatively, the Little House constituted a rather foggy mental picture for radio listeners. Their indirect experience of the model house allowed for a rather flexible conceptualization of the ideal house. Sitting before the radio, these Americans imagined their dream houses within the spaces of their less-than-perfect dwellings. The resonance of the Little House as a mental picture relied in part on radio listeners’ incomplete knowledge of its material conditions.

Despite the Better Homes organization’s efforts to convey specific and practical methods of home improvement, the “ideal” American house nevertheless retained its characteristic ambiguity. What was radical about the Better Homes project was the relatively new idea that ‘one best house’ *could* satisfy the needs of the average American. The historical preference for an individualized small house had been permanently compromised by the work of housing experts. Defining the quintessential small house was an ongoing project characterized by objective research, specialist insight, and the implementation of minimum housing requirements. While educational demonstrations like “America’s Little House” made progress in the calcification of certain housing standards, no single best house occupied the collective imaginations of the American public.

¹³ My use of the term “pseudo-environment” is borrowed from Walter Lippmann, who uses the term to describe the ‘pictures in our heads’ that constitute our understanding of anything in the world not directly experienced by our senses. See Lippmann’s *Public Opinion* (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1957), 27.

The ideal small house was not the only vaguely conceived concept in the Better Homes lexicon. Chief among the organization's ill-defined terms was the "housing problem." The American "housing problem" was a buzzword that frequently appeared in literature promoted by national and state governmental authorities. Like the "average" Americans targeted by housing propaganda, Better Homes organizers assumed that they shared the same definition of the "housing problem" as their readers and listeners. Of course, the "housing problem" was open to interpretation. It could allude to a number of contemporary housing crises, such as the unsanitary conditions of tenements, the failure of state and local governments to set minimum housing requirements, or the inadequate municipal sewage lines and public roads that accompanied new housing developments. When the federal government invoked the "housing problem," their concerns stemmed from a set of statistical figures. Population studies across the country confirmed low numbers of American homeowners. Hence, when asked about the decision to build "America's Little House" in Midtown Manhattan, Better Homes organizers credited neither the well-trafficked site nor its proximity to CBS. Instead, they pointed to Manhattan's place within a table of national homeownership data.

Herbert Hoover often cited national homeownership statistics when discussing the issue of post-war recovery. In his capacity as Secretary of Commerce, Hoover guided the early years of the Better Homes campaign (1924-29).¹⁴ During his presidency, Hoover's contributions to Better Homes publications emphasized the importance of homeownership to maintaining national stability. According to Hoover, homeowners were better citizens than renters. Homeowners worked harder, lived healthier, saved more money, and demonstrated greater

¹⁴ The Better Homes project was originally launched by Marie Maloney, editor of *The Delineator*, a popular woman's magazine. Just two years after its inception, Hoover adopted the project in 1924.

interest in local government.¹⁵ In the midst of the Great Depression, the federal government published *The Better Homes in America Manual* (1931), which categorized homeownership statistics according to state. Citizens were encouraged to compare their state's rate of homeownership with the forty-six percent national average.

With numbers hovering around thirty percent, the District of Columbia and New York had the lowest percentages of homeowners.¹⁶ Better Homes literature decried the low numbers associated with both states.¹⁷ However, they also underscored what was believed to be a crucial difference. While DC's homeownership rates had slightly risen over the past two decades, New York's had fallen. Published the same year, the U.S. Department of Commerce's *How to Own Your Own Home: A Handbook for Prospective Homeowners* included a more detailed account of New York homeownership statistics. New York's dense capital city was correctly held responsible for the state's dropping homeownership rates. In order to better understand the city's lack of homeowners, New York's five boroughs were each assigned homeownership percentages. Not surprisingly, Manhattan ranked last with a two percent score, thereby securing its position at the bottom of the national homeownership barrel.

Statistical portraits of national homeownership featured prominently in "America's Little House" radio broadcasts and published literature. Such surveys promised to reveal the American public to themselves. The ability to "see" oneself in state and national statistics was crucial to the

¹⁵ Herbert Hoover, "Home Ownership and Home Financing," in *The Better Homes Manual*, ed. Blanche Halbert (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), 3-4.

¹⁶ Certainly, statistical evidence of low homeownership rates guided the Better Homes in America organization's decision to establish model homes in New York and Washington, D.C. The first large-scale Better Homes in America demonstration house was built on Washington, DC's National Mall. Janet Hutchinson discusses this project in her essay, "The Cure for Domestic Neglect: Better Homes in America, 1922-1935," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, Vol. 2 (1986), 168-178.

¹⁷ John Gries and James Taylor, "Home Ownership and Home Financing," in *The Better Homes Manual*, ed. Blanche Halbert (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), 11-12.

construction of middle-class identity. According to national surveys, nearly one out of every two Americans owned their own houses. To be among the better half of the nation's citizenry, homeownership was key. Moreover, in rural states like North Dakota (where homeownership percentages reached seventy percent), the ability to purchase a house incontestably defined middle-class status.¹⁸ The Better Homes national homeownership survey not only recorded but also constituted the "average" American to which it was addressed. The very concept of an American public hinged on the ways in which survey data were presented and received by citizens.

The Better Homes organization constructed an image of a "mass society" characterized by mass surveys, mass consumerism and mass communication. The federal government conceptualized its citizens *not* as an aggregate of individual communities but as a homogenous national body. Better Homes organizers turned a blind eye to the many markers of class difference that characterized individual members of its public. Instead, they singled out one quantifiable badge of middle-class identity: homeownership. Just as homeownership came to characterize the "average" American, houses themselves became associated with certain "average" qualities. The belief that the best houses were adapted to suit their owners was incompatible with philanthropic efforts to raise the living standards of all. In order to implement universal housing reform, experts needed to agree upon minimum housing requirements. Statistical portraits of the American middle-class seemed to indicate that the country's citizens shared more or less the same needs and thus could all benefit from a standardized house. Mass surveys promised that the typical American's daily routines and domestic labor could be identified, quantified, and made legible by tables and graphs. Confidence in statistical knowledge made it possible for housing reformers to embrace the possibility of designing a single 'best

¹⁸ Ibid.

house.’ When it came to defining the ideal house, Better Homes organizers considered architectural design to be a secondary consideration. Their literature was often devoted to the selection and arrangement of household equipment. They preached that the best houses were filled with tasteful furniture and an extensive collection of modern appliances.

III. Making Better Houses or Better Consumers?

As an important precursor to the Better Homes organization, the domestic science movement similarly attempted to guide American consumer activity. Books and editorials written by domestic science practitioners detailed the ways in which informed consumer choices could lead to happier, healthier families. As frequent contributors to women’s magazines, these writers promoted “scientific” methods of cooking, cleaning, and laundering. Typically, they adopted a rather loose definition of scientific management. What made their procedures “scientific” were the ways in which they quantified household labor. Any household task could be numerically understood through counting the bodily movements required to perform it. The steps taken to complete a task became a particularly popular method of scientifically “testing” the efficiency of modern household equipment. Appropriating the language of domestic science, contemporary advertisements boasted that kitchen cabinets could save housewives’ steps (Fig. 4). Such advertisements were always aimed at women. While husbands worked as “producers” outside the house, wives were recognized as the family’s “consumers.” Advertising trade journals reported that women did the lion’s share of retail buying, crediting them with eighty-five percent of all consumer spending.¹⁹ The burgeoning of market research meant the incorporation of statistical tools as a means to tap the needs and desires of female consumers. Like homeownership statistics, consumer spending reports presented a picture of the “average”

¹⁹ Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 66.

American. Hence, the results of these surveys intrigued both advertising agencies and the public alike.

Americans' cooperation with private and public survey groups testified to their shared stake in knowing the results. Participation in consumer surveys, opinion polls and governmental studies reached new heights in the nineteen-twenties. The unexpected popularity of *Middletown* (1929)—sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd's study of the daily routines, beliefs and houses of Muncie, Indiana, residents—confirmed the nation's interest in conceptualizing itself. The emergence of sociology departments within American universities paralleled the rapid expansion of the advertising industry. With many survey groups offering to pay their participants, public opinion became a commodity. Consumer surveys made it possible to rank the “appeal” of different advertising tactics. Advertisers learned that marketing a product as “scientific” was less appealing than ads that boasted a product's ability to save time.²⁰ Whether providing information to advertisers or sociologists, Americans began to realize that public opinion was a valuable resource.

