Preserve or perish: the Orange County Food Preservation Battalion and food conservation efforts in New York State during the Great War, 1917-1919

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Preserve or Perish:
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by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

College of Arts & Sciences

Department of History

2015
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Abstract

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This thesis examines the role of both private voluntary organizations like the Orange County Food Preservation Battalion as well as city- and state-sponsored organizations in food conservation efforts during World War I in New York state (1917-1919). Society women such as Orange County Food Preservation Battalion chairman Mrs. Theodore Bailey, in conjunction with professional home economists, played an important role early in the war effort in disseminating the patriotic pleas of Herbert Hoover and the U.S. Food Administration, but their efforts were later subsumed by state-run entities such as the New York State Food Commission. Using an unpublished scrapbook kept by Mrs. Bailey as well as newspapers, magazine articles, and published official reports of government commissions and committees, this thesis seeks to enumerate how and how effectively food conservation efforts in New York connected with ordinary people.
Introduction

The Great War, as it was then known, was the first truly global war, engaging millions of people around the world in conflict. Much attention has been paid to the military events of the First World War, but far less to the smaller events of the American home front. The brevity of American intervention, from spring of 1917 to fall of 1918, has meant that in some ways the Great War is America’s forgotten war.

Even more forgotten than the conflict itself is the role of food and women on the American home front. The tendency of history is to emphasize the exceptional, and what could be less exceptional than women, food, and cooking? And yet, both women and food would go on to integrate the War into nearly every facet of everyday life in the United States.

This thesis will examine the impact of private voluntary club organizations, such as the Orange County Food Preservation Battalion (OCFPB) and the Long Island Food Reserve Battalion (LIFRB), on food conservation efforts in New York state and how they complemented, competed with, and were eventually subsumed by city- and state-sponsored organizations such as the Mayor’s Committee of Women on National Defense, Cornell University, the New York State Food Commission, and county Farm Bureaus, as well as how (and how well) both types of organizations connected with ordinary Americans.

Using their wealth, free time, and high society status, the women of the OCFPB and the LIFRB were able to act quickly and decisively when war was declared, grasping the importance of food aid to the Allies as central to the war effort and throwing themselves into the task of educating all Americans about the importance of food conservation. Although city- and state-
sponsored organizations and agencies, and even in some cases the federal government, were slower to react to the need for food conservation during the war, by 1918 they dominated the food conservation scene, taking over the work of some organizations, and collaborating with others like the OCFPB. Both voluntary and state-sponsored organizations worked closely with professional home economists to spread the word about food conservation in the home and in communities across the state.

To provide a clear picture of who the women organizing the OCFPB and LIFRB were, and how they built upon and departed from state- and city-sponsored organizations, it is first necessary to examine the background of food and food reform in the early 20th century and its significance to the war effort as well as the actions of federal food policymakers, especially U.S. Food Administration head Herbert Hoover. Within the context of this background, this thesis will explain how food conservation and related Progressive reform efforts were carried out in New York state, the specific ways in which the women of the OCFPB and LIFRB worked to advance federal and state initiatives, and how they developed their own methods to reach new audiences. By examining this microcosm of New York state food conservation efforts during World War I we can better understand how the themes of Progressive reform and the emergence of the state affected the lives of everyday Americans.

Food Before the War

It was clear even before they officially entered the fray that Americans would play a crucial role in supplying the Allies, particularly on the agriculture front. The vast tracts of arable land held by the United States were nearly unparalleled in the world, and as Europe’s farms were ravaged by war and its farmers fed to the machine guns and trenches, America became Europe’s
breadbasket. But 1916 had provided a poor harvest, and the outlook for 1917 was not much better.¹ As European powers vied for these limited resources and drained America’s grain reserves, food prices everywhere began to rise. Progressives had been fighting the “high cost of living,” also known as the “HCL,” since the turn of the century. President Woodrow Wilson struggled to come up with a solution to the food supply problem. His reluctance to involve the United States in the “European problem” had earned him reelection, but he could help the Allies in other ways, namely, by providing supplies, especially food. But farmers were wary of planting too much, knowing from experience that overproduction led to falling prices on the open market, and they were happy that stiff competition for their limited resources was driving up prices. But Wilson knew that feeding both the warring Allies and the American people was imperative, and that could not be done on the projected harvests.²

As the “high cost of living” continued to increase while wages stagnated, some rebelled against skyrocketing inflation. In the early part of 1917, working class Jewish housewives in New York City, in particular, captured the nation’s attention when they started a boycott of culturally essential foods such as onions, potatoes, and chicken, the prices of which had risen significantly in a matter of months. The violence with which these women enforced the boycott – assaulting those who broke the boycott, destroying vegetable carts, and attacking storefronts – shocked Progressives and the general public alike. Progressives tried to shift the diets of poor and working class Americans to nutritionally equivalent but cheaper and more readily available substitutes, but to the boycotting women this represented an affront on their quality of life. The boycott culminated in a riot of poor and working class women and their children clamoring at the

² ibid.
gates of Mayor John Mitchel of New York City. The authorities, unable to solve the food price issue and at a loss as to how to deal with violent and rioting women, did little except arrest and jail all the rioters they could lay their hands on. In New York City, most of the women arrested were later broken out of jail by their free counterparts.³

Other food riots occurred across the country. According to Elaine Weiss, “[I]n Philadelphia, [. . .] one man was shot by the police, an old woman was trampled by a mob, and furious mothers declared a school strike. In Cincinnati, community leaders called a boycott of butcher shops, and in Chicago food prices spiked as settlement workers reported acute suffering among the city’s poor.”⁴ High food prices and fuel shortages gave rise to “[r]umors of foreign influence,” which prompted a Justice Department investigation.⁵ The declaration of war in April would serve to halt most of the outright protests as the previously scorned food substitutes soon became the epitome of patriotism.

Unlike the working class families of America’s big cities, high society was unaffected by food prices. But they were susceptible to the romantic military ideal. Led in part by former President Theodore Roosevelt, the Preparedness movement took New York society by storm in mid-1915. Prominent members of society at all levels, influenced by the likes of Roosevelt, determined that the Kaiser and his aggressive actions were a problem that a good American punch in the nose would solve, saving despotic Europe from itself. Preparedness advocates were certain not only that joining the war in Europe was inevitable, but also that engaging in war was good for the nation, society, and individual character. Dependent on 19th century ideas of war

⁵ Weiss, Fruits of Victory, 23.
and influenced by Roosevelt’s Rough Rider experience, the Preparedness movement
romanticized militarism and was certain of American superiority and victory.\(^6\)

In August of 1915 the Plattsburg Camp was opened with the aim of preparing young,
well-educated men for military service, particularly as officers.\(^7\) Women, too, sought to prepare
for the coming war. The American Women’s Self-Defense League was formed by Manhattan
socialites and a military drill instructor was brought in to teach them the use of rifles and how to
march.\(^8\) On July 4\(^{th}\), 1915, another group of society women formed the Women’s Section of the
Navy League in direct response to the sinking of the \textit{Lusitania}. They too, formed their own camp
in 1916: the Ladies’ Camp Plattsburg.\(^9\) Both groups knew that war was coming and sought to
have the cream of American youth (white, upper- and middle-class, well educated, physically fit
young people) prepared for the tasks ahead. The training these groups provided met with varying
degrees of success. The Ladies’ Camp Plattsburg trained women in practical skills such as
driving, telegraphy, and first aid. In contrast, the Plattsburg Camp and others like it were using
19\(^{th}\) century military techniques which would serve the trainees ill when the United States finally
joined the fight.\(^10\)

Preparedness fit in nicely with Progressive ideas about duty, self-control, class, and racial
superiority. Robert Zieger quotes Progressive journalist Ray Stannard Baker, who criticizes the
“common people” for prowling the streets, going to the movies, and eating ice cream: “‘Too
much money, too easily had, too much pleasure, not earned,’ and Americans desperately needed

\(^6\) Robert H. Zieger, \textit{America’s Great War: World War I and the American Experience}, (Lanham, MD: Rowman &
\(^7\) Zieger \textit{America’s Great War, xvi}.
\(^10\) Zieger, \textit{America’s Great War}, 37-38.
the discipline and sense of purpose that Europeans were finding in their grim, but ennobling struggle.” Here the Progressives like Baker made the real argument behind the Preparedness movement – that white, “native-born” America was in a dangerous decline, about to commit “race suicide,” as Theodore Roosevelt had called it a few years before. A good war would give them a good shaking up, provide the lower classes with “discipline and a sense of purpose,” and help prove to the world that white America was superior to both degenerate Europe and less “civilized” nations.

