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Isabelle Bevier...

Home Economics Pioneer

Dorothy Ann Olson tells of the life and work of a leader in the science of home economics

THE nation lost a great leader and true pioneer in the field of home economics when Isabel Bevier died March 17. Her enthusiasm and active work were an inspiration to all home economics people.

She was the first woman to receive an honorary degree of doctor of science from Iowa State. Dean Genevieve Fisher remarked that it was a privilege to see Miss Bevier receive this degree.

Miss Bevier received her bachelor's and master's degrees at Wooster University in Ohio. Special summer training at the Case School of Applied Science in Cleveland, Ohio, qualified her for professor of natural sciences at Pennsylvania College for Women, Pittsburgh. She taught there nine years and studied chemistry during the summers; Ellen H. Richards was her foods chemistry instructor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Later Miss Bevier taught chemistry at Lake Erie College, Painesville, Ohio.

Miss Bevier has been a guest at Iowa State a number of times and has sent several gifts to Isabel Bevier home management house, which was named after her.

"Her cunning humor and charming stories of her experiences made her delightful in the living room,"

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says Dr. Paulena Nickell, who taught at the University of Illinois when Miss Bevier was there in retirement, after teaching the chemistry of foods and home economics in extension for over twenty years at Illinois.

Truly a pioneer in the field of home economics, Miss Bevier was a woman of broad vision, always looking far ahead, leaving the details to be picked up along the way by those who followed her. Her buoyancy and radiance were coupled with a grim determination to strengthen the stakes of home economics.

Her most important work started in 1900 when she was called to establish a new department at the University of Illinois. With no textbooks and a nameless department, she earnestly began her task of developing courses of a college grade that would give academic standing to home economics.

Working with Eugene Davenport, then dean of agriculture at the University of Illinois, Miss Bevier set up fine standards that have served as a pattern for many similar institutions. Her unwillingness to compromise standards of scholarship to gain quick recognition from the public did much to win for home economics the high standing it now enjoys at many colleges. She remained at Illinois for 21 years as professor and head of the Home Economics Department.

With unlimited energy she worked during World War I as chairman of the conservation department in the Illinois Council of Defense. She was called to Washington in 1917 as one of six chairmen of the home economics division of the Food Administration under Herbert Hoover and was appointed home economics director of Illinois. Later she served as vice-director of extension work in Illinois, chairman of the southern branch of the University of California department of home economics and lecturer in home economics at the University of Arizona. She retired from her academic role at Illinois in 1930.

Although Miss Bevier has contributed much information to home economics through her books, bulletins, magazine and newspaper articles, her writings don't reflect the sparkle in her vivid personality.

As successor to Ellen H. Richards, Miss Bevier was the second president of the American Home Economics Association. She was a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, vice president of manual training and household education for the National Education Association and a member of the American Chemical Society.

Her second honorary degree of doctor of science came from the University of Wooster in 1936. She was a member of Sigma Xi, Omicron Nu, Phi Upsilon Omicron and Sigma Delta Epsilon.

During her lifetime she saw home economics develop into a professional field, opening many opportunities to women for service to humanity.

Although she retired from academic roles as professor emerita in 1930, she never lost touch with current scientific work. As Dr. Nickell heard her say with sprightly humor, she wanted to retire before she was "worn out in harness."

Lita Bane, head of the Home Economics Department at the University of Illinois, said "Miss Bevier never lost helpful interest in departmental affairs. She was an inspiration to all of us, professionally and personally."

Miss Bevier's outstanding work and radiant personality will continue to be an inspiration to home economics people for many years, both in the professional field and in the practical world.



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