Industrialists Not Butterflies

In 1873 the leaders of Kansas State Agricultural College, the first coeducational land-grant institution in the United States, adopted a radical new curriculum that would have unexpected national impact. This curriculum emphasized practical approaches by re-

Women's Higher Education at Kansas State Agricultural College, 1873–1882
quiring hands-on industrial classes to impart vocational skills. By so doing, the college became a pioneer in the industrial-arts or manual-training (not to be confused with manual labor) approach to learning. It also became one of the first colleges to include domestic subjects in a bachelor's curriculum. Nineteenth-century contemporaries acknowledged that Kansas State's influential program "furnished the model for the departments of household economy in many of the western colleges."  

Surprisingly, Kansas State Agricultural College has received little attention in the literature on women and higher education even though its controversial industrial offerings provided academic vocational training for women at a time when the idea was highly unpopular. In fact, it often has been dismissed as offering little more than a sewing and cooking course for women. Possibly because it did indeed include "cooking and sewing," Kansas State's distinctive approach to women's education has appeared to some twentieth-century commentators as merely a conservative attempt to keep educated women locked into domesticity. A careful analysis of "the Kansas plan," however, reveals instead a program that was radical for its day in that it successfully encouraged women to prepare for self-supporting careers as well as traditional roles. The particular solution with its balance of cultural, scientific, and practical classes suited the frontier environment in which the program developed and eventually influenced the national home economics movement.

In mid-nineteenth-century America only a small segment of the college-age population went beyond the common public school for any kind of higher

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education, and only 20 percent of these students were female. Most people deemed higher education unnecessary and inappropriate for women who were destined for the domestic sphere. Even those who conceded that women deserved to be well educated did not agree "as to the manner or extent."

Some influential leaders believed that a crusade for formal training in domestic roles would be an effective strategy to expand educational opportunities for women. Sarah Hale, the editor of Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine from 1837 to 1877, campaigned regularly for women's higher education and urged that household science be incorporated into the curriculum. Catharine Beecher, author of the widely read book *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841), likewise argued that domestic science should be a "distinct branch of school education."

Others opposed this strategy. Mary Lyon, founder of Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in Massachusetts (1837), required domestic work of her students but only to run the school economically. She stressed that this manual-labor system of housekeeping simply adapted the family pattern to the boarding school. It was "not an integral part of her educational plan" to train teachers. The trustees of Vassar Female College in New York, established in 1865, concluded that "a full course in the arts of domestic economy" could not be successfully incorporated in a liberal arts college "without a far larger demand on the time of the students than would be either practicable or wise." Eastern women's colleges followed Vassar's lead and excluded domestic economy from their curriculums, opting to duplicate patterns set by prestigious men's colleges. Sarah Hale commented:

The young lawyer or merchant who has the good fortune to carry off to his new home a fair graduate of Vassar College will doubtless be not a little proud of the intellectual acquirements of his bride. But when he comes down with a limp collar to an ill cooked breakfast, the idea will be likely to occur to him that it would be well if the idol of his heart, in addition to so much abstract science, had acquired something more of that practical training for her actual sphere. Calls for domestic training continued. Hoping that the new land-grant colleges would respond, Sarah Hale commended Kansas for being the first

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A crisis brought both agricultural matters and domestic matters to a head. In the early 1870s Kansas farmers experienced severe economic stress. As a consequence, in farm newspapers and at meetings, farm leaders began to criticize the college. Considering education an essential ingredient in improving the quality of life on the farm, they became increasingly impatient with the slow progress in agricultural and industrial training at their land-grant college. George T. Anthony, editor of The Kansas Farmer, called for a "radical change in the course of study and mode of instruction," finding strong support from the rapidly growing farmers' movement that was sweeping Kansas in 1872 and 1873. Farmers and their local organizations, which included clubs, unions, and granges, pressured the Republican legislature. In March 1873 the legislature responded by appointing a new board of regents for the agricultural college.

Since farmers favored separate agricultural and mechanical colleges and wanted practical courses in agricultural and domestic science, Kansas State's replacement trustees wisely decided to restructure the college along these lines. They believed the financially strapped state would find it hard to close the only college meeting the immediate practical needs of a predominately agricultural and industrial populace.