Many in the Preparedness movement faced criticism from isolationists, pacifists, and those otherwise reluctant to involve the nation in a foreign war. Women’s groups fought to maintain peace. For immigrants who had fled forced conscription back home and rural people alike “distaste ran deep for strong central government [. . .].” President Woodrow Wilson was also extremely reluctant to commit the United States to a foreign war. He won his second term on the slogan, “He Kept Us Out Of War.” However, the patriotic fervor among the upper echelons of society was eventually put to good use when Wilson finally signed the formal declaration of war against Germany on April 6th, 1917. That same high society Preparedness “fever” had trickled down to middle class families and helped set the scene and the tone for participation in patriotic activities on the home front.

**Food During the War**

Food played a central role in the war effort at home and overseas. First, its strategic value in Europe meant that by providing food supplies the United States would become a key ally to

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Britain and France. Poor harvests meant that avoiding waste in the home and consuming uncommon foods could free up much-needed comestibles for shipment overseas. Second, the “high cost of living” was a concern of working class Americans and reform-minded Progressives alike and food was one of the few variables in the household budget. Food conservation helped families build up reserves for when prices were high and consume lower-cost alternatives. Finally, the fact that food was an important facet of everyday life made the perfect vehicle for the federal government to provoke widespread patriotic sentiment and for home economists to have far-reaching impact on the lives of Americans of all social stations.

Historians are starting to address food, women, and World War I. This project reinforces some insights and departs from others. For instance, Helen Zoe Veit’s *Modern Food, Moral Food: Self-Control, Science, and the Rise of Modern American Eating in the Early Twentieth Century* (2013) examines the long-lasting impact of turn-of-the-century scientific discoveries, Progressive propaganda around eating habits, and home economists’ obsession with the efficiency of American eating habits and perceptions from the First World War to the present. She argues that World War I allowed Progressives to transmit food reform and home economics ideas throughout the nation. Particularly, she argues, the Progressive idea that Americans should exercise self-discipline when it came to food, eating less, denying social, emotional, and taste pleasures surrounding food, and valuing food purely for its nutritive qualities. The ideas of duty, voluntary self-denial, and will were echoed in propaganda and official rhetoric throughout the
war. As Veit does, this thesis examines the role of home economists and food reform during World War I, but takes an in-depth look at the local impacts of national reforms.\textsuperscript{14}

It also looks at how the emergence of the state affected ordinary Americans. In \textit{Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen} (2008), Christopher Capozzola closely examines the role of the state during World War I. He argues that wartime was the first time most Americans came in contact with the idea of the state, in this instance primarily the federal government, and that during World War I the role of volunteer organizations and that of the federal government often blurred together as social pressure and sometimes vigilantism enforced the accepted vision of what America should be and how Americans should act. Capozzola also pays particular attention to voluntarism and society women during the war, recounting their role in the Red Cross and food conservation efforts in particular. Society women like those of the Orange County Food Preservation Battalion and the Long Island Food Reserve Battalion used their social status to launch voluntary educational campaigns, cultivating compliance with both down-to-earth educational practices and guilt-inducing patriotic slogans like “preserve or perish,” and “can or collapse.”\textsuperscript{15}

Food conservation was not the only thing society women focused on during the war. Elaine F. Weiss looks at the other side of food with \textit{Fruits of Victory: The Woman’s Land Army of America in the Great War} (2008), which focuses on efforts to put women in the field (literally) to relieve America’s farm labor shortage during the war. Weiss closely examines the work of society women as individuals, particularly the role of the suffrage movement, in

relieving the farm labor shortage with well-educated young white women, with varying degrees of success. The way these women organized closely resembles the organizational pattern of the OCFPB and LIFRB, but the Woman’s Land Army was often at odds with the federal government, rather than working in tandem with it.\textsuperscript{16}

In her book \textit{Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity} (1998), Amy Bentley uses the voluntary rationing efforts of World War I to frame the mandatory rationing of World War II. For Bentley, voluntary rationing failed to make much impact on food exports to the Allies – increased agricultural production was more important – and the voluntary failure only served to make mandatory rationing during World War II that much more necessary.\textsuperscript{17}

Although all of these authors use local and individual stories to illustrate their ideas, the focus of all of these books is national, as with many books on the topic of World War I. With nationally-focused books, the smaller stories, such as those of the OCFPB and LIFRB, often get lost. By examining these smaller, local stories, this thesis will use the state of New York to track the local impact of national food policy during the Great War and to tell the stories of ordinary American women. Of course, in order to examine the local, we must first get some background context on the national.

After the food riots of February and looming crop shortages, President Woodrow Wilson was anxious to solve the “food problem.” Herbert Hoover seemed the sort of man who could solve that problem. Prior to the outbreak of war in Europe, Hoover had made a good living as a

mining engineer. But the plight of invaded Belgium caught his attention and he turned his organizational talents to the formation of an organization called the Commission for the Relief of Belgium. Enormously successful, the Fund solicited donations to provide food and shelter to homeless and starving Belgians as their country was ravaged by war. His duties to the relief fund sent him across the pond to England and Europe. There he learned how Europeans were dealing with the “food problem.”\(^\text{18}\) It was this organizing expertise that led Wilson to appoint Hoover “food dictator” for the nation as the head of the United States Food Administration in May of 1917.

The Food Administration would have a huge impact on middle and upper class American women and their attitudes toward food. Hoover would also help solve the food production crisis, in more ways than one. His experiences in Europe had taught him that he did not want to resort to the “coercive measures” other nations had already implemented.\(^\text{19}\) First, he recommended that instead of the price controls suggested by so many at home and abroad, Wilson put him in control of the supply of food, particularly grain, for the whole country. This temporary wartime measure let Hoover control what was sold to whom and how much, thereby allowing him to manipulate prices and supply as he saw fit.\(^\text{20}\) He “cajoled the Allied purchasing commissions” into accepting higher agricultural prices to encourage American farmers to produce more without fear of falling prices. The Allies resented that Hoover preferred to rely on voluntary incentives

\(^\text{19}\) Kennedy, *Over Here*, 118.
rather than what they regarded as the more efficient mandatory rationing, but they were not in much of a position to argue.\textsuperscript{21}

Hoover also decided to enlist ordinary Americans in this fight. Wheat was a staple of nearly all Western civilizations, and bread formed the backbone of American, British, and French diets. Nutrition scientists at the turn of the century had discovered the “food values” of carbohydrates, proteins, and fats. Refined white flour and the bread made from it was an extremely efficient carbohydrate, metabolizing easily to provide abundant energy. White bread, along with sugar, was touted as a healthy, efficient, energy-giving food vital to good health.\textsuperscript{22}

Wheat was also easy to store and nutritionally dense. But the wheat crop of 1916 was short— it could not feed Europe, the American army, and the American public. Hoover turned to his nutrition scientists for a solution.

Herbert Hoover’s reliance on voluntary and temporary food rationing arguably had as many long-lasting consequences as President Woodrow Wilson’s insistence that the United States join the European conflict in order to fight for democracy. Wealthy society women would play an outsized role in helping educate the general public about Hoover’s policies, but ordinary women would integrate them into their daily lives. Even Hoover, however, could not hold back the growing tide of government influence as voluntary efforts by society women were eventually subsumed by the professionalized work of state and federal organizations.

