

IN THE VICINITY OF HULL-HOUSE AND THE MAXWELL STREET MARKET: CHICAGO 1889-1935



VARIETIES OF ETHNICITY AND RACE ON URBAN STREETS

ITALIAN-AMERICANS ON TAYLOR STREET

PAESANS, PASTA AND PROGRESSIVES: CHICAGO ITALIANS AND THEIR FOOD

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PERFECTED MIDDLE-CLASS HOUSEKEEPING



University of Illinois at Chicago
The University Library, Department of Special Collections
Italian American Collection, IAC neg. 135.9

Preference and tradition were the two barriers reformers sought to overcome in the adoption of a healthful and nutritious diet. To surmount them, a number of institutions, including Hull-House, initiated cooking and nutrition classes to educate women in the proper selection, preparation, and serving of food. Cooking and dietary classes were held at Garibaldi House on the Near West Side, at Eli Bates House in the Italian neighborhood on Elm Street, and for the Italian Mothers Club at Chicago Commons. Through the years, Hull-House conducted the most extensive array of courses with classes for adults, working girls, schoolgirls and children, including classes specifically for Italian girls, mothers, and brides-to-be. Classes at

Hull-House were designed to teach the latest in modern methods and in 1902 were held in a special room in the Labor Museum where the "modern cooking tables with their iron racks and Bunsen burners, and a gas range of the newest type" contrasted with a Colonial kitchen complete with fireplace.



Domestic Science Room within Hull-House

University of Illinois at Chicago
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Jane Addams Memorial Collection, JAMC neg. 223

Ethnic cooking was relegated to this obsolete area, where, "An Italian woman occasionally cooks macaroni in a kettle over the open fire and women of other nationalities are gradually, although as yet somewhat timidly, offering to demonstrate from their store of traditional household lore and training." [197]

A wide variety of lectures and courses on domestic economy were also offered at the settlement. In 1891, Mary Hinman Abel of the New England Kitchen lectured and demonstrated the use of the Aladdin oven and in 1897 M.H. Kaufman of MIT gave lectures on food and dietary laws. A syllabus for a college extension course on domestic science taught at Hull-House highlighted their scientific approach. The course included sessions on "the products of fungoid growth" and another on "the chemicals produced by the putrefactive bacteria". During one year in the early 1920s, ten different cooking programs were being conducted by "trained domestic-science teachers" in settlement houses in the city. These professionals, who were forging closer links to the business community, made use of their new ties. Swift and Co. sent a teacher to Hull-House to give a cooking lesson, and Chicago

Commons sponsored a representative from the gas company for a demonstration in 1915. [198]

Reformers believed changes in technology and the modern city had altered the issues of housekeeping. Sophonisba Breckinridge and Marion Talbot explained,

The fire on the hearth, the spit, the crane, and the brick oven have vanished. Only here and there traces remain of the churn and the cheese press, the curing of meats, the drying of fruits and vegetables, the brewing of beverages, the caring for stored and too often decaying potatoes and apples, and the filling of closet shelves with jars of pickles and preserves. In their places have come gas and electric stoves, the fruit and vegetable trains from Florida and California, the gigantic stockyards, slaughter houses, and packing plants, the factories for the preparation and preservation of every kind of food substance, the cold storage warehouse, the creamery, the Greek and Italian fruit vendors, the telephone to the market, and the mail-order house. In fact, there are almost countless devices of the spirit of invention and of commerce which give rise to wholly new problems in regard to proper feeding for a household."

Women now needed to be taught not only how to cook but how to shop and keep house. [199]

Reformers mistrusted the ethics of neighborhood ethnic storekeepers and decried the expensive imported ingredients which women purchased there. They criticized the fuss and frills that immigrant women thought constituted stylish furniture. Model Tenements and Housekeeping Centers, meant to illustrate the "perfected" homes of tenement dwellers, sought to wean women away from the unscientific and risky methods taught by mothers and grandmothers. The centers stressed cleanliness, simplicity, and organization. The Practical Housekeeping Center, located at 813 Ewing on the Near West Side was a four room flat in a tenement building furnished according to domestic hygiene standards at a cost of under \$200.00. It served as a site for afternoon classes for children, evening classes for mothers and working women, and as "a neighbor who knows all the things which they need to know...." A flyer soliciting funds stated the purpose of the center:

The aim is to teach the pupils to make their homes as attractive and healthy as possible in the surroundings in which they live. They are taught general house-work and cooking: how to economize coal by thoroughly understanding the stove; how to clean and scrub; how to select the foods that are cheap but nourishing, and how, in furnishing to avoid things that mean unnecessary work, are difficult to keep clean and so encourage disease.

HULL-HOUSE COLLEGE EXTENSION.