Under pressure, President Denison resigned, and in September 1873 the Reverend John A. Anderson, pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Junction City, became Kansas State's second president. The regents charged Anderson with the job of establishing a new direction for the college. To many observers, the thirty-nine-year-old Anderson seemed an unlikely candidate to carry out controversial changes at Kansas State. He knew little about agriculture. With a B.A. degree from Miami University in Ohio and a B.D. de-

grew from New Albany Theological Seminary in Indiana, he appeared to represent the very type of education the board hoped to replace.

Anderson did, however, possess a number of desirable qualities. A tall, vigorous, and plain man, he mixed easily with all classes of people. He had strong and persuasive speaking and writing skills. Open to new ideas, but decisive and firm when necessary, Anderson enjoyed challenging tasks. During the Civil War, he had served as chaplain of the Third California Volunteer Infantry. Then, joining the U.S. Sanitary Commission, he supervised the transport of supplies for the Wilderness Campaign and later edited the Sanitary Bulletin. After the war he accepted a call to the frontier parish in Junction City, Kansas, and quickly built a strong congregation. Anderson knew first-hand the type of task he faced at Kansas State, for his father had encountered a similar challenge as president of Miami University from 1848 to 1854.13

Narrowly interpreting the Morrill Act, Anderson dropped most of the classical curriculum and submitted a new plan for a six-year program with practical courses geared to farm, mechanical, commercial, and domestic needs. Students would devote the mornings to literary and scientific pursuits and the afternoons to required industrial courses. The “industrials” would provide students with educational opportunities to learn vocational skills in farming, horticulture, blacksmithing, carpentry, painting, printing, telegraphy, wagonmaking, and sewing. These offerings were among the first efforts at shopwork instruction and a manual-training approach to education in the United States. Anderson made it clear that he did not embrace such “industrials” as manual labor to save money for the tuition-free college. Instead he proposed to “fit men and women for the ordinary pursuits of life.”14

Committed to coeducation and determined to introduce practical courses in order to survive, the college intended to provide feminine alternatives for the industrial training offered to male students. As Anderson put it, “tread-mill educators” in the East could “purse their classic lips at the idea of including such topics in a collegiate course,” but they made common sense in a Kansas girl’s education.15 Anderson had read Edward Clarke’s new book Sex in Education (1873), which claimed the physical strain of exhaustive study in college would permanently damage women’s health; however Anderson’s wife, Nancy, was an educated woman, and he had worked with capable educated women during his years in the Sanitary Commission. He also knew the dire circumstances of women forced to earn their own support without skills or education. Therefore, he strongly argued for a course “for young ladies who wish to fit themselves, either for earning an honorable support, or for wisely filling any position in womanly life, as the unknown future may indicate.”16 Anderson intended to shape a program of practical study “with reference to the liberal and direct education of women as a woman instead of as a man, and as an industrialist instead of a butterfly.”17

Introducing industrial education for women meant entering unexplored and unpopular territory. Anderson searched for appropriate offerings for the women’s course. He soon proclaimed that a woman could “honorably earn her livelihood in the kitchen, the dairy, with the needle, as a teacher, accountant, photographer, engraver, printer or telegrapher;” but he stated that “lack of room prevents the immediate establishment of a kitchen laboratory, a dairy, photographic gallery and engraving room.” The college had


14. “The New Curriculum,” The Nationalist, November 14, 1873; “Kansas State Agricultural College,” ibid., October 20, 1873; advertisement from president’s office, ibid., May 29, 1874. For Kansas State’s role in early manual-training instruction, see Charles Alpheus Bennett, History


15. “Kansas Ahead,” The Industrialist (Manhattan), September 18, 1875.


17. Advertisement for Kansas State Agricultural College, The Industrialist, April 22, 1876.
no kitchens or laundries to use as workrooms for domestic pursuits, as Iowa State College had, for all students boarded in private homes several miles from the campus. It could not train teachers because that prerogative had been granted to the state university and the normal school. Determined to give each Kansas State woman “an education as an industrialist, one by the practice of which she can earn money,” Anderson decided to experiment. He would give new ideas, new courses, new methods, and new regulations a fair trial, keeping them if they worked and discarding them if they did not. In October 1873 Anderson announced that women at Kansas State could begin to train for accounting or printing and very shortly for telegraphy. He noted that arrangements for sewing machines and instructors were in progress.18