Household trends and scientific studies before the war helped prepare Americans for the imposition of new, voluntary regulations. The late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries saw enormous

\textsuperscript{21} Kennedy, \textit{Over Here}, 119.
\textsuperscript{22} Veit, \textit{Modern Food}, 45-50.
changes in attitudes toward food, health, sanitation, and nutrition. Scientific breakthroughs in the 1900s and 1910s discovered crucial food elements such as fats, carbohydrates, and proteins. Sugar, white bread, fats, and red meat were deemed the healthiest and most efficient means of getting energy.\(^\text{23}\) Society women crusaded against swill milk. In 1909 the Pure Food and Drug Act was passed and the agency it created would go on to help outlaw dangerous food additives which had for decades adulterated store-bought foodstuffs.\(^\text{24}\) And perhaps most crucially of all, good domestic help was hard to find, putting more women back into their own kitchens than ever before.\(^\text{25}\) Progressive ideas about rural living, the Country Life Movement, and a drive to professionalize the role of women in the home all had lasting impacts on how Americans viewed agriculture, food, and household.

The recent introduction of the calorie was revolutionizing how Americans viewed food. Calculated as enough heat energy to raise the temperature of water by one degree Celsius, calories were a quick and scientific way to determine the value of food by a nation obsessed with numbers and ignorant of many other nutritional properties yet to be discovered. With the application of the calorie, nutrition scientists were shocked to discover that the whole grains, bean, and vegetable diets of the poor could have equivalent calories to and even better nutrition than the much-vaunted red meat, potatoes, and white bread of middle- and upper-class white America.\(^\text{26}\) With the evidence that corn, barley, rye, oatmeal, buckwheat, and potatoes were just as good if not, in fact, better than wheat flour in hand, Hoover made his recommendations.

In the spring of 1917, Hoover released his non-binding recommendations for voluntary rationing. In order to free up calorie-dense, shelf-stable foods for shipment to the Allies, Hoover encouraged housewives to reduce consumption of butter, lard, sugar, and milk and to use more corn, barley, oatmeal, and other grains as well as more fish, eggs, cheese, and poultry. Vegetable oils and shortenings were recommended as alternatives to butter and lard and corn, maple, and sorghum syrups as well as honey were recommended as alternatives to sugar. By consuming more of these substitutes, Americans would free up wheat, beef, and pork for shipment overseas to American soldiers and Allied civilians alike. Wheat was more familiar to the Allies than other

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grains like corn, and it stored well. Sugar was considered a calorie-dense necessity, as were butter and lard. Meats like beef and pork were canned, and milk was condensed and canned for shipment overseas. The US Food Administration also urged citizens to conserve fuel and eliminate food waste entirely.  

It was not until the passage of the Lever Act in August of 1917 that Hoover was given the power to mandate rationing. It was a power he was reluctant to use, although he did eventually ration both sugar and fuel in 1918. By October of 1917 Hoover released his “wheatless” and “meatless” day recommendations, calling for one wheatless and one meatless day per week.

Eliminating food waste was also central to Hoover’s food policies. Statistics were a newly popular way to analyze just about everything – from baseball to the stock market - and the idea that the individual action of saving a crust of bread or a cup of meat scraps from the garbage pail could add up into millions of pounds of saved food was incredibly alluring to efficiency-obsessed Progressives. One Chicago Progressive even published a children’s mathematics textbook using food conservation statistics to teach both thrift and math, with the admonition that President Wilson and others were, “fighting the war with arithmetic” [emphasis original] and math problem sections with titles like, “Wheat Problems,” “Meat Problems,” and “Sugar Problems.” These statistics indicated that although the effort on the part of the individual was minimal, participation from everyone could make a difference on a national scale. But in order for the impact to truly make a difference, everyone had to participate. This idea also emphasized

28 United States Food Administration, outline of policy, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook, 1917-1919, Archives, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
31 A. N. Farmer and Janet Rankin Huntington, Food Problems: To Illustrate the Meaning of Food Waste and What May Be Accomplished By Economy and Intelligent Substitution, (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1918).
personal responsibility, rather than the responsibility of a government to make such changes happen. As with many of the war’s voluntary policies, there was a fair amount of societal vigilantism, with volunteer groups weeding out “slackers” both socially and sometimes physically, and neighbors spying on one another to ensure that if one housewife was eating wheatless and meatless on the correct days, her neighbors were, too.  

The new wheatless and meatless recommendations left many housewives struggling to find substitutions. Commercial producers of products like corn syrup, oatmeal, and vegetable shortening leapt at the chance to introduce their wares, considered inferior by many, to a new, lucrative audience. Propaganda posters were produced to encourage housewives to use alternatives.

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Figure 2 – These two posters illustrate the emphasis placed on alternatives to wheat and sugar. At left, a stylish young woman glowing with health stirs a pot overflowing with steaming hominy behind piles of pancakes and muffins. At right, an illustration of the various ways corn products can be used in substitution of wheat and sugar. Cornstarch in sauces and custards, corn oil for frying, and corn syrup for fudge, canning, and baking.33

In his new position Hoover was reluctant to impose forced rationing on the United States. Believing that capitalism and the voluntary spirit of white, middle- and upper-class Americans would show the world America’s exceptionalism and provide an example for despotistic Europe, Hoover touted both voluntary rationing and the success of sales, rather than donations, of “relief” foods to the Allies in Europe, as to many foreign food aid smacked of socialism.34 In fact, thanks to Hoover’s business savvy, the United States Food Administration actually turned a profit on

34 Veit, Modern Food, 59.
the sale of food “aid” to the Allies. Socialism was not the only thing a conservative businessman like Hoover had to warn against. Like many Americans, he also feared the expansion of the federal government into a bureaucracy, saying that forced rationing would require a “hundred thousand bureaucratic snoopers.” Voluntary self-control, coupled with education on science and efficiency, was the only rational way forward.

This emphasis on voluntarism fit well into the worldview of middle- and upper-class Americans, but particularly Progressives and women. Well-educated upper-class women with little else to occupy them took to the war effort with a vengeance. Experienced in organizing social clubs and charitable organizations, many women, from New York City socialites to small town bankers’ wives, turned their organizing tendencies toward the only outlet afforded wealthy white women during the war: volunteering. Although many women volunteered for the Red Cross, fundraising relief organizations, and for more radical endeavors like the Woman’s Land Army, most women were involved in one way or another with food conservation.

American club women were instrumental in getting nearly 3 million Americans to sign the “Hoover Pledge” to change their eating habits in order to free up calorie-dense food supplies for both “our boys” and America’s starving Allies. [See: Figure 3.] The pledge cards purported to “enlist” women to “join” the United States Food Administration as if it were a club. Upon receipt of the pledge cards, the Food Administration sent a membership card in return, which most housewives displayed in their kitchen window: visible proof of loyalty and patriotism to the community. Not everyone signed up – some women feared the government would confiscate the

35 Veit, Modern Food, 59.
36 Herbert Hoover, quoted in Capozzola, Uncle Sam Wants You, 96.
37 Capozzola, Uncle Sam Wants You, 96-103.
38 Capozzola, Uncle Sam Wants You, 97-100.
contents of their pantries. Others were certain that they were being asked to scrimp and save while the wealthy ate like kings. Still others resented being asked to do the bidding of a government which did not recognize their right to vote.39

Figure 3 – “The Housewife’s Pledge for Food Conservation.” Millions of women all over the country signed these pledges at the behest of club women, their local newspaper editors, and friends. By filling out this card and mailing it to the United States Food Administration, American women were literally joining the “club” of this federal agency, in a strange mix of public and private administration.40

For poor and working class families, both the pledge cards and the idea of voluntarism were a little harder to swallow, especially when it came to food. Few of the truly poor in America saw meat on the table on a regular basis, much less in quantities sufficient to repurpose leftovers. Many, especially in the rural South, ate cornbread and beans - both touted by

39 Capozzola, Uncle Sam Wants You, 98.
Hooverizing home economists - regularly and resented being told to avoid meat, lard, butter, sugar, and white bread when they did have the money for it. Others were scraping so close to starvation that economizing further was not possible.\textsuperscript{41} As Helen Veit recounts, “A southern farmer’s daughter wrote to Hoover that their meals were always wheatless, meatless, and butterless by necessity, and if he did not believe her he should ‘come down south and visit a while and get sighted.’”\textsuperscript{42} To deal with these criticisms, Hoover and the Food Administration turned to nostalgia, “antimodern impulses,” and references to the privations endured by Americans during the Civil War to gain support for the recommendations. Thanks to Hoover’s “Simple Life” message – “Go back to the simple life, / Be contented with simple food, / Simple pleasures, simple clothes, / Work hard, pray hard, play hard.” - which was extensively published in newspapers and Food Administration literature, Americans started to hearken back to colonial meals and virtues.\textsuperscript{43} Although some Americans remained unconvinced, public and social pressure still held sway in Progressive Era society across the nation, and the threats, both social and sometimes physical, of being labeled a “slacker” were often enough to persuade most reluctant Americans to toe the voluntary line.