With private and public institutions regularly appealing to the masses, Americans sometimes had difficulty knowing if they were being addressed as citizens or consumers. Close attention to Better Homes literature reveals Americans' growing sense of skepticism concerning advertising ploys masquerading as educational demonstrations. “America's Little House” pamphlets stressed that the model house had “no product to sell,” and “no commercial interest to sustain.” Moreover, the objects chosen to furnish the Little House were “chosen on a non-commercial basis [...] by experts whose sole interest was to serve the public.” Suspicions that the Little House was no better than a grandiose advertising scheme were well founded. After all, the final pages of the model house's pamphlet priced every item in the house and listed their

²⁰ Christine Frederick, *Selling Mrs. Consumer* (New York: Business Bourse, 1929), 61.

manufacturer. Even the price of fifty-cent matchboxes did not escape these comprehensive shopping lists. The line separating commercial advertisement and educational demonstration was rather thin. While the sheer size of “America’s Little House” rivaled department store displays, a similar logic seemed to undergird these well-ordered, purchasable spaces. Visitors to the Little House must have wondered how exactly the model house’s living room differed from that of the Wanamaker Department Store display downtown (Figs. 5-6).

For Better Homes directors there was an obvious difference between their model house and department-store displays. Better Homes organizer Marie M. Meloney wrote that the Little House was the product of “the most expert knowledge, the best that trained minds can give.”²¹ Besides its spectacular site, what was most distinctive about “America’s Little House” was its division into constitutive parts, each headed by an expert. The Better Homes campaign promoted numerous model houses throughout their thirteen-year history. For each of these demonstration projects, professional expertise was typically limited to the commissioned architect. While certain domestic science specialists were often involved, the planning process was not always recognized as a collaborative one. The specialist team assigned to the Little House included architects, an interior decorator, landscape designer, and a self-described “household engineer.” In addition to these men and women, a number of housing experts served as professional consultants. “America’s Little House” proved that the Better Homes committee had become quite comfortable with enlisting the work of specialists in its final years.

This was not always the case. From the outset, the Better Homes campaign aimed to develop average Americans’ abilities to judge the small house for themselves. They encouraged prospective homeowners that time and money-saving decisions were often matters of common

²¹ *America’s Little House*, 1.

sense.²² The championing of practical, no-nonsense advice galvanized Better Homes volunteers. Their educational demonstrations hoped to pull together a set of standards by which the nation's housing could be improved. The cooperative efforts of plumbers, interior decorators, builders, contractors, and electricians were directed at producing the best houses possible given a modest budget. Prizes were awarded to the 'best' model houses, and their photographs appeared in Better Homes literature (Fig. 7).²³ As a member of the Better Homes advisory council, the General Federation of Women's Clubs played an important role in recruiting local volunteers.²⁴ Educational demonstrations were typically lead by white, upper-middle class women who coordinated the Better Homes public outreach efforts. Many of these women had connections to local businesses.²⁵ Marie Christian Kohler was a six-time Better Homes demonstration prize-winner.²⁶ She lead Better Homes campaigns in Kohler Village, her family's model company town near Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Both regional newspapers and national Better Homes publications lauded the new Kohler plumbing products installed in the town's prize-winning model houses. Contributions to Better Homes campaigns provided an excellent opportunity for business promotion.

An important aim of the Better Homes administration was to impart a sense of public responsibility to wealthy industrialists. In the case of the Kohler family, the Better Homes

²² Better Homes in America Pamphlets, 1920s, box 23, folder 11, Call Number: D&A Wood ReCAP, Edith Elmer Wood Papers, Avery Drawings and Archives Collection, Columbia University.

²³ The criteria for the 'best' model house varied according to its neighborhood demographics. Karen Altman has noted that prizes awarded to the best 'demonstration houses for Negroes' could be one-tenth of the price of a model house in a white, middle-class suburban neighborhood. See Altman's "Consuming Ideology: The Better Homes in America Campaign," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 7 (1990), 296.

²⁴ Ibid, 294.

²⁵ Regina Lee Blaszczyk, "No Place Like Home: Herbert Hoover and the American Standard of Living" in *Uncommon Americans: The Lives and Legacies of Herbert and Lou Henry Hoover*, ed. Timothy Walch (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 131.

²⁶ Ibid, 131-132.

organization was already preaching to the choir. Kohler Village was modeled on garden city principles, with housing design inspired by William Kohler's trips to Letchworth and Port Sunlight in England.²⁷ Kohler hired city planner Werner Hegemann and landscape architect Elbert Peets to design a garden-industrial town replete with public parks, tree-lined boulevards, houses with gardens, and social centers.²⁸ An image that appeared frequently in Kohler publications was the "American Club," a boarding house-type residence for immigrant workers.²⁹ Twice a week, classes for immigrant workers were offered at no cost. Instructors taught English language, arithmetic and American history classes.³⁰ They also offered help with the practical matters of preparing naturalization papers and acquiring basic health and hygiene knowledge.

Like many Better Homes reformers, the Kohlers taught immigrant families that cleanliness was the first step towards cultural assimilation. By the second decade of the twentieth century, communicable disease rates had been curbed among the privileged classes.³¹ Contemporaries praised the widespread acceptance of germ theory and adoption of personal protective behaviors to combat contagion. With new confidence, public health groups preached the gospel of hygiene and sanitation to tenement dwellers.³² City slums continued to produce alarmingly high rates of tuberculosis and typhoid. At work in philanthropic efforts to raise public

²⁷ Christiane Crasemann Collins, *Werner Hegemann and the Search for Universal Urbanism* (New York: Norton and Company, 2005), 119.

²⁸ After a series of arguments between William Kohler and Hegemann & Peet, the project was completed by the Olmsted Bros. Associates. See Collins, 124-5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.

³⁰ William R. Johnson, "The Kohlers of Kohler: Acculturation in a Company Town," *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Autumn, 1971), 230.

³¹ Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women and the Microbe in American Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 184.

³² *Ibid.*

health awareness was the not-so-veiled belief that immigrant groups possessed low hygienic standards that, if not corrected, posed a health threat to their neighbors.³³

The Better Homes organization was adopted by the federal government in the same year as the Johnson-Reed Act (1924). The new federal law sought to curtail “undesirable” immigration by establishing restrictive quotas for Asian, Southern European and Eastern European countries. Anxieties concerning the prevalence of foreign traditions and values prompted government intervention in the daily habits and routines of Americans’ everyday lives. The Better Homes campaign facilitated the government’s desire to influence the homebuilding and homemaking practices of its natural-born and naturalized citizens. Homeownership and improvement promised to deliver a sense of national identity predicated on a peculiarly American combination of consumer activity and individual responsibility.

Today operating as a five-star hotel, the “American Club” was an exceptional-looking model of “Americanization.” The Kohler boarding house was a semi-permanent institution, unlike the short-lived model houses of the Better Homes organization. Despite the Better Homes campaign’s claim that an ‘average’ American audience could be defined and addressed, the model houses testified to the country’s uneven distribution of wealth and power. In a number of cities, demonstration houses were built alongside high schools where homemaking classes were taught to privileged housewives in the afternoon and immigrant women at night.³⁴ The Better Homes administration ignored the fact that so many women not only did their own housework but also spent their days cleaning the houses of others. While the Better Homes organization was eager to condemn the deplorable aesthetics of tenement neighborhoods, it was less interested in

³³ Janet Hutchinson discusses an Italian woman’s ‘conversion’ to Better Homes hygienic practices in her essay, “The Cure for Domestic Neglect: Better Homes in America 1922-35.”

³⁴ Karen Altman, “Consuming Ideology,” 296.

the deplorable wages and working hours of its residents. Despite the era's confidence in the work of housing experts, these specialists could be insensitive to the labor problems suffered by the public to whom they addressed themselves.

The tension between expert and public opinion characterized the Better Homes campaign as well as the period more generally. Public and private institutions regularly appealed to the masses, enlisting them in market surveys, health crusades, sociological studies, and political reform campaigns. At the same time, there was a growing awareness that the possibility of articulating much less solving the nation's problems was beyond the scope of the "average" citizen. Socio-political change required the specialist knowledge of experts whose work took into account factors that were simply unknowable to the public. A stubborn problem was the simple matter of defining the public's common interests. There was altogether 'too much' public, too many disparate groups with competing objectives.³⁵ Labor protests, public health crusades, and charitable fundraising efforts constituted crucial moments when the public seemed to reveal itself. However, just as quickly as the masses pooled around a common interest, enthusiasm waned and the public returned to its former incoherent state.