Official approval for industrial work in sewing came in late November. Within a week Anderson hired Hattie Cheseldine, a forty-year-old widow with four children, as superintendent of the sewing department. Cheseldine, who ran her own dressmaking and millinery business in downtown Manhattan, assumed her new teaching duties in early December at a salary of thirty-five dollars per month. Her twelve students met on the chapel stage located on the third floor of the college building. They did all their sewing by hand. The local newspaper announced, however, that before long “all the young lady students will be required to learn to sew and operate machines—including taking them apart, putting them together, etc.”19

While Anderson provided training in sewing, he never limited women to traditionally feminine pursuits. Female students at Kansas State participated fully in campus life and did not become second-class citizens. Anderson intended to continue this policy because it was a “matter of right.” All students took the same classes in basic sciences, math, English, bookkeeping, and drawing (taught by Walter Smith’s practical system). Female students had to take one term of sewing and could take more, but they also could choose from carving, engraving, instrumental music, photography, printing, scroll-sawing, and telegraphy. Since a belief in equality for women was far from universal, Anderson set the tone at Kansas State in a good-natured manner. During a campus beautification project, for example, he announced that every male “who had no affection for any of the young ladies would be required to set out six trees,” but males with affection would have to plant only three.20

18. For philosophy on women’s education, see “Of Course Not,” ibid., January 29, 1876. For program, see the October 1873 advertisement, The Nationalist, May 29, 1874.

20. “College Items,” The Nationalist, April 28, 1876. Workshops for women are advertised in The Industrialist, April 14, 1877; see also Anderson, Hand-Book, 65–105.
Facilities for domestic courses at Kansas State were extremely limited. Initially students met on the third floor of the college building (far right). In 1875 the sewing department moved to the newly completed Mechanical Building (second from left).

Anderson correctly predicted that the new manual-training approach would create a sensation different from “anything we have ever seen.” Inaugurating the industrial departments quickly and simultaneously, with limited space and insufficient capital, proved difficult. The radically different program met wide resistance from factions in the student body, in the faculty, in the local community, and in state circles. Critics of the controversial new curriculum declared that Kansas State would soon be reduced to a trade school instead of an educational institution. Anderson knew men would honestly differ with his views, for the principles he planned to follow meant “educational war” and promised “ten Bull Runs for each Vicksburgh [sic] or Gettysburgh [sic].”

In spite of opposition, Anderson felt encouraged after the 1873 fall term. He reported to the board that a start had been made and he now was confident that with time and hard work the plan could be done well. In December Anderson headed east to examine industrial and technical schools and workshops, hoping to benefit from their experience so as to make “as few mistakes as possible in the organization of the industrial departments.” While Anderson was absent, the students “resolved to try and make ‘the new way’ a success, rather than pull against it.” Three of the scientific faculty, however, remained disgruntled with the new curriculum and attempted to convince the state legislature not to confirm the new regents. The board of regents dismissed the men for insubordination in February 1874, and the college lost respected professors of agriculture, geology, zoology, and veterinary science.

During this period of turmoil, the four sewing machines finally arrived, and Cheseldine’s sewing class began meeting in an assigned room. The students learned to cut, fit, and make clothing by both hand and machine. Although eastern supporters donated sewing charts, Hattie Cheseldine, a skilled dressmaker, preferred “to make every student depend upon their sight in the cutting out of garments; to cultivate a correctness in widths, lengths, etc.,

23. Anderson’s statement in “President’s Report to the Board of Regents, 1873,” 20. Comments on the trip and students in The Nationalist, December 19, 1873, January 30, 1874. For more on the controversy, see ibid., February 13, 20, 27, 1874; Willard, History of the Kansas State College, 38.
without measuring, (as in drawing)." Students who thought they already had learned enough at home found challenge and ceased complaining. Beginners also experienced success. Cheseldine set her standards high, and some students received lower grades than they expected. The students began to respect Cheseldine and soon made her the "confident of all their school girl troubles." At the spring display, visitors admired the "dresses of calico, lawn, grass cloth, white goods embroidered, swiss muslin elaborately puffed and ruffled, hemming, felling, tucking, gathering, etc."  