Hoover’s new, voluntary recommendations were unfamiliar to native-born and immigrant housewives alike, but across the country private and state-run organizations, staffed by professional home economists, would step in to help.

Christopher Capozzola argues quite persuasively that the First World War was for most Americans the first time that the amorphous entity known as the “state” (in this instance, the

\textsuperscript{41} Veit, \textit{Modern Food}, 22-25.
\textsuperscript{42} Veit, \textit{Modern Food}, 23.
\textsuperscript{43} Herbert Hoover, quoted in Veit, \textit{Modern Food}, 24.
Federal Government) had ever entered into their lives. Federal income tax was passed in 1916, but applied only to a tiny fraction of the population – the very wealthiest.\textsuperscript{44} Aside from the Spanish-American War of 1898, which had little real impact on most Americans, peacetime meant that the majority of people went about their daily lives free from the influence of state or federal governments. While not at the heart of Capozzola’s analysis, his broader point about the emergence of the state also applies to agricultural and food reform in the Progressive Era. The 1890s expansion of land grant colleges across the country and again in 1914 with the passage of the Smith-Lever Act, allowed for the creation of cooperative extension offices and agents across the country.\textsuperscript{45} Cooperative extension agents may have been the first government workers, aside from census takers, most Americans ever came in contact with. These efforts accelerated during the war.

Hoover’s national menu was based soundly on the nutrition science of the day. Home economics courses had ballooned at land grant colleges around the country throughout the 1900s and 1910s, resulting in an entire class of well-educated, scientifically-minded women trained for not much besides housework.\textsuperscript{46} Nutrition scientists and home economists, with help from the calorie, discovered that many foods which had previously been scorned, such as whole grains, were actually just as good for you, if not better than the previously touted refined white flour. Recent discoveries of vitamins from research on diseases like pellagra, scurvy, and rickets meant

\textsuperscript{44} Capozzola, \textit{Uncle Sam Wants You}, 6. \\
\textsuperscript{45} Veit, \textit{Modern Food}, 83. \\
\textsuperscript{46} Blitekoff, \textit{Eating Right in America}, 28.
that fruits and vegetables, far from being the calorically useless food of the poor, suddenly had nutrients crucial to good health.  

Hoover’s policies offered the ideal career for these women, and many got to work lecturing, demonstrating, and educating the general populace about food values, substitutions, and the newest advances in food preservation. In fact, the focus on food during the war, coupled with the work of cooperative extensions, put home economists at the forefront of food conservation efforts around the country and familiarized ordinary Americans with their scientific principles.

The life of a home economist during the war seemed to involve a great deal of travel, as qualified individuals rotated through different positions around the country. Their impact, however, should not be understated. For all that some women complained about fancy specialists presuming to teach experienced housewives how to can, trained home economists brought scientific food principles and technology to wealthy women in urban areas who had never boiled water as well as to rural women who struggled in poorly maintained and outdated kitchens; sacrificial lambs to the god of their husband’s more lucrative agricultural pursuits.

Not everyone agreed that focusing on the housewife was the best way to “win the war” with food. Suffragettes in particular decried the emphasis on the minutiae of the “garbage pail,” rather than the role women could play in solving the agricultural labor crisis. The poor also derided Hoover’s policies, exclaiming that they already had plenty of meatless and wheatless days. But few people questioned Americans’ role in feeding the Allies. Hoover’s propagandists

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47 Veit, Modern Food, 45-46.
48 Weiss, Fruits of Victory, 64
49 Veit, Modern Food, 22-25.
had very effectively tapped into American sympathy for women and children with images of dirty and impoverished Belgian and French children begging for milk and food. Guilt kept Americans from refusing to share their surplus with the Allies. Those who did speak out were often accused of sedition, jailed, or beaten by public mobs. For most, the vigilantism against “ slackers” was entirely too strong to challenge publicly.

The State Steps In

In terms of Progressive reform and food conservation, land grant-created Cornell University would play a huge role in New York and become influential nationally. In 1898 it began publishing the “Cornell Reading-Course for Farmers.” In 1901 it released the first of its “Cornell Reading-Course for Farmers’ Wives,” both of which became a series of self-educational reading courses administered by request via mail to rural women all over the country. The “Course for Farmer’s Wives” far outstripped its male counterpart, which had ceased publication by 1904. The reading course underwent several telling title changes, first to “Cornell Reading Course for the Farm Home” in the 1910s and finally the “Cornell Homemaker’s Bulletin” in 1925. The shift in titles suggests a shift in attitudes – from inviting rural women to share with home economists what they would like to learn, and suggestions that they learn it in conjunction with other women, to a much more authoritarian, top-down “bulletin,” in which the “homemakers” have little or no say and which inspires no camaraderie.

The way the state interacted with ordinary people followed a similar trajectory. During the First World War, the United States Food Administration simply requested, cajoled, and peer-pressured Americans into participation in food conservation efforts. By World War II,
participation was no longer optional. Americans, willingly or not, had accepted the state as an important authority in their daily lives.

In *Uncle Sam Wants You*, Christopher Capozzola argues that even as the federal government grew immensely during World War I, voluntary organizations still played a key role in carrying out its mission. New York State’s experiences with food reform illustrate this point. Although the state played a new and increasingly important role in Americans’ lives, voluntary organizations still held sway locally. New Yorkers took Hoover’s policies for food conservation to heart. Society women in New York City sprang into action and farm bureaus, women’s clubs, and grange organizations all across the state got started on increasing production and preserving the harvest. Some organizations, like the Long Island Food Reserve Battalion and the Orange County Food Preservation Battalion, were newly formed by private citizens. Other groups formed under county farm bureaus, home defense committees, and colleges both agricultural and otherwise. Many of these groups were eventually brought under the auspices of state organizations like the New York Food Supply Commission.

Three city- and state-based organizations influenced food conservation efforts in New York state before and during the Great War: the Mayor’s Committee of Women on National Defense, the New York State Food Supply Commission, and the State College of Agriculture at Cornell University all contributed to the war effort in similar ways.

In New York City, Mayor John Mitchel formed a Committee on Food Supply in July of 1914 in response to increasing prices and commodities shortages due to an increase in European
purchasing and a poor harvest in the Midwest.\textsuperscript{50} The committee published a number of booklets, including \textit{Substitutes for Meat} in 1914 and the enormously popular \textit{Hints for Housewives} in 1917. In September 1914 the Mayor’s Committee on Food Supply also opened public markets where farmers and other purveyors could sell their products at cost, thus avoiding the inflationary cost additions by middlemen and retailers.\textsuperscript{51} So effective were the markets that they attracted the wealthy. The National Municipal League wrote in its 1915 report, “ladies in automobiles [came] down to buy shoulder to shoulder with the wash-woman of the slums.”\textsuperscript{52}

During the war Mitchel expanded with the Mayor’s Committee on National Defense and its sister organization, The Mayor’s Committee of Women on National Defense, headed by Mrs. William Randolph Hearst. Both of these massive, mostly-volunteer-run organizations had numerous subcommittees, including the Food Committee of the Mayor’s Committee of Women.