DOMESTIC HYGIENE

1. The causes of decay of animal and vegetable substances. Conditions under which decay does not take place. Some of the common forms of mould. The way to make a garden in a test tube. The morphology of the fungi. The classification of the fungi.

2. The products of fungoid growth. The decomposition of sugar and the production of alcohol. The decomposition of alcohol and the production of acetic acid. The growth of the sugar fungus. Its reproduction. The reproduction of the fission fungi.

3. The chemicals produced by the putrifactive bacteria. The effect of these products when taken into the stomach. The effect when constantly inhaled. The effect of alcohol compared with other products of decay.

4. The classification of bacteria by their effect on living animals. The chronic infectious diseases. Their cause and method of contagion. Precautions to be used in cooking to prevent the spread of tuberculosis or consumption. The teachings of history in regard to leprosy.

5. The acute infectious diseases—Small-Pox, Measles, Scarlet Fever and Whooping Cough. Causes. Their method of contagion.

The infectious filth diseases—Typhoid, Dysentery, and Diphtheria. Where each parasite grows. How they poison. The care of food, water and milk to prevent the spread of these diseases. The kitchen, the garbage box, and domestic animals, as sources of these diseases. The basement, the closet and the outhouses; the alleys and the streets, as sources of filth diseases.

6. The study of cleanliness in past ages from the literature of those times. The cleanliness of the rudest man from his use of fire. The cleanliness which the easy and cheap production of cloth secured. The use of perfumes. The use of deodorizers. The use of carpets, draperies, and upholstered furniture, pillows and mattresses.

Flyer for Hull-House College Extension Course on Domestic Hygiene

By the 1920s, the Association of Housekeeping Centers had addresses on Sholto Street, Bishop Street and on Augusta Avenue. [200]

Reformers continually bemoaned the fact that Italian women showed so little interest in their efforts and often blamed husbands for isolating women within the homes, and women for their stubborn resistance. Public kitchens and cooking classes held little appeal for Italian women, however. The recipes recommended by nutritionists used the Anglo-Saxon ingredients and cooking styles that formed the base of middle class, East Coast cooking. They encouraged the use of red meats but disdained pork, considered food of the lower class in America. They advocated broiling and baking and were suspicious of fresh fruits and vegetables. Not only did the food have little ethnic appeal, but a focus on chemicals and nutrients made it seem that it had little to do with taste at all. Probably more importantly,

dietary reformers were well-versed in the mechanics of food but they were often dismissive of its cultural meanings for Italian immigrants. The preparation of food was an essential element of Italian women's role within the family and would not be handed over lightly to strangers. [201]

Many reformers were convinced that children provided a greater opportunity for access to the home. The Practical Housekeeping Center, which offered afternoon classes for children was explicit in their purpose. Children would be their in-road into the family home:

An important part of the work lies outside of the regular routine of the classroom. The children are visited in their homes so that a friendly relation may be established between their parents and the teacher. In this way the children are encouraged to apply the principles learned at the Center and the practical results of the lessons are ascertained.

Most settlements sponsored classes for young girls and unmarried women. Hull-House even hosted several classes for boys, although "The Camp Cooking Class," which taught small boys to cook during outdoor excursions may have provided the model. Children who attended settlement house social activities were introduced to American foods in clubs and parties and a special dining room for children was established across from the Hull-House Coffee House, where children whose mothers were at work could obtain meals.

Feeding children themselves allowed some reformers to include meal time etiquette along with their food, as in the case of the young women who opened a store to sell penny lunches to children near Hull-House and demanded each child first wash his face and hands. The public schools, however, were seen as the most fertile ground for educational efforts and domestic scientists pushed for the inclusion of home economics as standard curricula for female students. [202]

The importance of learning to do housework, and do it correctly was stressed for young girls. There is a certain irony in home economists, who were forging new professional careers and settlement workers, who were spared from most housework by their cooperative living arrangements, admonishing girls to help in the kitchen. Yet, most reformers did not portray housework as a lesser form of work. Instead, they sought to restore a dignity and importance to the sustenance of daily life which they felt had been lost by an over-emphasis on male-dominated public life. They attached great importance to essentials such as food, child rearing, and the functioning of the home as a crucial component of quality of life and a necessary contrast to the competitive and stressful public world. Many saw their careers in public life, not as a negation of their traditional roles, but as a method of its elevation. While some hoped to gain new rights and respect, few challenged the traditional responsibility of women for the home. Mabel Kittredge wrote:

Suffrage we will have, and we must interest and educate women until we do have it; but at the same time, the dishes have to be washed clean, the beds have to be aired and made well, and the babies have to eat nourishing food, or we'll have an anaemic, poor race to govern when we get the suffrage. [203]

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