Anderson now considered the sewing industrial a successful experiment that would be a "fixed fact." The college converted the old library into an improved sewing department, laying carpets and adding tables made by the carpentry class. Cheseldine asked the board for eight or ten more machines, hoping her students could begin to experiment with manufacturing articles to earn part of their college expenses. The meager budget, stretched to provide for all industrials, could not cover this request.  

At the end of his first year as president, Anderson prepared a lengthy and innovative college Hand-Book in place of the annual catalog. In it he colorfully set forth his philosophy and carefully explained the "radical changes" made at Kansas State. Anderson stated that the program had "worked more successfully than was anticipated," and much that had been experimental could now be considered proven and valid. The college had demonstrated that teaching trades was not impossible, and it could begin to notice real advantages of a manual-training approach. It need not apologize for offering a practical education, for if students mastered the common industries they could expect to succeed in life. In many ways "the Kansas Plan," as Anderson began to call it, differed from that of any other college in the nation and seemed typically western in viewpoint. Anderson noted:  

We are yet a great ways off; with trails to find, roads to build, streams to bridge, long miles to march. It would be much pleasanter to take the eastward train of professional education, and with genial companions, be smoothly rolled to the New York of professional life. But, being expressly ordered westward to the Rocky range of industrial skill, where no such train runs, it is evident that a trip to professional New York would only take us that much farther from our journey’s end.  

Anderson urged the state to support this liberal practical education and to provide needed buildings and equipment not funded by the land grant. The Manhattan editor backed him, arguing:  

What the State is requiring of this Institution should only be required of a college with fine buildings—chapel, laboratory, machine shop, telegraph office, printing and sewing rooms, &c. &c; and yet with the cramped condition of buildings and finances, this college is to-day doing more than any in the Union.  

In the Hand-Book, Anderson devoted more than thirty pages to his thoughts on women's education. While he believed that "chances are ninety-nine in a hundred that every Kansas girl will have more or less to do with housekeeping," he clearly stated that the purpose of the college was to furnish an education that would prepare girls for paid labor should they need it. Therefore the college must open new avenues for women's self-support. In Anderson's opinion, this new educational approach could not be worse, and might prove better, than the prevailing eastern system, which he described as "furnishing intelligent playthings for men possessing exhaustless wealth."  

27. The Nationalist, June 26, 1874.  
Anderson knew that frontier women needed many practical skills, and he liked to put his ideas into stories Kansas people could understand. He referred to wealthy easterners as Hortense and Charles Augustus and said their lifestyle would work in dreamland but not in Kansas, the home of John Smith and girls like Mary, Martha, Susan, and Jane. In a widely quoted passage Anderson wrote:

John Smith... lives in Kansas and earns every cent by hard labor. He tears his clothes, snores, and eats unlimited quantities of pork and cabbage, which Mrs. John Smith may have to cook, and, at the same time, preserve order among an assorted lot of little Smiths, energetic with mischief and having capacious lungs and elastic stomachs.\(^2\)

During the 1874–1875 school year, Anderson worked to develop special offerings for women in the literary as well as the industrial division of the college. He argued that a “female industrialist, being a woman before and during her industrial work, has an inalienable right” to a woman’s liberal and practical education. Since most middle-class women expected to be homemakers in charge of the “domestic sphere,” Anderson also wanted to offer special courses in hygiene and household economy. He knew, however, that developing these new and untried courses would take time, money, and faculty dedication.\(^3\)

Efforts to institute practical offerings for women received a temporary setback in March 1875 when Hattie Cheseldine broke her leg. At the end of April she became “able to sit up, although not allowed to use the broken limb in the least.”\(^4\) Anderson began the search for a replacement. In May the board approved hiring Mary E. Cripps at a salary of fifty dollars per month.

Cripps, a fifty-two-year-old widow with children, seemed an ideal person to help develop the Kansas plan. She had run a successful wholesale and retail millinery business in New York City during the 1850s and 1860s. Writer Ann S. Stephens recommended her as a “prompt, honorable, and industrious woman” and stated that “articles she made always had preference for the illustration of fashions in the magazines I edited.” Prominent journalist “Jennie June” (Jane Croly) described Cripps “as a thoroughly capable, and intelligent business woman, able to direct a large establishment, and always noted for the good sense and judgment, as well as taste, that marked her designs and methods.”\(^5\) Responding to Anderson’s hopes for the Kansas plan, Cripps wrote:

The points aimed at are excellent, whether attainable remains to be proven. It has always been a habit with me to set my aims high. Am therefore often disappointed but never discouraged. Am very happy to notice by the tone of your letter that disposition in the Savant of Manhattan College.\(^6\)

With Cripps hired to fill the sewing position, Anderson turned his attention to the building program. Noting that the animals had better quarters than the students, he persuaded the college to turn the stone barn into an “Industrial Hall” for classroom use and to build a Mechanical Building nearby. Summer issues of The Industrialist, the new college newspaper edited by Anderson and printed by students, presented floor plans of the structures and kept all apprised of progress.\(^7\)

Mary Cripps and her thirty students moved into the new sewing room on the second floor of the Mechanical Building in late September 1875. They soon made it look like a dressmaking establishment. Within a month, the department announced that it was ready to do all kinds of work for people. By the end

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29. Ibid., 31–32, 52–53.
30. Ibid., 54, 64.
32. The Industrialist, June 26, 1875; see also “Minutes of the Board of Regents,” April 3, May 27, 1875. Cripps is listed as age fifty-two in the 1875 Kansas State Census, Osage County, and age forty in the 1860 Federal Census, New York City, Ward 5. References to her work in New York City appear in Frank Leslie’s Monthly and Gazette of Fashion 7 (December 1860): 562, and 8 (May 1861): 471. New York City directories issued between 1853 and 1861 list her business, on Canal Street, under Edward W. Cripps, her husband.
33. M.E. Cripps to J.A. Anderson, July 23, 1875, folder 69, box 1, Kansas State Agricultural College Records, 1868–1912, University Archives.
of the term the students had completed "dresses, twenty water-proof suits, two miscellaneous articles, one hundred boys' suits, drawers, overalls, bed-quilt, comfort, and a beginning in millinery." Anderson stressed that the new department was a business and meant business. While he knew that thousands of women barely scraped out a meager existence using the needle, Anderson believed that if they learned dressmaking skills or skills in engraving, printing, or telegraphy, they would be able to earn decent incomes and would not be at the mercy of employers. Cripps agreed and intended to make each student capable of supporting a family and able "to meet every emergency of life with true womanly dignity and Christian fortitude."

While Cripps managed the sewing department, Anderson worked with the professors of agriculture, horticulture, and chemistry to develop a sequence of offerings in "domestic economy" that would be useful to women in their varied roles. This special four-part women's program began in the fall of 1875 for twenty of "the most advanced young ladies." The respective professors lectured on farm economy, gardening, and household chemistry. Cripps completed the program in March 1876 with a series of lectures on the laws of health.

Aware that the cooking school movement was beginning in New York City, Cripps included cooking lectures in her series of lessons. Since the campus lacked cooking facilities, she asked faculty wives and Manhattan friends to be her "Assisting Society of Ladies." They attended classes, bringing samples and recipes for students to try later in the private homes where they boarded. When President Anderson entertained the board of regents, the students helped set up in order to apply the lesson on tablesetting.


The first household chemistry course also had to be taught by the lecture method since, at this time, all the college apparatus and chemicals could be "kept within the limits of a dry goods box." Undaunted, William K. Kedzie, the young chemistry professor, covered "topics in which chemical principles are applied in the various practices of household economy." The course included lessons on bleaching, coloring, and dyeing and on the nature and constitution of food. Kedzie held an M.S. degree from Michigan Agricultural College and had studied at Yale's Sheffield Scientific School. He had just returned from a four-month trip to England and the Continent where, at his own expense but with Anderson's blessings, he had visited the laboratories of prominent European universities. His new female students listened attentively to lectures explaining "bread, meats, fish, milk, butter, and cheese; tea, coffee, and chocolate" as well as "the preservation of fruits, manufacture of jellies, &c." Eager to learn, they often performed the experiments he described in their own homes; however, Kedzie, Cripps, and Anderson all agreed that the
college desperately needed a chemistry laboratory and a "well-furnished kitchen laboratory, under the direction of an experienced matron." 38

Anderson campaigned vigorously for improved facilities. The legislature finally approved plans for a chemistry building. Ready for occupancy early in 1877, the new building, purportedly the best in the West, included a kitchen laboratory intended as a "practice room in the application of the principles of scientific cooking." To keep expenses at a minimum, students had helped make equipment, including the extension table and kitchen tables for the "model kitchen." 39