The Food Committee ran public Canning Kitchens in 1917 and 1918, preserving surplus food, particularly fruits and vegetables from New York City docks which would otherwise spoil. They offered this food at no cost to volunteers and at “reasonable prices” to families around the city.\textsuperscript{53} The Committee on National Defense had a subcommittee on “Aliens,” which in the summer of 1917 recounted working closely with the City Canning Kitchen. The immigrant women “learned there the use of new foods, and received valuable lessons in cleanliness and food conservation.”\textsuperscript{54} Thus the City Canning Kitchen fit in neatly with efforts to ensure the loyalty of “alien women.” Not only were they subjected to assimilation efforts to improve their

\textsuperscript{51} Wilson, \textit{New York and the First World War}, 84.
\textsuperscript{53} The Activities of the Mayor’s Committee of Women on National Defense, New York, 1918-1919, 20.
\textsuperscript{54} Report of the Executive Committee, Mayor’s Committee on National Defense (1917), 27.
“cleanliness,” but also to change their eating habits – something many immigrant communities were extremely reluctant to do. For many, food was one of the only connections they had to their homelands. For others, the types of food needed for shipment overseas – beef, sugar, butter – were the types of food many impoverished people of all backgrounds associated with wealth and good living. Perhaps some women attended canning kitchen demonstrations because of patriotism, but for the truly poor it is more likely that the promise of free or very cheap canned fruits and vegetables drew them to the City Canning Kitchen door.

The New York City Food Conservation Kitchen, as it was called by 1918, was also heavily invested in dehydration. A community dehydrator had been installed to inspire other communities and municipalities to adopt this “cheap form of conservation” which provided preserved food that would “keep for years, if kept in a dry place and taken care of.”

Unlike other organizations, the New York City committees were focused almost exclusively on Manhattan and the outer boroughs. By late 1918 their efforts would be assisted by the New York State Food Commission, but in the early days of 1917 it would take private voluntary organizations to capture the attention of the nation.

Immediately following the declaration of war on April 4th, 1917, New York Governor Charles S. Whitman convened a meeting with farmers to see what might be done about the food supply program. He also declared Saturday, April 21st as “Agricultural Mobilization Day,” upon which over 85,000 people met, primarily through the Grange system, at events around the state.

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55 *The Activities of the Mayor’s Committee of Women*, 22.
The Patriotic Agricultural Service Committee was formed, and on April 17, 1917 the New York State Food Supply Commission was formally created.\textsuperscript{56}

The Food Supply Commission got to work almost immediately. At the May 3\textsuperscript{rd} meeting they tackled the farm labor problem. At the May 10\textsuperscript{th} meeting they addressed poultry conservation and made plans to employ “field agents for insect and disease control, and for employing women as food conservation agents.”\textsuperscript{57} By July the Food Supply Commission turned its eye to Hoover’s pledge program, authorizing “the assistant secretary to supervise the work of getting membership pledges of the housewives in the State in the Federal Food Administration, as requested by Herbert Hoover;” this work was to be done by the county home defense committees.\textsuperscript{58} The Commission helped pave the way, however by sending “7,000 circular letters” to clergy around the state, urging them to participate in “Food-Saving Sunday,” the first Sunday in July.\textsuperscript{59} The Food Supply Commission also held a huge exhibition at the State Fair. Called the “Food Training Camp exhibit,” this section of the fair included booths on agricultural topics such as bovine tuberculosis and putting marginal lands into production, booths on food transportation waste, booths illustrating the coming food shortages and, especially food conservation:

A section devoted to the preparation of foods and the conservation of food products occupied nearly one-third of the entire space, including an auditorium for motion pictures and demonstrations of making wheat-saving breads, of meat and vegetable canning, and of jelly making and preserving. [. . .] Drying and canning exhibits showed the various types of driers, together with a large display

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\textsuperscript{57} Report of the New York State Food Supply Commission, 16.
\textsuperscript{58} Report of the New York State Food Supply Commission, 18.
\textsuperscript{59} Report of the New York State Food Supply Commission, 22.
\end{flushleft}
of dried foods, and also of pressure canning outfits of sufficient size to take care of a large truck farm or small community.\textsuperscript{60}

Other displays showed how to conserve fats, promoted the commercial production of beans in New York State, taught backyard gardening and root cellaring, and gave tractor demonstrations.\textsuperscript{61} By holding such a “training camp” at the State Fair, the New York State Food Supply Commission was able to reach thousands of New York residents, especially upstate farmers.

![Figure 4](map.png)

\textbf{Figure 4} – This map of New York State counties illustrates all of the counties with food conservation agents recognized by and affiliated with the New York State Food Supply Commission in 1917. The counties in light blue had newly organized food conservation efforts. Counties in orange had already had home economics departments connected to their county farm bureaus. These last were pressed into service for the Food Supply Commission in July of 1917. Orange county (near the southern tip of the state) is noticeably absent from this list, even though the Orange County Food Preservation Battalion was well into its conservation work by July of 1917.\textsuperscript{62}

The report also references the Commission’s work in placing food conservation agents in counties around the state. In all, forty of New York’s sixty-two counties are listed as having food

\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Report of the New York State Food Supply Commission}, 26-27.


\textsuperscript{62} County conservation agent information compiled by this author from \textit{Report of the New York State Food Supply Commission}, 49-52.
conservation agents (See: Figure 3). Orange county as well as Suffolk county on Long Island (though not Nassau) are completely omitted from the lists of Commission-placed agents, as well as the shorter list of agents already established in counties, perhaps because the Orange County Food Preservation Battalion and Long Island Food Reserve Battalion were already at work there. A food conservation agent was placed in New York City and worked primarily to direct the city’s enormous canning kitchen.

Perhaps the most far-reaching work of the New York State Food Supply Commission on the food conservation front was the production and dissemination of “mailing cards” on a variety of food conservation topics including “Drying fruits and vegetables in the home,” “Some ways of getting along without the hired man,” “A homemade fireless cooker,” and “Rye and clover – a two years’ rotation,” to name a few. Produced by the staff of the State College of Agriculture, nearly 2.5 million cards were distributed across the state.

The New York State Food Supply Commission made significant strides in organizing farmers and disseminating scientific and technological information to far-flung counties across the state through field agents, food conservation agents, and cooperation with local home defense committees and Farm Bureaus. But at the end of 1917, the state was already reevaluating the work that had been done thus far.

On August 29, 1917, the New York State Food Commission was formed to replace the New York State Food Supply Commission and had its first official meeting on October 9th.

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64 Report of the New York State Food Supply Commission, 53-54.
This redirection took the focus of the commission from stand-alone operation to one much closer to the federal government. “Conferences with Mr. Hoover and other officials of the United States Food Administration resulted in assurance from them that the Commission would become the arm of the Federal Food Administration within the boundaries of New York State [ . . . ].”67 Two Federal Food Administrators, employed by the federal government, were appointed, one in New York City and the other for upstate New York. Together, the Commission and the two Administrators formed the Federal Food Board for New York State – so designed to avoid overlap, conflicting policies, and confusion in the minds of citizens.68 Within the Commission, three bureaus were created: Production, Distribution and Transportation, and Conservation.69

When it came to food conservation, the Commission turned its educational attention to the cities of New York state, particularly New York City, because of the “difficult” “polyglot character” of the state’s many ethnic groups.70 The Commission left most of “the rural propaganda, by agreement, largely to the State College of Agriculture.”71 Part of the campaign in New York City involved tailoring propaganda to individual ethnicities, as well as demonstrating “to mothers at the public playgrounds and Coney Island. [. . .] The ‘sand-pile’ of the Kindergarten Mother’s Club at Coney Island rivals the community kitchen as a summertime food educational center.”72 The Commission clearly understood that it could not simply “go out to preach food saving. A positive program of education [. . .] was needed.”73 Here we see the Progressive home economists speaking, as the Report goes on to state that “[a]mong the foreign-

68 Ibid.
72 Report of the New York State Food Commission, 64.
73 Ibid.
born families there was also frequently the problem of showing them how to use some comparatively cheap and plentiful American food, in place of an expensive imported food to which they had always been accustomed.\(^{74}\) In order to reach these somewhat intractable immigrant women, the Commission found a solution:

To reach them the home demonstration was tried out and found most effective. The demonstrator goes to a tenement house where one of the women of the neighborhood has agreed to give use of her kitchen. All the women of the tenement are invited [. . .]. If the demonstrator does not speak their language, every word is translated as she describes the things she is making. Only the utensils in the home are used, proving that the dishes can be prepared with the simplest equipment. When the dish is cooked, it is divided among the women and children present so that they can have a chance to taste it for themselves.\(^{75}\)