The difficulty of conceptualizing let alone harnessing public opinion plagued the federal government. Constituted by volunteers from across the country, the Better Homes organization provided a much desired picture of the American people united by a common goal: home improvement. Better Homes volunteers seemed capable of shedding light on the national housing problem and taking active steps towards ameliorating it. The Better Homes project presented itself as a campaign created, managed, and undertaken by the public. Their brochures included a diagram that demonstrated how volunteer efforts should be organized (Fig. 8). Like the

³⁵ John Dewey discussed the problem of defining the public's common interest, writing that there was 'too much' public in *The Public and its Problems* (1927; repr., Athens: Ohio University Press, 1954).

hierarchical arrangement of modern businesses, volunteers could be divided according to specialized departments. This business model of departmental management demonstrated the increasingly bureaucratic character of philanthropic housing reform efforts in the nineteen-twenties.

The Better Homes organization borrowed their strategies and objectives from the domestic science discipline. A spirit of “liberal pluralism” characterized the domestic science movement in the early years of the twentieth century.³⁶ Housing reformers believed that the benefits of “science” were subject to the interpretation of individual housewives.³⁷ Traditional ways of running households need not be entirely replaced by new objective methods. While domestic scientists initially preached that some women *could* benefit from running scientifically managed households, they later proclaimed that all women *should* adopt the business management model. Improvised methods of household sanitation and personal hygiene were deemed inadequate strategies for combating typhoid and tuberculosis. The communicable diseases emerging from unsanitary tenement neighborhoods posed a problem for all city residents. The sentimental nineteenth-century ideal of individualized house design and management was problematic for public health officials. Model houses helped Americans to visualize what an efficient, sanitary, and modern dwelling might look like. For domestic science advocates and Better Homes volunteers alike, raising the bar of public health meant encouraging the consumption of mass-produced household products newly marketed as “sanitary.” Consumer surveys revealed that advertising “health” was a profitable strategy.³⁸

³⁶ Wright, *Moralism and the Model Home*, 160.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ According to consumer surveys, interest in a product’s ability to promote “health” was consistently ranked highly. For more, see Frederick’s *Selling Mrs. Consumer*, 61.

Demonstration houses and model kitchen contests were deployed by philanthropic housing organizations as a means to guide consumer spending. Better Homes volunteers hoped that the American public would emulate these carefully constructed model environments. Failing to acknowledge the unfair wages, long working hours, and resulting health problems suffered by the working class, housing reformers offered environmental solutions for social problems.³⁹ In some cases, wealthy industrialists like the Kohlers held themselves responsible for raising the living standards of laborers. However, this burden usually fell on the laborers themselves. Modern household equipment was too expensive for many of these families. The infamous arrival of short-term loans made it possible to buy goods with promises to pay later. To be truly “Americanized” sometimes meant incurring debt. Abiding by Better Homes instruction required purchasing the “right” goods to promote a safe, healthy household. From the selection of house plans to the installation of household equipment, the Better Homes organization prided itself on the expert advice it offered consumers.

IV. The Individualized House Ideal and Standardized House Reality

When building a house from scratch, Better Homes authors advocated purchasing plans from the Architects’ Small House Service Bureau (1922-34).⁴⁰ This new division of the American Institute of Architects typified the era’s emphasis on specialization. The Better Homes organization’s confidence in experts was no better exemplified than in their promotion of *The Small Home*, the AIA’s monthly bulletin. Member architects bemoaned the degeneration of the American landscape by substandard houses. They believed that architectural expertise was sorely

³⁹ Lizabeth Cohen, “Embellishing a Life of Labor: An Interpretation of the Material Culture of American Working-Class Homes, 1885-1915,” *Journal of American Culture*, Vol. 3, Issue 4 (Winter, 1980), 755.

⁴⁰ A detailed discussion of the Architects’ Small House Service Bureau can be found in Lisa Marie Tucker’s essay, “The Small House Problem in the United States, 1918-1945: The American Institute of Architects and the Architects’ Small House Service Bureau,” *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2010, pp. 43-59.

needed for minimum housing standards to take root. The publication of architect-designed house plans hoped to impinge on those drawn by local builders. The federal government joined professional architects in their promotion of *The Small Home*, describing it as the only credible mail-order house pattern book.

The AIA's attempt to secure their own piece of the mail-order market was praised as a philanthropic decision. Better Homes Executive Director James Ford described the AIA's splinter group as "practically a non-profit."⁴¹ Ford saw the AIA's new bureau as proof of President Hoover's success in instilling specialized business groups with a sense of public responsibility. Like the Kohler Company, the AIA's interest in middle-class housing reform seemed to demonstrate that the same capitalist system that occasioned the housing problem also possessed the means to solve it. Despite Ford's enthusiasm over the AIA's *Small Home* publication, he undoubtedly knew that professional house pattern books would only make a small dent in the nation's "housing problem." Since the late nineteenth century, only a small percentage of American houses were custom-built from mail-order plans.⁴²

The majority of the nation's homeowners purchased houses built on speculation. Despite the persistent belief that one's house should be unique and personalized, most American houses were in fact quite standardized.⁴³ Single-family houses were constructed on standard rectangular lots that conformed to a gridded neighborhood plan. Generally, floor plans were more or less alike in the interest of easing the work of carpenters and masons. Costs were controlled by building similar houses with interchangeable, 'personalized' ornaments. The majority of

⁴¹ James Ford, "The Plan Service of the Architects' Small House Service Bureau," in *The Better Homes Manual*, ed. Blanche Halbert (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), 182.

⁴² Thomas Hubka, *Houses without Names: Architectural Nomenclature and the Classification of America's Common Houses* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 10.

⁴³ Gwendolyn Wright, *Moralism and the Model Home* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 26.

American houses were the products of a speculative building process that encouraged fairly homogenous regional styles. Thus, middle-class Americans could not purchase a truly “personalized” dwelling because most houses were built by local builders, contractors and developers for unknown clients. Local builders designed houses according to regional traditions, only gradually modifying their designs to accommodate national housing trends.⁴⁴ Customized, architect-designed houses were the exception, not the rule.

Nevertheless, the individualized small house persisted as an ideal in the face of its imperfect realization. Emily Post’s *The Personality of a House: The Blue Book of Home Design and Decoration* (1930) advised readers to collaborate with architects and decorators in order to assure that houses ultimately expressed the owner’s personality.⁴⁵ Similarly, the AIA’s new publication assured readers that the middle-class house could be a personalized one. *The Small House* published over two hundred and fifty plans of three-four-five-and six-room dwellings. Ford recommended contacting the Small House Bureau directly in order to procure patterns that satisfied one’s “individual requirements,” such as family size, architectural taste, budget, local building codes, and lot size.⁴⁶ “America’s Little House” also contributed to the mail-order house-pattern market. With a few minor alterations (such as turning the broadcasting studio into a garage), the Better Homes organization sold standard plans and elevations of its model house.

Public institutions (Better Homes), and government-endorsed private ones (AIA) sought to balance their message of housing standardization with the deeply-engrained idea of the personalized house. The rhetoric of consumerism promised that personal identity could be constituted by one’s selection of house patterns. What remained to be questioned was whether an

⁴⁴ Hubka, *Houses without Names*, 38-41.

⁴⁵ Archer, *Architecture and Suburbia*, 308-309.

⁴⁶ Ford, 184.

individualized identity could really be articulated by choosing from a limited number of mass-produced blueprints.⁴⁷ Selecting from a restricted field of consumer options may have appeared to be a rather shallow expression of selfhood. Moreover, the ubiquitous ‘spec house’ challenged the usefulness of house-pattern books altogether. If Americans rarely built whole houses from pattern books, what did they do with them?

Comparing and analyzing house plans may have inspired Americans to improve their existing houses. Some Better Homes volunteers taught local communities that many people already owned their ideal small house. They just needed help realizing it. Housing reformer Carolyn Bartlett Crane published plans and elevations of her Kalamazoo, Michigan, demonstration house in the book *Everyman’s House* (1924). Crane’s house was a variation on the traditional four-square plan (Fig. 9). Her project showed that a ubiquitous plan type could be adjusted to promote efficient household labor. The central staircase bifurcated the first floor into living and working areas. Family living spaces included a street-facing living room and rear dining room. The housewives’ kitchen and mother’s room comprised the house’s working spaces. Crane reasoned that coordinating these work rooms eased the burden of cooking, cleaning and childcare by saving housewives’ steps. Also, joining the mother’s room to the kitchen and bathroom allowed women to keep a vigilant eye on young children at all times. *Everyman’s House* emphasized the importance of creating a “mother’s room” in even the smallest of houses. Space for a first-floor mother’s room could be procured by combining living and dining spaces into a single room, or eliminating the dining room altogether and building a breakfast nook in the kitchen.