In preparation for her new work, Mary Cripps had journeyed east in the summer of 1876, stopping at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia where, among other items, Kansas State displayed dresses, aprons, and patterns prepared by the students. She then visited Vassar and institutions and manufacturing establishments in New York and adjoining cities, "gleaning treasures for the benefit of the laboratory kitchen." 40 She tried to determine what "might and ought to be taught in this department had we the means and time for that purpose." She intended to create a progressive department with instruction she described as "thoroughly practical and of permanent use to the students when they go forth to meet life's realities." 41

Politically astute, Cripps knew how to win support. After a baking lesson, she sent President Anderson "a good substantial piece of apple pie." In March 1877 her students served the board of regents a roast beef dinner that featured three different potato dishes and six desserts. The trustees gave this "examination" their stamp of approval. The Industrialist reported the event as the "first effort of the first class to

40. The Nationalist, May 19, April 28, 1876; The Industrialist, July 22, 1876.
whom the art of cooking has been taught in any college in the United States."42

Cripps enjoyed the reputation of knowing how to entertain young folks, and she began to use the new kitchen laboratory as a center for campus social events. When her class prepared refreshments for the senior party, Cripps applied her artistic skills, which she formerly had used to fashion bonnets for wealthy New Yorkers, to create beautiful party decorations, unusual at the spartan frontier college. Students marvelled at the festive room that featured "tables profusely decorated with flowers, while among the blossoms could be seen cakes, candies and oranges in abundance."43

Luxuries of any kind remained scarce during the depression years of the mid-1870s, which had been made even more severe in Kansas by the grasshopper plague that struck in 1874. To make ends meet, the college trustees had reduced faculty salaries in 1875. In the summer of 1877 Anderson shortened the course of study so that students from the common schools could enter the program and complete their degrees in four years instead of six years. Since the required industrial work remained intact, this change effectively removed the highest two years from the curriculum. Anderson, backed by the board, proudly announced to the state that the program "contains no Latin or Greek rubbish, no useless 'abstract' mathematics, and no fancy 'ologies' or 'osophs." Instead it provided the only manual practice and applied science in the state, enabling the working man or woman to earn an honest living. He continued to emphasize Kansas State’s manual-training approach, reminding the public that the kitchen laboratory was not a place where students performed repetitious manual labor, but differed essentially "in the respect that after a girl has learned to wash dishes or pare potatoes she is not kept everlastingly at either."44

Cripps made the best of difficult situations. She continued to run the sewing department with only four machines, but she developed elective courses in designing patterns and "in cutting and fitting by chart" so that students would be "competent to earn a livelihood, if necessary." For the household economy course, Cripps added lectures on household management and economics, the management and primary instruction of children, and the laws of health and nursing. To extend her resources she called on the help of the "ladies of Manhattan, and some of the prominent gentlemen," thankful that they could appreciate the difficulties of introducing this new work. She predicted that what some called a "hobby" would in the future be prominently taught in leading colleges.45

In 1878 work began on an impressive college building significantly different from the small utilitarian ones that Kansas State previously had built. Now that the new program had passed the experimental stage, Anderson wanted an imposing edifice that would symbolize the importance of the college in the state and its role as a national model for land-grant education. The structure would have to be completed in three stages because state funds remained limited. Construction work camouflaged but did not remove the continuing financial crisis. Meager state appropriations forced the board to cut salaries and to assign faculty heavier loads in May 1878. Cripps, however, did not have her five-hundred-dollar salary reduced since it remained the lowest at the college.46

44. Quote on program in John Anderson, "Course of Study," The Industrialist, June 2, 1877. Quote on manual training in "Household Economy," ibid., March 30, 1878; see also Carey, Kansas State University, 51–52; "Minutes of the Board of Regents," July 18, 1877.
In the summer of 1879 the board re-elected Cripps and finally provided two additional machines for the sewing rooms. While her reappointment had not been unanimous, it turned out to be critical for domestic education at Kansas State because Cripps would sustain the program during a change in administrative leadership. Anderson had allowed his name to be placed on the 1878 Republican ticket for Congress, and he won easily. Mathematics professor Milan Ward functioned as acting head until the new president, George T. Fairchild, assumed duties on December 1, 1879.