Home economists also had outdoor demonstrations at pushcart markets and both social settlements and public schools worked closely with the Commission in its food education and conservation work.\(^{76}\)

The State College of Agriculture at Cornell University did its bit for the war effort, too. Drawing on its earlier history of reading courses for the farm, Cornell University got right to work, publishing in June of 1917 a reading course entitled “Food Preservation: A National Challenge.” The pamphlet proceeded to run on for 50 pages, outlining in great detail all the different methods of food preservation, including the science behind each method, plus explaining the science and reasoning behind food spoilage, including the dangerous botulism bacteria.\(^{77}\) It continued to publish regular pamphlets on a variety of food conservation topics throughout the war. Cornell also provided the state with trained home economists, some of

\(^{74}\) Report of the New York State Food Commission, 63.  
\(^{75}\) Report of the New York State Food Commission, 64.  
\(^{77}\) “Food Preservation: A National Challenge,” Cornell Reading Course for the Farm Home, Cornell University: (June, 1817), 133-184.
whom would take the lead with private volunteer organizations, but most of whom would go on to become cooperative extension agents. In fact, it appears that Cornell, in cooperation with the New York State Food Commission, dominated the food conservation efforts of the Capitol region of Albany, NY and north, whereas parts of the lower Hudson Valley and Long Island relied on volunteer organizations, at least at first.

Volunteers: First in the Fight

Once Herbert Hoover first made noises about food conservation immediately following the declaration of war in April of 1917, high society sprang into action. Within weeks two organizations with ties to New York City society formed: the Long Island Food Reserve Battalion and the Orange County Food Preservation Battalion. Though the two groups differed greatly in how they were established, the goals they set, and who led them, they used similar strategies to reach ordinary Americans.

On April 19, 1917, the Hempstead Sentinel featured on its front page an article about the formation of the Long Island Food Reserve Battalion (LIFRB). Outlining the main goals of the LIFRB, the article does not once mention food conservation. Instead, as the title suggests, the group “Will Use Idle Lands,” putting the estates of the wealthy on Long Island into production. Chaired by Long Island Railroad President Ralph Peters, the rest of the board was composed entirely of men. A week later, in the same newspaper, the LIFRB put out a call for $50,000 in donations. Their work was primarily focused on agricultural production and harvest, and the

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78 “Will Use Idle Lands: People of County Organize Long Island Food Reserve Battalion.” Hempstead Sentinel, April 19, 1917.
money was intended to go toward furnishing agricultural machinery, seed, land, and organizing the agricultural labor of Boy Scouts and high school boys in all four counties of Long Island.\(^79\)

By June the LIFRB was focusing on the purchase of seed, including seed potatoes and the nutritious and easy-to-store bean. The LIFRB brought over a thousand bushels of seed potatoes from Michigan to Long Island and “distributed to the farmers at a cost much less than the prices being quoted in the east.” Seed corn was also distributed, and locally the LIRFB touted the nutrition and keeping qualities of beans while also arranging for bean threshing equipment to be made available to farmers to encourage production.\(^80\)

These goals remained at the heart of the LIFRB for the duration of the war, but their most famous endeavor was actually put on by the “Committee of Women of the Long Island Food Reserve Battalion” – a “Special Instruction Train” on the Long Island Railroad.\(^81\)

Like the society men and women of Mayor Mitchel’s Committees on National Defense, the Long Island Food Reserve Battalion believed strongly in the Progressive principles of science, public service, and reform. Although their agricultural efforts would have a large impact locally, it was their food conservation efforts that captured the imagination of other groups and the nation.

The Long Island Food Reserve Battalion worked closely with and possibly employed two home economists for food conservation work: Mrs. Nellie F. Snyder and Mrs. A. Louise Andrea. Snyder had long been involved in canning work with boys and girls clubs as well as extension

\(^79\) “FOOD BATTALION WANTS $50,000 – Needs that Amount to Get its Work Started on The Food Problem.” Hempstead Sentinel, April 26, 1917.

\(^80\) “Long Island Food Battalion To Open Canning Kitchen Here?” The East Hampton Star, June 22, 1917, front page.

work. Starting in 1914 and continuing at least until 1916 she taught canning classes to the public. In 1916 she was employed by the Long Island extension office to teach canning. By the outbreak of war, she was working for the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Figure 5 – At left, Mrs. A. Louise Andrea in 1918 from her book, *Home Canning, Drying, and Preserving* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1918). Note the US Food Administration recommended food conservation outfit. At right, Mrs. Andrea in her booth at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, part of an advertisement directed at food advertisers from *The Gentlewoman* magazine, touting Andrea’s experience in recommending brand-name foods.

Mrs. A. Louise Andrea was a “well-known expert” in the field of home economics. A gold medal winner at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco in 1915, by 1917 she was running the Gentlewoman’s Experimental Kitchen for *The Gentlewoman*

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85 “Orange County Food Battalion” *Monroe Gazette*, undated but sometime before June, 1917, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook, 1917-1919, Archives, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
magazine. *The Gentlewoman*, founded in the 1890s, was a true society weekly, originally emphasizing etiquette and “court” manners as well as listing debutantes and other society news for New York City. By the outbreak of war it seemed more focused on the Progressive-tinged ideals of high society than Gilded Age etiquette.

Both women were instrumental in the formation of the Long Island Food Reserve Battalion’s “Special Instruction Train” on the Long Island Railroad. Snyder’s experience working for the government gave her distinct authority on the subject. Andrea’s more popular work and background at a society weekly made her the perfect intermediary between the refined men and women of the LIFRB and the science of food preservation.

The use of trains to promote various topics dates back as early as 1908, when an “Agriculture and Home Economics Train” made its way through Southern California. Instruction trains quickly became so popular that by 1920 the Russell Sage Foundation published a book entitled, *Traveling Publicity Campaigns: Educational Tours of Railroad Trains and Motor Vehicles*. Written by Mary Zwain Routzahn, the book primarily offered advice on how to arrange an instruction train, as well as information on past instruction trains.

The Long Island Food Reserve Battalion’s “Special Instruction Train,” which ran on the Long Island Railroad from May 21st to May 25th, 1917, was one of the most famous instruction trains of the war. As to whose idea it was to put on the instruction train we may never know, but it is almost certain that Long Island Railroad president Ralph Peters and his wife were heavily involved in the execution. Although Peters does not record why he chose to support the

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instruction train, it was likely part patriotic service, part advertising stunt. Other society women joined in. According to an article in *The Seacliff News and Glen Cove News* dated May 19th, 1917, “The Special Committee of the Battalion, in charge of the train, consists of Mrs. Arthur Scott Burden, Mrs. William Laimbeer, Mrs. Ralph Peters, Mrs. Geo. W. Pierpont [daughter of the Peters], Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt, Jr., and Mrs. Watson Webb.” Lectures were given by Nellie F. Snyder and A. Louise Andrea as well as Mr. and Mrs. Hal B. Fullerton on the topics of food preservation and canning. Mr. Fullerton’s certification to speak on food was apparently given because he was the “Chief Grub Scout of the Boy Scouts of America.” He did, however, proceed to talk himself hoarse by the final day of the train’s journey, telling “in his own way, and there is no other way like it, how ‘Butcher Bill,’ the Kaiser, made this war necessary.” Mrs. Fullerton’s qualifications were that “[a]ll of the preserves on view in the car were put up by Mrs. Hal B. Fullerton. Out at Medford she puts up over 3,000 jars of preserves a year.”

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Other women in the committee were heavily involved in the day-to-day operations of the train. Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt, Jr., perhaps because of lack of preservation experience or interest, took it upon herself to keep an eye on the children of women who wanted to attend the lectures. Mrs. Ralph Peters herself kept extra busy and was actively engaged in a multitude of tasks when the demonstration car started to bulge on the sides after each stop when it filled to its capacity and more with throngs of women ravenous for the information to be dispensed. Over her arm hung a pretty bag, and as soon as the cars cleared she was busily engaged during every spare minute – or, rather, every spare second – knitting a gray sweater, which held forth abundant promise that some soldier, when the keen wind whistled through the trenches, would have ample reason to extend her his heartfelt thanks for her industry.91

Unfortunately for Mrs. Peters, it is unlikely her sweater ever made it to that poor soldier. Although knitting was a popular way for women to participate in the war effort and early attempts at military supply organization were haphazard at best, by 1918 the Red Cross was telling women “Don’t Make Sweaters.”92 Still by knitting “every spare second,” Mrs. Peters was showing her fervent commitment to the patriotic cause of voluntary war effort.