⁴⁷ John Archer offers an insightful discussion of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno’s theories concerning the ways in which our ‘culture of consumption’ promises to impart individualized identities. Archer’s work focuses on the implications of Benjamin and Adorno’s ideas for Americans purchasing their ‘dream homes.’ See Archer, *Architecture and Suburbia*, 13.

Designed to ease the work of housewives, “Everyman’s House” stemmed from Crane’s conviction that most American women did their own housework. The idea that middle-class women had to manage their houses without the aid of live-in servants had become quite widespread by the nineteen-twenties. Statistical portraits of the national servant shortage had been published since the turn of the twentieth century. Women’s magazines reported that between 1870 and 1900 the demand for servants had doubled while the supply increased only by half.⁴⁸ Contemporary figures estimate that most employed women worked as domestic servants in 1870. However, by 1930 less than a fifth of all employed women performed household labor in other women’s houses.⁴⁹ Social insurance theorist I.M. Rubinow co-authored an article titled “The Depth and Breadth of the Servant Problem” that proposed possible explanations for women’s partiality to jobs in factories, offices and shops. The authors speculated that jobs outside the house offered independence, comradery, and a fixed schedule. Conversely, domestic service was increasingly associated with loneliness, social stigma, and long, irregular hours.⁵⁰

Rubinow proposed that setting an eight-hour work day was the only solution to the “servant problem.” Decreased work hours allowed maids and nurses to live apart from their employers and thus more fully participate in social life. The disciples of domestic science preached that it was possible to successfully manage a household with only part-time help. Newly mechanized means of performing household labor meant that live-in servants were no longer necessary. Just as the limited space of the small house was praised for providing the

⁴⁸ I.M. Rubinow and Daniel Durant, “The Depth and Breadth of the Servant Problem,” *McClure’s Magazine*, March 1910, 576.

⁴⁹ David Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 228.

⁵⁰ While Rubinow downplayed ‘social stigma’ as a major cause of the servant problem, historian David Katzman has demonstrated the ways in which feelings of embarrassment played an important role in women’s distaste for domestic service. Rubinow and Durant, “The Depth and Breadth of the Servant Problem,” 576, and Katzman, *Seven Days a Week*, 3-43.

impetus for efficient room coordination, the servant shortage was credited with prompting the invention of new household appliances. To the progressive thinker, necessity was not just the mother of invention; it was the catalyst for technological and managerial revolution.

In addition to their equally snappy names, “Everyman’s House” and “America’s Little House” shared the same objective: to lighten housewives’ labor. Rubinow’s hope that new professional standards would reverse the domestic labor shortage never panned out. The numbers of American servants continued to dwindle into the nineteen-twenties and thirties. Consequently, those who designed middle-class houses hoped to better accommodate housewives who did their own work. While much emphasis was placed on women’s activity in the house, men’s role in household labor was left unchallenged. Alleviating the drudgery of women’s work was not a matter of evenly distributing household chores between husbands and wives. Rather, new consumer products held the keys to domestic revolution. At least, that was the promise of federal housing reformers, advertising agencies, and domestic-science specialists. Better Homes demonstration houses were Period Houses with much emphasis placed on the new cooking, food storage and laundering equipment contained in their modernized kitchens. “America’s Little House” was no exception.

V. A Typical Period House for an Extraordinary Location

“America’s Little House” was a typical example of the ubiquitous nineteen-twenties Period House. These Period Houses maintained the traditional exteriors of their predecessors but revised house footprints.⁵¹ Architects Bullard and Wendehack chose a Georgian-style façade for the Little House because they considered it to be a more or less neutral style (Figs. 10-11). They

⁵¹ Jonathan Lane, “The Period House of the Nineteen-Twenties,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 20, No. 4, (Dec., 1961), 169-178.

eschewed regional styles such as Cape Cod or Southern Colonial, hoping that “America’s Little House” could blend into any suburban neighborhood in the country.⁵² Like many Period Houses, the Manhattan model house situated first-floor work areas at a right angle to living spaces. An “L” shaped plan organized the Little House’s living and dining rooms along the street, with the kitchen, hall, closet and garage towards the rear (Figs. 12-13). In addition to most of these rooms, earlier Georgian house plans would have included a music room, parlor, and/or library. Instead, Period Houses had fewer, larger rooms. Sizable living rooms were especially common, emphasizing their place as the center of family life.⁵³

Better Homes organizers filled the living room of “America’s Little House” with colonial-style reproduction furniture. The colonial era was freighted with nationalist pride and its furniture marketed to middle-class Americans as symbols of cultivated taste. Just a few blocks away from the Little House, the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s period rooms were comprised of authentic colonial-style objects.⁵⁴ Metropolitan trustee Richard Halsey believed that these rooms were capable of improving immigrant morality through inspiring assimilation and discouraging foreign customs.⁵⁵ Halsey perceived the country as threatened by an influx of immigrant bodies whose presence signaled potentially dangerous foreign ideologies.⁵⁶ Like many early twentieth-century Americans, Halsey had an unshakable faith in the power of interior design to improve

⁵² Despite claims for its regional neutrality, the Georgian style was best suited to battling the harsh winters of the East Coast. Its hiproof pitch was steep enough to shed snow and rain, an important concern for New Englanders.

⁵³ Lane, “The Period House of the Nineteen-Twenties,” 170.

⁵⁴ Neil Harris dates the emergence of period room popularity to the teen years of the early twentieth century. For more, see Neil Harris, “Period Rooms and the American Art Museum,” *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 46, No. 2/3, Period Room Architecture in American Art Museums (Summer/Autumn 2012).

⁵⁵ Richard T. Halsey and Elizabeth Tower, *Homes of Our Ancestors* (1925; reprint, New York: Garden City Publishing, 1937).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

the moral conditions of his fellow man. While Better Homes organizers emphasized the importance of improving one's own house, Halsey believed that virtuous behavior could be inspired simply by viewing replicated colonial interiors within the museum's galleries.

By the nineteen-thirties, colonial furniture was an popular marker of middle-class taste. The housing specialists that contributed to "America's Little House" expected their visitors to recognize that the colonial style connoted simple, moral living. Much harder to communicate were the ways in which subtle design choices improved "America's Little House." The Little House's architectural design demonstrated the ways in which small spaces could be made to *appear* larger. Better Homes organizers proposed that the small house's limited space could be stretched at virtually no cost to the homeowner. Such ideas were not unique to the Better Homes demonstration. Architects and interior decorators had long prided themselves on their ability to manipulate perception. Nineteenth-century house-pattern books described clever designs that could "trick" one's eye, creating the false impression of spaciousness in small houses.⁵⁷ By the nineteen thirties, methods for "producing space" had become familiar to readers of professional and non-professional architecture literature.

Distributed to visitors, the Little House pamphlet was organized according to "space-saving" and "space-making" schemes. Architects Bullard and Wendehack saved space in a number of fairly traditional ways. Second-floor bedrooms opened directly onto bathrooms, saving the square footage ordinarily taken up by hallways (Fig. 13). The central staircase was sandwiched between two walls, eliminating the space and expenses consumed by a customary

⁵⁷ Sandy Isenstadt argues that the architectural rhetoric of perceptual manipulation is a modern phenomenon. First traced to nineteenth-century pattern books, the "production of spaciousness" persists as a concern in today's professional and non-professional architecture literature. For more, see Isenstadt's *The Modern American House: Spaciousness and Middle-Class Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

open-string stairway (Fig. 14). Built-in corner bookcases in the living room and china cabinets in the dining room were additional space-saving measures.