Fairchild, a graduate of Oberlin who had served as vice president and professor of English literature at Michigan State Agricultural College, wisely announced that he “sought to make no changes in the usual routine, before completely understanding existing methods.” The trustees clearly had emphasized:

The policy of this Institution is fixed, and generally accepted. Under the vigorous administration of your predecessor, it has attained a character, an individuality, everywhere recognized. But the foundations only are laid; the superstructure is yet to be reared; and this is the work now before us.

Fairchild came to Kansas with strong commitments to both women’s education and industrial education. His wife, the former Charlotte Halsted, had studied at Oberlin, the coeducational institution his father helped found. His brother James, Oberlin’s president since 1867, served as the “chief spokesman for and defender of the coeducational experiment.” In time Fairchild broadened and enriched the basic curriculum, but he retained the practical emphasis of the college because he believed that a balanced education included training for the hands as well as for the head.

Since teaching domestic courses at the college level remained controversial and difficult, the attitudes and values of academic leaders could determine the fate of such offerings. Fairchild’s crucial support of Mary Cripps, an established and capable teacher, assured the future of household economy at Kansas State. In contrast, the programs begun at the Illinois and Iowa land-grant colleges fared less well. At both institutions the teachers who developed the offerings were married to the departing presidents. When President John Milton Gregory and his new bride, Louisa Allen Gregory, left Illinois Industrial University in 1880, the next administration abolished the School of Domestic Science established in 1875 and discontinued work in domestic education for the next twenty years. After President Adonijah Welch and his wife, Mary Beaumont Welch, left Iowa State in 1882, the flourishing domestic program went through a period of decline and eventually looked to Kansas State for leadership.

Instead of retrenching, Kansas State continued to develop the domestic component. Cripps believed the cooking department could “easily be made self-supporting” by selling the prepared food at a price to cover costs. In February 1880 she and her classes embarked on a “new departure” and began serving ten-cent noon dinners to students and professors. More than sixty people arrived the first Tuesday for these inexpensive meals, and ninety came the next week. The new venture proved extremely popular because the college lacked eating facilities.

Always in the forefront, Cripps organized a Domestic Science Club in 1880, and she served as its first president. This formal organization, growing

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47. “Minutes of the Board of Regents,” August 7, 1879; Willard, History of the Kansas State College, 57.
49. Ronald W. Hogeland, “Coeducation of the Sexes at Oberlin College: A Study of Social Ideas in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America,” Journ...
Classes in sewing and cooking formed an impressive domestic program at Kansas State, a program backed by a solid foundation of course work in the sciences and the arts.

out of the informal “Assisting Society of Ladies,” met monthly, often on the campus. Members, including the social elite of Manhattan and professors’ wives, took turns reading papers. They also invited students to present papers as guests of the club. These innovative activities must have impressed Fairchild for he finally achieved a raise of one hundred dollars for Mary Cripps in June 1880.  

In May 1881 the college relocated the kitchen laboratory, providing improved facilities next to the sewing rooms in the Mechanical Building. Cripps no longer had to teach in two buildings; however the relocation separated the kitchen laboratory from the chemistry laboratory. With this move, the connection between the “pure science” chemistry laboratory and the “applied science” kitchen laboratory became less obvious to outsiders. Since Cripps carried on an active program in the new facilities, visitors were impressed with the convenient arrangement of sewing rooms and nearby kitchen. This new grouping soon formed the standard for a good domestic program.  

With the domestic science of cooking closely linked to the domestic art of sewing, some later mistakenly assumed that the Kansas program for female students was limited to practical skills in these subjects. Eastern leaders, attempting to open opportunities for home economics in women’s colleges, stated that the early western programs did not meet the standards of “scientific” scholarship demanded by prestigious colleges and universities in the East.  

This often-repeated opinion, while politically useful,

52. Harper, “History of Domestic Science Club,” 1–2; The Industrialist, October 9, 1880; The Nationalist, August 31, 1882; “Minutes of the Board of Regents,” June 8, 1880.


seriously distorted the truth. Women at Kansas State completed the regular coeducational courses in organic chemistry and inorganic chemistry, and in botany, entomology, geology, mineralogy, physics, physiology, and zoology required of all students. The domestic courses, like all the applied offerings, always were backed by a solid foundation in the sciences and the arts. As a leading coeducational land-grant college in the nineteenth century, Kansas State helped set the land-grant standard for a balanced combination of liberal, scientific, and practical courses. This well-established approach later prevailed in the colleges offering the strongest programs in home economics.