90 Page torn from The Country Gentleman, undated, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook, 1917-1919, Archives, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
92 Capozzola, Uncle Sam Wants You, 83-85.
Figure 7 – “Mrs. Arthur Scott Burden and Mrs. William Laimbeer on the canning special on which they with other busy housewives of Manhattan toured Long Island to teach the women how to ‘preserve or perish.’” Mrs. Laimbeer holds a stack of pamphlets in her arm, presumably on the topic of food preservation, which would have been given or sold at cost to women attending the instruction train.93

Mrs. Laimbeer and Mrs. Watson made a game of it, “to see who would answer the greater number of questions during the remainder of the day. The contest closed at Glen Cove after the women had talked six hours out of the nine they were on the train, and it was then decided that they had both won.”94 Although the paper does not outline what precisely their qualifications were, presumably Mrs. Laimbeer and Mrs. Watson were answering the questions correctly. At least, one hopes so.

The train ended up being wildly successful and captured the imagination of the nation. Stories of the “special instruction train” showed up in newspapers around New York and locales

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93 Page torn from The Country Gentleman, undated, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook, 1917-1919, Archives, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
94 Ibid.
as far-flung as Ogden, UT. The publicity savvy of Mr. Underwood, along with the well-known society names attached to the endeavor made good copy. So did the photographs of society women, particularly Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt, Jr., the “trim woman in a fetching yellow suit and a jaunty black hat” looking after other women’s babies [See: Figure 8].

However, in one location an incident occurred which gravely disturbed the sensibilities of every patriotic Progressive. On Friday, May 25th the Brooklyn Eagle published a lengthy piece on the train. In a section of the article entitled, “Someone Strafs [sic] the Train,” the author outlined a curious incident. “Telephonic advice” was spread throughout the town of Roslyn that the train would arrive in town at a time that was in fact forty minutes later than the scheduled time. “Nearly one hundred women” arrived late for the demonstrations. Then, the article identified the potential culprits:

An unusual incident at East Williston threw some light on the situation. Three women got on the train there with some children and colored servants. They appeared to be turning up their nose at everything they saw or heard, and spoke in a loud tone in German.

Mrs. Nellie Snyder, the Government canning expert, understands the language, so she took a seat in the stereopticon auditorium car, next to the women. She ascertained that they were belittling the efforts of those on the cars, and saying that no one would do anything the women told them to do. They talked throughout in a supercilious and irritating manner, but attempted nothing militant on the train.

By describing the incident in military terms, the author implies that the women of the canning special were “doing their bit” as kitchen soldiers in the battle against waste and, apparently, the Hun threat of mockery and derision. By conflating criticism of the train with the German threat,
the article effectively used peer pressure to stifle any potential dissent or skepticism about the effectiveness of the train.

Examined in isolation, it would be easy indeed to question the effectiveness of the Long Island Food Reserve Battalion’s “special instruction train,” but its popularity and effectiveness at getting its point across would go on to inspire other instruction trains, including the “Conservation Special” of the Orange County Food Preservation Battalion and the “Thrift Special” of the New York State Food Supply Commission. Indeed, evidence suggest that an instruction train was in fact repeated on Long Island in 1918, though perhaps not by the Long Island Food Reserve Battalion itself.

The Long Island Food Reserve Battalion also planned to open a Canning Kitchen in Hicksville, NY, led by Mrs. Watson Webb and Mrs. William Laimbeer, on June 1st of 1917. By August 7th the kitchen was well underway, although it had in fact only been in operation for a month, having opened on July 6th. Nellie F. Snyder, the home economist who ran the “Instruction Special” with A. Louise Andrea, was paid “by the government” to run the kitchen, but the rest of the labor was provided by volunteers. The volunteers were soon inundated with produce from estate farms and gardens, orchards, and working farms:

The camp was started with the plan to work three days a week for the army and navy and to allow the women of the neighborhood to come in three times a week to receive instructions in their own canning. However, when the big aviation camp was established nearby at Mineola, this bought all that could be furnished by the cannery. Enthusiastic work has been done by the rich and poor alike. Since its foundation the camp has been able to put up 9,000 quarts of food.

100 “Big Canning Plant to Get Collegians,” Columbia Daily Spectator, August 7, 1917.
Students were also to be recruited; “[a]fter the summer sessions of the eastern universities close, many students will go to the kitchen at Hicksville to do their bit. The work will consist of everything from washing and steaming fruits and preparing vegetables to pasting labels and running a typewriter.” The kitchen had installed a drying plant in July. All of the food was “purchased by the government at the cost of the jars, sugar and fuel.” Some fruit preserves were even “sent to France in wooden buckets.” Other home economists and domestic scientists were trained at the Hicksville kitchen with the intent of managing other canning kitchens around the Northeast. Fascinatingly, this canning kitchen, perhaps because Snyder was employed by the US Department of Agriculture, was able to sell most of its canned goods to the government, particularly the “aviation camp at Mineola.” These government purchases helped support the canning kitchen as well as lend legitimacy to their efforts. It also indicates that the boundaries between these voluntary organizations and the federal government were still fluid, at least when it came to food production and conservation.

What ultimately happened to the Hicksville canning kitchen is not clear, but like most other community canning kitchens its work probably ended with the war. The emphasis by the Columbia Daily Spectator on the fact that the kitchen was designed not to make a profit was likely in response to criticisms, such as this one from the New York Tribune on August 10, 1917 in an article entitled “Big Crops Rot on Ground As Farmers Seek Market: ‘Glut’ Centers Urged to Take Care of Foodstuffs Which Canneries Refuse to Handle – Community Canning Stations and Cold Storage Houses Advocated:”

102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
'I know a market gardener out on Long Island,’ she [Mrs. Irving Brock, chairman of the home economic section of the National League for Woman’s Service] said, ‘who had several acres of spinach. He offered it to a canning establishment, and they refused it on the ground that there was so little demand for canned spinach it wouldn’t pay to put it up. It is time, I say, that the canning establishments bore a little of the war burden. What if they don’t make as big a profit as they should? Let them preserve the food for the sake of the world need, as the American people planted it for that need.’

The canning kitchen mentioned is clearly not the LIFRB’s at Hicksville because it is mentioned later in the same article as it “long ago burst its warehouse with the vast store of vegetables sent in by farmers for Long Island’s Poor.” But once again the public became very wary of profit-making enterprises when it came to patriotic war work. And that aversion to profiting from wartime needs helped prevent most canning kitchens and other wartime efforts like the Woman’s Land Army from continuing after the war. Canning kitchens and the Woman’s Land Army both relied on donations and patriotic volunteers to keep the prices of canned goods and farm labor low for the public good. Once the war was over, it was difficult for the public to swallow the higher prices brought on by paid staff and purchased goods.

Inspired by the early work of the Long Island Food Reserve Battalion – especially the instruction train - a number of women prominent in Tuxedo Park, NY society got together in the spring of 1917 and formed the Orange County Food Preservation Battalion with the intent of taking Hoover’s wartime admonishments to heart. Chaired by Mrs. Theodore Layton Bailey (née Gillian Webster Barr), the Battalion got right to work. Plans were made to open a community canning kitchen in Chester, NY. A flurry of letters were sent to the various people involved with the Long Island Food Reserve Battalion’s instruction train, which would inspire the Orange

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106 Ibid.
County Battalion to put together their own “Conservation Special” on the Erie Railroad. Mrs. A. Louise Andrea, who had helped the LIFRB, was consulted on both the organization of the canning kitchen and the instruction train.\(^{107}\)

Mrs. Bailey had both the time and the verve to get deeply involved in the food conservation movement. Like many, her husband was away at war. Theodore Layton Bailey had been in the National Guard of New York and by wartime was a Captain in the Air Corps Service. In 1918 he was promoted to Major, and in 1919 he published the book *Military Courtesy*.\(^ {109}\) A

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\(^{107}\) *Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook, 1917-1919, Archives, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.*


prominent New York lawyer, he and Gillian summered at and eventually moved to her family farm, Stoneywolde, in Harriman.