While “space-saving” schemes entailed the reorganization of actual space, “space-making” involved the manipulation of spatial perception. Emily Post advised using under-scaled furniture and over-scaled windows to create the impression of size. As a consultant for “America’s Little House,” Post worked with interior decorator Elizabeth Parker to create the illusion of space in the small house. Large, projecting bay windows enhanced one’s sense of space in the living and dining rooms. Parker wrote that this spatial effect could be exaggerated by installing full curtains, thereby treating triple windows as one big window (Fig. 15). Large windows could bring the outdoors inside, promoting the illusion of continuity between indoor and outdoor spaces. Hence, the size of living rooms could be especially enhanced when a bay window opened onto an uninterrupted view of the natural landscape. Although the urban site of “America’s Little House” did not offer much natural scenery, the house’s large bay windows nevertheless created the impression of an unbroken space that united the dining and living rooms with the carefully landscaped front yard.

Interior designers were particularly concerned with the ways that color could be used to enhance or diminish the size of rooms. House furnishing literature claimed that light colored walls and textiles exaggerated one’s sense of space in a small house. Parker claimed that the Little House’s “air of spaciousness” was achieved by the combination of white walls and grey carpeting. To add visual interest, hints of red and green appeared in the house’s furniture. These accent colors livened up the white-walled rooms without robbing them of their ability to exaggerate spatial perception. Interior decorators spoke of space as a flexible phenomenon capable of being harnessed and exploited by expert designers. Similarly, architects promoted their ability to manipulate both actual and perceived space. For the architectural profession,

spatial perception offered a unique territory upon which architects could differentiate their skills from those of builders. What made the ‘production of space’ a troublesome marker of either architectural or interior design expertise is that it was always *supposed* to go unnoticed. Large windows, white walls, and gray carpets were subtle indicators of spatial manipulation. In their writings, architects and interior designers drew attention to spatial illusions that were meant to be inconspicuous in the built environment. Visitors may have failed to recognize the subtle markers of expert architecture and interior design that characterized “America’s Little House.” Much more obvious was the landscape design that transformed 39th Street and Park Avenue into a tiny, park-like oasis.

The Better Homes organization preached that children’s safety hinged on their family’s ownership of a private backyard. Such advice had become commonplace by the nineteen-thirties. Period Houses were regularly pushed to the edges of streets, allowing for a larger private yard. While this increased space sometimes facilitated improved play areas for children, it also had a number of other common uses. In the popular sociological study, *Middletown*, the authors described the common practice of halving one’s lot in order to accommodate an additional house. The rentals built at the rear of residential lots were an important source of income for Muncie, Indiana, (aka “Middletown”) residents.⁵⁸ Even when Muncie homeowners decided to keep their entire lots intact, backyards were often devoted to unsightly storage. Sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd bemoaned the decline of backyard gardening, writing, “Backyards are ceasing to be ample affairs with grass and fruit trees and grape arbors [...] Among working class families, smaller yards, less home canning, lack of winter storage space for food, time spent riding and tinkering on the car, movies, and similar factors have been responsible for the decline

⁵⁸ Robert Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown*, 95-96.

of backyard gardening.”⁵⁹ As a survey of a “typical” American community, *Middletown*’s problems were characterized as national problems. Publications concerning the shameful aesthetics of America’s neighborhoods spurred outdoor beautification efforts.

Better Homes organizers were adamant about the virtues of well-landscaped backyards.⁶⁰ Among the many experts enlisted to plan “America’s Little House,” landscape architect Annette Hoyt Flanders occupied an important position.⁶¹ Flanders designed a play yard, drying yard, lawn and bird bath at the Little House’s rear (Figs. 16-17). Peppered among the shrubbery and fresh cut grass were apple, dogwood, and maple trees. A major problem for Flanders was the difficulty of creating a garden around an unsightly rear garage. Originally unattached to the house, car garages became “domesticated” during the Period House era.⁶² Successfully attaching the garage to the house was initially a thorny task. Fear of gas fumes barred the building of second-floor rooms above the garage. More importantly, the narrow dimensions of city lots encouraged the construction of garages at the house’s rear. Backyards were often compromised by ugly cement driveways that linked the garage to the street (Fig. 18).

Positioning garages at the house’s rear also meant that mothers were unable to supervise their children’s outdoor play from inside the house. In “America’s Little House” window views from the kitchen and clothyery captured the cement driveway, an unlikely place for children to entertain themselves. Far more preferable would have been situating the mother’s work rooms at

⁵⁹ Ibid, 95.

⁶⁰ Better Homes Executive Director James Ford called backyards and gardens a “fundamental requisite” for childhood in his essay, “Planning and Equipping the Home for Children,” in *The Better Homes Manual*, ed. Blanche Halbert (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), 195.

⁶¹ In the nineteen-thirties, Flanders’ position as a female landscape architect was far from unusual. The importance of women in the emerging field of landscape architecture is detailed in Thaisa Way’s *Unbounded Practice: Women and Landscape Architecture in the Twentieth Century* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013).

⁶² John Brinckerhoff Jackson, “The Domestication of the Garage,” in *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 118-125.

the house's rear, allowing for constant supervision of backyard play. The eventual transformation of the rear garage into the modern side garage required the lateral orientation of the house along its lot. While narrow city lots barred this possibility, the larger lots of suburban developments allowed for the lateral expansion of the house.⁶³ Faced with the problem of landscaping large suburban yards, Americans had difficulty funding garden purchases. To make her outdoor beautification efforts more economically feasible, Flanders extended purchases over a five-year plan. "America's Little House" placed the expensive burden of landscape design and maintenance on the homeowner. What the Little House failed to demonstrate was how landscape design was becoming less associated with individual residents and increasingly attributed to community-scale developers.

In the same year that "America's Little House" was constructed, the Levitts purchased the forty-six acres that would become their "Strathmore" community in Manhasset, New York.⁶⁴ Curving roads dotted with trees offered picturesque views of neighborhood houses and public parks. Nature was an important consideration in the planning of Strathmore. Like Kohler Village, the Levitts' picture-perfect town took a cue from the English garden city of Letchworth. Strathmore's parks and recreational facilities were also inspired by those designed by architect and planner Clarence Stein for Radburn, New Jersey. Stein wrote that private developers needed to consider houses not as distinct entities but as units in a coordinated, comprehensive community plan.⁶⁵ His words were echoed by federal housing consultant Edith Elmer Wood,

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Richard Longstreth, "The Levitts, Mass-Produced Houses, and Community Planning in the Mid-twentieth Century," in *Second Suburb*, ed. Dianne Harris (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 128-129.

⁶⁵ Clarence Stein to Alfred K. Stern, September 15, 1930 (Presidential Papers Subject File—Better Homes, Box 74, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library). Quoted in *The Rise of the Community Builders*, by Marc A. Weiss (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 2-3.

who wrote that “good housing cannot be realized through single good houses scattered among bad ones, but only through the creation of good neighborhoods large enough to maintain wholesome social characteristics of their own.”⁶⁶ It would seem that the Better Homes campaign failed to communicate the importance of community-scale planning. After all, the very logic of the model house was at odds with Wood’s convictions. What were Better Homes demonstration houses other than “single good houses scattered among bad ones?” Individual model houses simply could not demonstrate the *relationship* between houses, infrastructure, and landscaping in residential enclaves.

Better Homes literature concerning community-scale developments circulated among housing experts. These formal reports were not publicized like the “prize-winning” houses discussed in demonstration pamphlets. In the year following the President’s Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, Better Homes Executive Directive James Ford co-authored a report titled, “Slums, Large Scale Housing and Decentralization” (1932). Ford believed that the housing problem could be solved through a combination of government city planning and corporate building. He advocated the decentralization of industrial facilities to the urban periphery. In these newly suburban areas, Ford envisioned small houses dotting comprehensively planned communities. Ford’s decision to situate “America’s Little House” in Manhattan did not suggest that the Better Homes organization held the impractical hope of substituting Midtown skyscrapers for Period houses. Rather, it was believed that the development of New York’s suburban periphery could relocate tenement dwellers and provide the possibility of slum clearance.

⁶⁶ Edith Elmer Wood, “Changes Proposed in Housing Conditions,” Feb 1, 1934, box 67, folder 4, Call Number: D&A Wood ReCAP, Edith Elmer Wood Papers, Avery Drawings and Archives Collection, Columbia University.