In spite of the fact that the domestic program at Kansas State had grown and thrived, the board voted to ask Cripps to resign in June 1882, the same week her son Edward graduated from the college. The reasons for the dramatic request remain unclear. The new president and board may have believed the time for a change had arrived. Cripps later claimed that she had “resigned her position at the College” in February, but the board of regents postponed action making it necessary for her to continue “much longer than she contemplated.”

Although she was sixty-two years old, Cripps remained quite energetic, taking leadership roles in Manhattan’s benevolent and temperance work prior to moving to Boston to live with a daughter in 1883. Cripps concluded her 1881–1882 annual report with the simple statement, “I have endeavored to do my duty faithfully, and can afford to await results.” She would later be remembered by former students and colleagues as a “practical modern woman” who had pioneered in her special field at a time when “means and methods were undeveloped.” When her part in the formation of domestic economy at Kansas State was slighted at the golden anniversary celebration in 1925, 1882 graduate Allie Peckham Cordry wrote to the dean:

When I think of modern day improvements, and the few and inconvenient things with which Mrs. Cripps taught us, and the patience she had— I think she deserves a Memorial, and at least a nice mention in the history of Home Economics Dept. of the College.

During Cripps’s tenure, the domestic program had become an important and integral component of the Kansas plan. Fairchild intended to continue it, but now hoped to find an instructor able to teach the practical skills and provide lessons in household economy based on the application of science. Since few women had both sets of qualifications, the col-

59. Allie Peckham Cordry to Dean Margaret Justin, March 4, 1925, Human Ecology Records.
lege hired one of its own “brightest and best” graduates. Nellie Sawyer Kedzie, a young widow and an 1876 graduate, became Cripps’s capable successor at Kansas State in the fall of 1882.

Under Kedzie’s seventeen-year leadership, Kansas State developed the largest and strongest academic program of domestic economy in the country. Other land-grant colleges began to seek its graduates. Dalinda Mason, an 1881 graduate, launched the department of household economy at the new Dakota Agricultural College in Brookings in 1887. Married and widowed in 1890, Mason-Cotey returned to teaching in 1894, taking over the domestic program at Utah Agricultural College, which had been started in 1890 by 1888 Kansas State graduate Abbie Marlatt. Others followed in their footsteps. When the American Home Economics Association was founded in 1908, Kansas State graduates headed home economics units in influential colleges and technical schools across the country, and the Kansas land-grant curriculum served as a model for leading academic programs.

The majority of students attending Kansas State in the earliest years left before graduating, but nineteen women and thirty-nine men received bachelor’s degrees between 1873 and 1882. Female graduates established both careers and families, and they made transitions between the two spheres. They became strong supportive alumnae, urging others to pursue the type of education they valued. Only one remained single, living “at home” for a time and later teaching music. Nine of the women married soon after graduation, and most remained housewives for the rest of their lives providing leadership in Kansas communities and as far afield as California, Illinois, Minnesota, and Texas. Nine of the women graduates taught before their marriages. Most taught in the common schools, but Kansas State degrees prepared them to take advantage of a variety of opportunities. The three married graduates who experienced early widowhood were able to resume satisfying careers. Undoubtedly Cheseldine and Cripps provided worthy models for them to emulate.

The names of Hattie Cheseldine, Mary Cripps, John Anderson, and George Fairchild rarely appear in historical summaries of the home economics movement or of women’s higher education. But the Kansas plan, fashioned “with reference to the liberal and direct education of woman as a woman instead of as a man, and as an industrialist instead of a butterfly,” can be viewed as a progressive step in the democratization of higher education, one that opened career paths instead of closing doors for American women.

60. The Industrialist, January 28, 1882: “Minutes of the Board of Regents,” July 5, 1882.

62. Compiled from Record of the Alumni of the Kansas State Agricultural College (Manhattan: Kansas State Agricultural College, 1914), 49–59. The Industrialist ran a weekly column on “graduates and former students,” keeping its readers up-to-date on news of alumni and former classmates.
63. Quotation in The Industrialist, April 22, 1876.