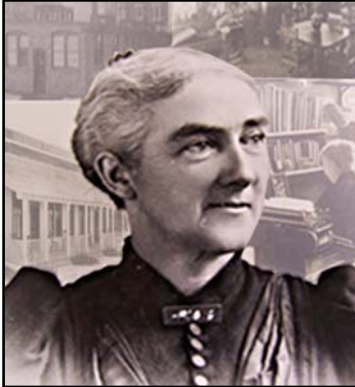




DIRECTION

TWIN CITIES HOME ECONOMISTS IN BUSINESS

December 2007



Ellen Swallow Richards was the original home economics "superwoman."

The Original Home Economics "Superwoman" Ellen Swallow Richards (1842-1911)

Pioneer, Prophet, Philosopher

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In the mid-nineteenth century, in the northern farm country of rural Massachusetts, Ellen Swallow was born to parents Fanny and Peter Swallow. She grew up an only child, home schooled by her parents who were teachers. She thrived on the clean outdoor environment and nearly became a tomboy were it not for her mother's influences otherwise. Ellen learned at an early age to accomplish all the domestic chores in the home since her mother suffered poor health during much of Ellen's early years. She was an accomplished cook, as well as housekeeper, seamstress, and gardener. Ellen was an avid reader and often had a book in her hand, even while navigating the stairway. She was astute in math, possessed excellent organization skills, and was a great help to her father as he operated various mercantile establishments throughout northern Massachusetts.



Joyce B. Miles has done extensive research on Ellen Richards.

Ellen attended Westford Academy and successfully taught school for a short time. However, she languished in a severe case of depression as she realized her life was not fulfilled. She desired greater educational challenges and felt thwarted that none were open to women in New England at the time. When she learned about a new women's college called Vassar opening in New York, she turned from her depression and started saving money to attend. Ellen entered as a third-year student and thrived with the rigorous study opportunities. She was interested in astronomy, but could see no practical applications, so she turned to chemistry. In the field of chemistry, she could envision solutions to many problems of the day including poor air quality, water quality, sanitation, and inadequate nutritional diets.

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Superwomen!



The Theme for this *DIRECTION* newsletter is SUPERWOMEN.

Special thanks to everyone who contributed articles and information. Your ideas and input are greatly appreciated!

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What do you want to be remembered for? *I hope to be remembered as a caring person.*

Share something unique about yourself. *I worked as an intern at the Women's Correctional Facility in Shakopee as a parent educator. At the time, it was the only correctional facility in the nation that allowed mothers have their children visit on Saturdays and be involved in parent/child activities. I planned and facilitated those activities as part of my internship and received graduate credits from the University of Minnesota for my efforts. Marilyn Rossmann, one of my professors, suggested this to me instead of a traditional home economist internship. It opened my eyes to a whole new world!*

Anything else you'd like to include? *I am truly blessed to know so many other wonderful women in the family and consumer sciences profession in Minnesota. I appreciate the support and friendship I have had with them over the years!*

Ellen Swallow Richards....continued from page 1

After her Vassar days, Ellen felt again that the doors were closed to women for further scientific study. She applied to Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and was eventually admitted as a special student. The officials wanted no complaints about a woman in class, hence the *special student* status. Her early years at MIT provided her with the scientific study she desired, and she eventually became an expert in water quality. Ellen was sought after as a consultant throughout the world. She became the first ever female instructor at MIT where she continued for the rest of her life. She opened many doors for women in science and walked where no woman had gone before.

What made Ellen unique is that she was not content with simply earning admittance to MIT; instead, she vigorously campaigned for more women to be admitted and eventually completed a Women's Laboratory for women in science. She worked tirelessly for more learning opportunities for women in education including co-founding with Marion Talbot the organization we know today as the American Association of University Women (AAUW). She provided correspondence courses for women who wanted to teach science. (Keep in mind this was long before the Internet.) Ellen orchestrated the first "take out" meals in the New England Kitchen and went on to organize the school lunch program, which still exists today. Through her efforts in this arena, she became interested in the science of nutrition and championed nutrition education for the masses in order to encourage people to select a healthier diet and ultimately a better quality of life. She was solely responsible for designing the Rumford Kitchen exhibit at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, where a tiny little kitchen served nutritious meals to thousands of fairgoers, along with a healthy dose of nutrition education. She shunned an invitation to participate in the Women's Building, as she said none of her research was just women's work, but rather information for all.

Ellen traveled to the far reaches of the country and even abroad in an effort to share with others her scientific information. She lectured and published extensively and kept a dizzying schedule that could derail even the most energetic person. Late in the nineteenth century, she convened a group of contemporaries to discuss the essence of domestic science and how the elements of this discipline would ultimately improve the quality of life for many individuals and families. They met at pristine Lake Placid, New York, at the invitation of Melville Dewey. Over the course of the next ten years, these educators worked tirelessly to elevate the discipline, which was to become home economics, to a legitimate profession. Ellen wanted to call this *oekology*, or the science of right living. *Euthenics*, the science of controllable environment, was also a name Ellen suggested, but home economics was finally selected. Ellen was the visionary leader who could see how all things work together, and by 1909, the American Home Economics Association (AHEA) was a reality.

Ellen died before giving birth to and solidifying her real love, the oekology movement as an intricate link to science, the environment, and human interaction. However, her legacy lives today in many venues. In preparation for the centennial celebration for home economics in 2009, long-time American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS) member, Joyce B. Miles has produced a DVD featuring the "**Life and Legacy of Ellen Swallow Richards**" and also portrays Ellen in a monologue entitled "**In Her Own Words.**" The DVD is available for purchase on the www.aafcs.org website. Proceeds will benefit the AAFCS Centennial Campaign Challenge Fund.