Ford's interest in suburban development reflected the contemporary belief that improved environments produced healthier citizens. Using the analogy of "good seeds and bad soil," Ford wrote that even children of the best hereditary stock could be thwarted from wholesome development by poor environmental conditions.⁶⁷ Ford's claims about the relationship between heredity and environment had obvious ties to contemporary eugenics debates. The declining rates of communicable diseases in the nineteen-twenties prompted medical researchers to turn their attention to questions of hereditary disease. Published in the same year as the *Better Homes Manual*, Archibald E. Garrod's *The Inborn Factors in Disease* argued that individuals were biochemically predisposed to certain contagious illnesses.⁶⁸ The theory that human populations could be engineered to withstand disease had come up against a serious hurdle. Genetic susceptibility to communicable disease meant that environmental factors would continue to play an important role in public health.

Besides influencing health, the environment was also credited with engendering moral citizens. Colonial furniture reproductions in "America's Little House" and authentic colonial furniture at the nearby Metropolitan were freighted with nationalist pride. Colonial objects were characterized as signs of moral virtue. Their display in model houses and period rooms were intended to define and protect "Americanness." American interest in historical forms of house decoration became a form of patriotism. The call to convert immigrants into proud owners of colonial-style home décor was taken up by government authorities, domestic scientists, art museums, and retail corporations. Influenced by ideas from their home countries, immigrants purchased the overstuffed furniture and gaudy ornaments that were so offensive to American

⁶⁷ James Ford, "Introduction," in *The Better Homes Manual*, ed. Blanche Halbert (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), ix.

⁶⁸ A.E. Garrod, *The Inborn Factors in Disease* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931). For more on Garrod and medical genetics, see Nathaniel Comfort's *The Science of Human Perfection: How Genes Became the Heart of American Medicine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

middle-class taste.⁶⁹ Immigrants regarded these mass-produced products as distinctly “American.”⁷⁰ In doing so, they demonstrated that the material signs of cultural assimilation were subject to interpretation. The American house was interpellated through a constant process of negotiation in which retailers, public health officials, domestic science practitioners and housewives continually redefined the “ideal” household. Women practiced agency in the ways that they adapted contemporary housing advice and cultural traditions to suit their own needs.

VI. The Business Model of Household Management

Proponents of scientific management were often disinterested in the many cultural and economic factors that determined an individual housewife’s daily routine. They claimed that traditional methods of domestic labor wasted time. One of the most ardent advocates of domestic science systems was Lillian Gilbreth. As a self-titled “household engineer,” Gilbreth’s objective was to arrive at the optimum organization of space through the scientific analysis of household labor. Recruited by the Better Homes committee, Gilbreth was asked to design the nursery and kitchen of “America’s Little House.” She referred to these spaces as the mother’s “work centers.” The concept of “work centers” emphasized her conviction that even the most basic distinctions between kitchens, laundry rooms, etc. were subject to revision. For Gilbreth, the kitchen was understood as the domestic space most in need of scientific analysis.

By the time Gilbreth was approached to design the Little House kitchen, she had already planned and executed several test kitchens. Four years earlier, Gilbreth’s “Kitchen Practical” had

⁶⁹ Cohen, “Embellishing a Life of Labor.”

⁷⁰ Ibid.

been featured in the *New York Herald Tribune*.⁷¹ Photographs of the project were accompanied by two “before” and “after” diagrams that demonstrated how kitchen furniture and appliances could be reorganized to increase efficiency (Figs. 19-20). Gilbreth grouped kitchen equipment according to the housewife’s ease of movement. Her “circular work space” situated the housewife in the center of carefully arranged kitchen appliances. Objects were positioned in relation to one another and according to their role in specific tasks, such as cleaning or cooking. Lessons learned in Gilbreth’s “Kitchen Practical” were reapplied in “America’s Little House.” *The Parents’ Magazine* painstakingly detailed exactly how the Little House kitchen systematized the multi-step baking process.⁷² A short excerpt from the magazine relates the experience of working in the Manhattan model kitchen. “If you are standing at the kitchen cabinet your right hand can open the door of the refrigerator and your left the door of the oven. This in turn means that all baking operations can be done without walking.”⁷³ Through applying the logic of the “circular work space” to tasks related to cooking and baking, “America’s Little Kitchen” eliminated wasted motions and thereby saved time.

Lillian Gilbreth was well acquainted with Frederick W. Taylor’s tenets of “scientific management.” Her husband, Frank Gilbreth, had worked for Taylor as an efficiency consultant.⁷⁴ His job entailed the application of Taylor’s system to real-life problems in American factories. The original objective of scientific management was to increase efficiency on the factory floor

⁷¹ For a detailed account of Gilbreth’s “Kitchen Practical” project, see Laurel D. Graham’s essay, “Domesticating Efficiency: Lillian Gilbreth’s Scientific Management of Homemakers, 1924-1930,” *Signs*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Spring, 1999), 633-675.

⁷² Helen Sprackling, “Homekeeping in America’s Little House,” *The Parents’ Magazine*, February 1935, 28, 36, 83.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 36.

⁷⁴ See Haber’s chapter, “The Little Band of Taylorites,” 31-50.

through determining the most efficient means of accomplishing a job.⁷⁵ Once the ‘one best way’ to complete a task was determined, the time taken to perform the job was documented. Workers were then compensated according to a differential piece rate system. If they accomplished their job within the approved time, they were paid accordingly. If not, their wages were docked, making it impossible to hold the job. Taylor’s system promised to eliminate “soldiering” as laborers could no longer waste company time and expect payment.

Carving his own niche in this new management scheme, Frank Gilbreth famously used filmed motion studies to better capture the movements of laborers. After analyzing these films, he could better assess how to recalibrate laborers’ physical motions precisely to save time and energy. These time-and-motion studies reappeared in the work of Lillian Gilbreth, whose test kitchens were the products of household labor analysis. Chief among her concerns was the standardization of the heights of kitchen work surfaces. She proposed that the distance from the ground to the housewife’s elbow should set the standard for uniform height requirements. Hence, circular work spaces and standardized countertops were consistent components of Lillian Gilbreth’s various model kitchens. Not surprisingly, “America’s Little Kitchen” did not deviate from this formula. Governed by an objective system, the model house equated household labor with business management.

“Scientific management” became a buzzword for domestic-science practitioners in the early twentieth century. They believed that the principles of scientific management were flexible enough to accommodate problems beyond the factory floor. Taylor’s interest in discovering the ‘one best way’ to perform a job was easily applied to household labor. Scientific management in the kitchen meant exchanging Taylor’s descriptions of punitive action for housewives’ accounts

⁷⁵ For more on Frederick Winslow Taylor’s scientific management, see his book, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911; reprint, Mansfield Center, Conn.: Martino Publishing, 2014).

of domestic liberation. As Samuel Haber has noted, “While in 1895 Taylor’s system always meant hard work, by 1911 it sometimes meant easy work.”⁷⁶ Haber credits the 1910-11 Eastern Rate Case with popularizing key tenets of scientific management.⁷⁷ The trial centered on a freight increase proposed by the Eastern railroads. Shippers objected to the rising prices, claiming that the railroads could maintain current rates if they only adopted scientific-management principles. From this point forward, “scientific management” became a popular way to connote efficiency within the business sector and in seemingly unrelated fields. Without question, the discipline of domestic science was structured by terminology drawn from Taylor’s lexicon. Popular appropriation of scientific management principles papered over the moral condemnation of laziness that characterized Taylor’s original system. Taylorism, as applied to the domestic sphere, was considered a vital component in the realization of the household manager’s potential.

The idea that housework could be systematized according to business principles would have alarmed early domestic science reformers. For Victorian women, advancing the respectability of domestic life meant demonstrating the ways in which it differed from work outside the house. Famous for her anti-suffragist politics, Catherine Beecher advocated a strict division between the domestic and public spheres. Houses were supposed to protect their inhabitants from the morally polluted outside world. She preached that women’s superior moral qualities made them superb “home preachers” whose responsibility was to instill Christian virtues in their children and husbands.⁷⁸ Self-sacrifice and domestic isolation characterized the

⁷⁶ Samuel Haber, *Efficiency and Uplift: Scientific Management in the Progressive Era 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 30.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁷⁸ Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1982), 55-56.

ideal Victorian housewife.⁷⁹ Encouraging women to order their housework according to fairly rigorous day-to-day schedules, management was an important element of Catherine Beecher's philosophy. Crucially, Beecher described these management systems as adaptable to the internal logic of individual households. The idea that housework could be guided by a single, business philosophy was incompatible with the separate domestic and public spheres advocated by Victorians.

It was not until domestic science itself became recognized as an academic discipline that the ideal household was no longer understood to be an isolated one. Scientific management systems permeated American households. In doing so, they challenged the sentimental notion of separate domestic and business worlds. The professionalization of domestic science came about through the discipline's incorporation in universities and the publications of its most ardent proponents. Christine Frederick's *The New Housekeeping* (1918) was an important milestone in the development of domestic science. Her book detailed Frederick W. Taylor's scientific management system and proposed ways to apply his business philosophy to the house. Significantly, Christine Frederick made it clear that scientific management principles would be most beneficial to the middle-class:

The home problem for the women of the very poor is fairly simple. The women of the poor themselves come from the class of servants. Their homemaking is far less complex, their tastes simple, and society demands no appearance-standard for them [...] The problem, the real issue, confronts the *middle-class woman* of slight strength and still slighter means, and of whom society expects so much—the wives of ministers on small salary, wives of bank clerks, shoe salesmen, college professors, and young men in

⁷⁹ Ibid.

various businesses starting to make their way. They are refined, educated women, many with a college or business training.⁸⁰

The rewards offered by domestic science were primarily intended for educated white women of moderate means. Systematizing housework according to business principles stressed the intellectual requirements of domestic work. Advancing the respectability of domestic labor meant showing that intelligence was required to run a successful household. Frederick's belief that domestic science did not concern "the very poor" showed that it took a certain degree of privilege to buy into American homebuilding and management ideology.

Frederick articulated the difference between 'poor' women's houses and 'middle-class' dwellings as a matter of visibility. Society simply did not demand the same "appearance-standard" of tenements as it did for suburban houses. A nagging concern over appearances characterized not just society, but domestic science specifically. If kitchens were to be compared with stream-lined businesses, they needed to look more like offices. Besides housing modern cleaning, cooking, and laundering equipment, kitchens had to show the managerial work of housewives. For Gilbreth, the solution seemed to lie in the creation of a custom-designed management desk (Fig. 21). Her management desk stood in the "clothery" attached to the Little House kitchen. Given that most houses did not include space for this extra laundry room, Gilbreth's management desk needed to be compact. By minimizing horizontal surface space and maximizing vertical shelving, she devised a desk that could more easily fit into the average kitchen.

Gilbreth's management desk promoted the idea that housework required careful planning. Check books, bank books, recipe books, and educational pamphlets on nutrition and child rearing

⁸⁰ Christine Frederick, *The New Housekeeping: Efficiency Studies in Home Management* (1918; repr., London: Forgotten Books, 2012), 11-12.

occupied the shelves of her signature desk. Lined with cork, the desk's cabinet doors were made into bulletin boards. Files for bills, receipts, and menus promised to elevate household management from its precarious position in individual memory to the security of organizational memory. Along with the greater 'efficiency' offered by new cooking, cleaning and laundering technologies came the expansion of the housewife's responsibilities. Gilbreth's management desk could be employed to keep track of all the new childrearing responsibilities that accompanied the development of domestic science. Bulletin boards kept track of children's increasingly dense schedules: lessons, doctor appointments and school functions filled women's calendars. Filing systems stored information concerning children's diets, records of baby's changing weights, and doctor's prescriptions. The increased 'leisure time' afforded by new household technologies was quickly consumed by new childrearing activities.⁸¹ Women were expected to play a much more labor-intensive role in their children's lives. Statistics showed that the number of hours that women of the nineteen-twenties and early thirties spent performing household labor did not markedly change from those of the previous generation.⁸²

Lillian Gilbreth's management desk visually demonstrated that "America's Little House" was organized by the same objective principles that guided the business world. Advertisements similarly stressed the importance of furniture in communicating the efficient management of offices and houses. Printed for *Ladies Home Journal*, a McDougall kitchen cabinet ad pictured a business man seated at an office desk (Fig. 22). The tagline claimed that "if the man worked in the kitchen" he would apply the same efficiency principles to the domestic sphere as he did in business. Inevitably, his interest in time and energy saving systems would prompt his purchase of a McDougall cabinet. Despite the claim that efficient systems governed both the office desk and

⁸¹ Ruth Schwarz Cohen, *More Work for Mother* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 178-9.

⁸² *Ibid*, 178.

the kitchen cabinet, the McDougall advertisement nevertheless demonstrated that household and office equipment still *looked* quite different from one another. Gilbreth sought to reconcile these differences through appropriating the business desk for the kitchen. By the nineteen-thirties, the modern business had become the standard by which domestic activities could be judged.

VII. Conclusion

The very notion of a private “domestic sphere” and a business-centered “public sphere” was challenged by the Little House demonstration. As an urban spectacle, the model house made household labor undeniably visible. Situated in the heart of America’s business sector, the Better Homes demonstration proposed that housework was not so different from office work. The principles of scientific management structured American labor whether it was performed in high-rise office buildings or two-story Period Houses. Peering down on “America’s Little House” from his corporate office, a new business professional played an important role in shaping housing discourse. The high-level manager was a distinctly modern occupation that appealed to federal housing reformers.

With the late nineteenth-century expansion of communications technologies, corporate firms controlled larger numbers of employees over a greater geographic area.⁸³ The ambitious national spread of these corporate businesses required new systems of managerial control. Corporations operated according to sophisticated internal management systems guided by department heads. These high-level managers were trusted because of their specialist knowledge and disinterested position.⁸⁴ While owners could be easily persuaded by short-term profits,

⁸³ Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 103-105.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

managers were considered better able to keep a company's longevity in mind. These new business professionals seemed to be "objective" decision-makers. High-level managers practicing scientific management embodied the new corporate philosophy of administration. With similar plans to control large geographic areas, philanthropic housing reformers were inspired by corporate management systems. The housing experts that guided the Better Homes movement modeled themselves after high-level managers. They believed their usefulness was owed to their disinterested position and expert knowledge. Despite the extensive shopping lists that accompanied "America's Little House" pamphlets, Better Homes directors claimed they had no product to sell. Their stated aim was to raise living standards through helping the public make informed consumer choices.

Faith in the ability of modern household appliances to transform the domestic sphere characterized both housing reformers and corporate retailers alike. Consequently, the Better Homes organization often had difficulty differentiating their work from that of advertisers. Similarly designed to influence consumer spending, model houses and department store displays were rather indistinguishable. The difficulty of communicating expertise characterized the work of "America's Little House" architects and interior designers. Such problems were inherited from the domestic science movement, whose practitioners often had one foot in philanthropic organizations and the other in profit-driven companies. As pioneers in the discipline of sociology, domestic scientists used statistical knowledge to better understand Americans as citizens and consumers. Christine Frederick's *Selling Mrs. Consumer* rated the appeal of different advertising techniques based on consumer surveys. The commodification of public opinion meant that Americans newly understood the corporate profits at stake when surveyors recorded consumer desires. Harder to determine was the possibility of public opinion impacting more than just advertisements. Contemporaries questioned whether the public could make

meaningful contributions to economic and social policy.⁸⁵ The era's appeals to the masses shed light on the difficulty of mobilizing a united public towards governmental reform. As the Better Homes movement developed, the recommendations of housing experts increasingly overshadowed attempts to incorporate the ideas of "average" Americans.

Experts like Lillian Gilbreth attempted to find universal methods for household improvement. She believed that scientific management could solve everybody's domestic labor problems. Personalized houses and improvised methods of domestic labor were incompatible with the nineteen-twenties taste for efficiency and health. Curbing the spread of communicable disease depended on raising the hygienic standards of American houses. Nineteenth-century sentimental attitudes needed to shift in order for twentieth-century methods of standardized house design and management to effect change. Victorian culture pictured the house as a fortress from the outside world. Such ideas typified the writings of social thinker John Ruskin. For Ruskin, the home was a social institution characterized by its ability to protect inhabitants from the "anxieties of a hostile society."⁸⁶ Once the house was penetrated by these evils, it ceased to be a home. The early years of domestic science introduced leaders who similarly claimed that a strict division should separate public and private life. Catherine Beecher hoped to instill Americans with a newfound respect for housewives through emphasizing the *differences* between household and professional labor. Women's role as "home preachers" required them to protect the house from the outside world. Proponents of the burgeoning domestic science movement believed that the impenetrability of the house was its primary virtue.

⁸⁵ In the late twenties, John Dewey questioned the possibility of mobilizing public opinion to effect meaningful change in his book, *The Public and its Problems*.

⁸⁶ John Ruskin, "Of Queens and Gardens," *Sesame and Lilies* (London: 1864; New York: Metropolitan Pub. Co., 1871), quoted in Lizabeth Cohen, "Embellishing a Life of Labor," 753.

A new conceptualization of housework characterized the later years of the domestic science campaign. Christine Frederick claimed that housewives had much to learn from business professionals. Scientific management systems were just as applicable to the domestic sphere as to the business world. Outside influences were no longer characterized as polluting the house. Rather, the management philosophies of the business world were deemed necessary to improving households. The individualized and impenetrable house was no longer the only means of securing personal fulfillment. Standardized and scientifically managed houses could also be signs of personal success. The Better Homes campaign adopted the preoccupation with efficient, standardized houses that characterized domestic science. “America’s Little House” offered a Taylorized model of house design and management.

Despite widespread interest in Taylorized houses, the individualized house continued to be an attractive idea. The Better Homes movement itself maintained the contradictory impulse to promote standardized *and* personalized houses. James Ford encouraged Americans to solicit the help of the Architects’ Small House Service Bureau when choosing house plans. He described the selection of house plans as a highly individualized exercise predicated on a particular family’s idiosyncratic needs. Beyond selecting the right house plans, homeowners were also advised to adapt house interiors to suit their tastes. Emily Post’s belief that professional decorators should “personalize” houses appealed to the Better Homes committee. Post’s recruitment as a consultant for “America’s Little House” testified to the persistence of the individualized house ideal.

When novelist Pearl S. Buck wrote about “America’s Little House,” her words called to mind earlier Victorian attitudes. Buck described the Little House as standing “unperturbed and

unfrightened” amidst the “business and pleasure” carried on in office buildings.⁸⁷ Her moralizing language characterized the Little House as a beacon of virtue within the secular world of business. Echoing the sentiments of John Ruskin and Catherine Beecher, Buck emphasized the inviolability of the ideal house. Despite sharing scientific management principles, the Little House and surrounding office buildings could still recall the nineteenth-century paradigm of separate domestic and public spheres. “America’s Little House” was situated at the nexus of conflicting ideals. The cultural appeal of the individualized house would never be completely replaced by the Taylorized one.

Better Homes organizers described the model house as if it was capable of unambiguously conveying their agenda. However, model houses were never actually trusted to “speak” on their own. Radio programs and written pamphlets were necessary components of these educational demonstrations. Architecture was an unreliable indicator of its creator’s intentions. The sentimental Victorian ideals and modern managerial philosophies prompted by “America’s Little House” proved that architectural form could inspire confused readings. Model houses by themselves were unable to transmit the Better Homes organization’s objectives. The Better Homes movement conveyed their messages of scientific management and standardization through mass publications, radio programs and homemaking classes. Housing reformers inspired American citizens to pour money into home improvement and construction efforts. The gears of the housing industry needed to grind if the country was ever to pull out of its Depression-era standstill. The shifting consumer tastes captured in professional and non-professional housing literature shed light on the domestic ideals of the privileged classes. More difficult to analyze were the ways in which working-class groups responded to the appeals of housing reformers.

⁸⁷ Pearl S. Buck’s description of the Little House accompanied Richard A. Smith’s photographs in the “America’s Little House” pamphlet distributed to visitors.

The Better Homes organization sought to convert natural-born and naturalized citizens into efficient homemakers. Their demonstration houses were built to prove that housewives should embrace the logic of business management. Reformers described domestic labor as newly liberated from the shackles of backwardness and isolation. Sentimental ideas about the strict separation between public and private life had always been impractical for the working class.⁸⁸ Domestic servants often brought their work home and spent most days doing other people's laundry, cooking, and cleaning. For many women, their own housework came second to the domestic chores they performed for pay. Addressing themselves to the "average" American, the Better Homes administration avoided the problem of defining the different groups that attended their events. Diverging from the ideas of federal housing reformers, alternative conceptions of the "best house" were predicated on mixed cultural traditions and limited budgets. How individualized one's house could be was largely dictated by wealth. Similarly, a considerable sum of money was required to purchase the equipment necessary to manage a household scientifically. For many Americans, the choice was not between a personalized house versus a Taylorized one. The ability to own and furnish a house was a desire that often served as an end in itself.

⁸⁸ Cohen, "Embellishing a Life of Labor," 764.

[image redacted]

FIG. 1.

Richard A. Smith

America's Little House

1934

Image Source: (Richard A. Smith and Mattie E. Hewitt Photography Collection, New-York Historical Society)

[image redacted]

FIG. 2.

Richard A. Smith

America's Little House Broadcasting Studio

1934

Image Source: (Richard A. Smith and Mattie E. Hewitt Photography Collection, New-York Historical Society)

[image redacted]

FIG. 3.

“The 100 Stations of the Columbia Broadcasting System”

1934

Image Source: (*America's Little House Booklet*, 1934.)

[image redacted]

FIG. 4.

“Hoosier Cabinets Advertisement”

Ladies Home Journal

September, 1919

Image Source: (Special Collections, New York Public Library)

[image redacted]

FIG. 5.

Richard A. Smith

America's Little House Living Room

1934

Image Source: (Richard A. Smith and Mattie E. Hewitt Photography Collection, New-York Historical Society)

[image redacted]

FIG. 6.

Mattie E. Hewitt

Wanamaker Dept. Store Display

1934

Image Source: (Richard A. Smith and Mattie E. Hewitt Photography Collection, New-York Historical Society)

[image redacted]

FIG. 7.

“Prize-winning Model House”

Better Homes in America booklet

1924

Image Source: (Edith Elmer Wood Papers, Avery Drawings and Archives Collection, Columbia University)

[image redacted]

FIG. 8.

“Organizing a Better Homes Administration”

June, 1923

Image Source: (Edith Elmer Wood Papers, Avery Drawings and Archives Collection, Columbia University)

[image redacted]

FIG. 9.

Carolyn Bartlett Crane

“First Floor of Everyman’s House”

1924

Image Source: (*Everyman’s House*)

[image redacted]

FIG. 10.

Richard A. Smith

America's Little House Front-view

1934

Image Source: (Richard A. Smith and Mattie E. Hewitt Photography Collection, New-York Historical Society)

[image redacted]

FIG. 11.

Richard A. Smith

America's Little House Side-View

1934

Image Source: (Richard A. Smith and Mattie E. Hewitt Photography Collection, New-York Historical Society)

[image redacted]

FIG. 12.

“First Floor of America’s Little House”

1934

Image Source: (*America’s Little House* booklet)

[image redacted]

FIG. 13.

“Second Floor Plan of America’s Little House”

1934

Image Source: (*America’s Little House* booklet)

[image redacted]

FIG. 14.

Richard A. Smith

America's Little House: Space-saving Solutions

1934

Image Source: (Richard A. Smith and Mattie E. Hewitt Photography Collection, New-York Historical Society)

[image redacted]

FIG. 15.

Richard A. Smith

America's Little House: Space-making Solutions

1934

Image Source: (Richard A. Smith and Mattie E. Hewitt Photography Collection, New-York Historical Society)

[image redacted]

FIG. 16.

Annette Hoyt Flanders

“Landscape Plan”

1934

Image Source: (*America's Little House* booklet)

[image redacted]

FIG. 17.

Richard A. Smith

America's Little House: Garden

1934

Image Source: (Richard A. Smith and Mattie E. Hewitt Photography Collection, New-York Historical Society)

[image redacted]

FIG. 18.

Bert Lawson

America's Little House Driveway

1934

Image Source: (*America's Little House* booklet)

[image redacted]

FIG. 19.

Lillian Gilbreth

The Kitchen Practical

1930

Image Source: (Reprinted from Laurel D. Graham,
“Domesticating Efficiency: Lillian Gilbreth’s Scientific Management of
Homemakers, 1924--1930,” *Signs*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Spring, 1999), 664)

[image redacted]

FIG. 20.

Lillian Gilbreth

The Kitchen Practical

1930

Image Source: (Reprinted from Laurel D. Graham,
“Domesticating Efficiency: Lillian Gilbreth’s Scientific Management of
Homemakers, 1924--1930,” *Signs*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Spring, 1999), 664)

[image redacted]

FIG. 21.

Richard A. Smith

America's Little House: Management Desk

1934

Image Source: (Richard A. Smith and Mattie E. Hewitt Photography Collection, New-York Historical Society)

[image redacted]

FIG. 22.

McDougall Cabinet Advertisement

Ladies Home Journal

June, 1919

Image Source: (Special Collections, New York Public Library)

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