Gillian herself had studied law at New York University.\textsuperscript{110} She and Theodore married in 1907.\textsuperscript{111} She was a self-described “tom-boy” growing up who adored the country life afforded by her childhood summers on the family farm.\textsuperscript{112} Gillian was a well-educated, wealthy woman who obviously wanted to serve her country as much as her husband. The Orange County Food Preservation Battalion was her way of doing so.

It is not clear whose idea it was to form the Battalion, but it is safe to say that as Bailey became Chairman she was almost certainly involved in its creation. Two other women, Mrs. Schuyler Schieffelin (née Julia C. Cooper), who served as Secretary, and Mrs. Moses Charles Migel (née Elisa Parada), who served as Treasurer, both of Monroe, NY, were deeply involved with the organization, and both had husbands who were also away at war.

Julia’s husband Schuyler, who had been employed in his family’s pharmaceutical business, was a Captain in the Signal Corps and served in both England and France.\textsuperscript{113} Elisa’s husband Moses Charles Migel, born in Texas to Jewish New Yorker parents, made his fortune in the silk trade. He also served as a Major in the Signal Corps.\textsuperscript{114} The three women had all married around the same time and were all presumably near the same age.

\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Men and Women of America}, 76.
\textsuperscript{112} Gillian Webster Barr Bailey, \textit{The Recollections of Gillian Webster Barr Bailey for her Descendants} (1950), 65.
\textsuperscript{113} \textit{The Honor Roll of the Society of Colonial Wars: Services of Members of the Society During the World War, 1917-1918} (New York: General Assembly, 1922), 31.
Together these three, along with a host of other women prominent in Orange County society, including the wives of doctors, lawyers, politicians, bankers, and the independently wealthy, made up the Orange County Food Preservation Battalion (See: Figure 6).

![Image of women](image)

**Figure 9** – The caption on this image from *Country Gentleman Magazine* reads, “Well-known New York women of the fashionable Tuxedo colony beside their Orange County food-conservation train, which they equipped and ran through the county this summer. Assistant by an expert canner, they instructed hundreds of women in the best methods of canning. The women in the picture, from left to right, are: Mrs. J. E. Stevens, Mrs. C. H. Lee, Mrs. H. L. McVickar, Mrs. J. H. McGuinness, Mrs. Schuyler Scheiffelin, Mrs. C. P. Holzderber, Mrs. Theodore L. Bailey, Mrs. David Wagstaff and Mrs. M. C. Migel.”

Inspired in part by the Long Island Food Reserve Battalion, the Orange County Battalion pre-dated the food conservation agents that would later be attached to Farm Bureaus. By focusing entirely on food preservation, they differentiated themselves from other organizations, such as their Long Island inspiration, which focused on issues such as farm labor and the seed

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115 Page torn out of *Country Gentleman Magazine*, undated, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook, 1917-1919, Archives, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
supply. They aligned themselves not with bureaucrats and businessmen and producers, but with ordinary women.

One might wonder, what could wealthy society women possibly have in common with ordinary housewives? It would be tempting to portray the women of the Battalion as clueless debutantes, swanning around the countryside in “soft-cushioned limousines bearing ‘words of encouragement’ to women on farms” as one Minnesota paper described the efforts of Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt, Jr., of the Long Island Food Reserve Battalion’s Women’s Committee. But the evidence suggests that these women used their status as a springboard, rather than a pedestal.

One of the very first actions the Orange County Food Preservation Battalion took after formation was to start planning for its own “Conservation Special” on the Erie Railroad. Mrs. Gillian Bailey received a great deal of assistance from Mrs. A. Louise Andrea of *The Gentlewoman*’s Experimental Kitchen. Mrs. Andrea had, after all, been instrumental in the success of the Long Island Food Reserve Battalion’s special instruction train, which directly inspired the Orange County ladies, and she happily gave that expertise to Mrs. Bailey and the OCFPB. It is not clear whether or not Mrs. Andrea was actually employed by the Battalion, but she was at the center of many of its plans for the instruction train.

As early as June 5th, 1917, Mrs. Bailey was receiving letters regarding the possibility of an instruction train. On June 13th the Erie Railroad Company committed to the project, agreeing to outfit cars “just as soon as you inform us of the number of people to be accommodated and an outline as to the itinerary.” Ralph Peters, President of the Long Island Railroad and chairman.

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116 Quoted in Eighmey, *Food Will Win the War*, 152.
of the Long Island Food Reserve Battalion, sent his best wishes to Mrs. Bailey and the full itinerary of the Long Island “Instruction Special” to Mrs. Henry Bacon, “Chairman, Food Conservation Special.”

There seemed to be some initial trouble in finding suitable demonstrators for the train, likely due to the instant demand for educational information on food conservation. In his June 19th, 1917 letter to Mrs. Bailey, Ralph Peters indicated that Hal Fullerton (of “Chief Grub Scout” fame) was not available for the Orange County train due to a previous engagement. In a letter to Mrs. Bailey on June 20th, 1917, O. H. Benson, in charge of Boys’ & Girls’ Club Work for the US Department of Agriculture wrote that he could not spare any demonstrators for July and suggested she contact Mary Van Rensselaer at Cornell University instead. In spite of these initial setbacks, organization of the “Conservation Special” continued at a grueling pace. On June 22nd, 1917, the Monroe Gazette published a story all about the instruction train, which was set for July 2nd through the 7th and would feature “Miss Mary Wallace, Mrs. A. Louise Andrea and other experts, assisted by a special committee consisting of the honorary presidents and many other representatives [sic] women in Orange County.” On June 23rd, Mrs. Bailey and Mrs. Andrea were conversing about the possibility of securing a commercial dehydrator for the train as well as urging Mrs. Bailey to prepare for publicity, as Mrs. Andrea intended to “inform the Universal Film Corporation, as we want this film to set an example to the whole United States, and inspire people all over the country to ‘do their bit’ for the good cause.” That same day Mrs. Bailey also received a letter from Hal Fullerton, enclosing the report/itinerary of the Long Island train

118 Erie Railroad Superintendent to Mrs. Henry Bacon, June 22, 1917, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
119 “Food Preserve Battalion” Monroe Gazette, June 22, 1917.
120 Mrs. Andrea to Mrs. Bailey, June 23 1917, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
and sending his regrets that he could spare no stereopticon or lantern slides to be used by the ladies in Orange County.\textsuperscript{121}

A lengthy letter from Mrs. Andrea to Mrs. Bailey gives more insight into the planning sessions. In it, Mrs. Andrea wrote that she had secured a “community canning outfit that will take care of from 500 to 1000 cans per day” for use on the train. She also wrote of the possibility of purchasing lantern slides on dehydrating and made special emphasis of an early telephone conversation she and Mrs. Bailey had had:

I am repeating part of my suggestion as given to you over the phone this morning, in case you did not thoroughly understand me. Namely, to have the head of the Commissary Department at West Point, visit our train and let us show him and anyone he wishes to bring with him, all our outfit that pertains to commercial drying. I will also have cooked by the chef on the train, some of our dehydrated vegetables, and we will serve him in the dining car, so he will know just exactly how these foods look and taste when restored and ready to serve. [underlining original, presumably by Mrs. Bailey]\textsuperscript{122}

They did end up meeting with Lieutenant Philip Gordon of West Point, as well as “Mrs. Charles Roe, wife of General Charles Roe, U.S.A., retired” and Schuyler Schieffelin – Julia’s husband. Gillian, Mrs. Andrea, and Mrs. Henry Bacon (of the OCFPB) joined them for a meal of rehydrated carrots and spinach. Although it cannot have been very appetizing, it was apparently enough to impress Lieutenant Gordon, as Mrs. Andrea promised to send along samples for the commissary to experiment with.\textsuperscript{123} Efforts to reach out to West Point personnel indicate that the women of the OCFPB had higher aims than merely encouraging local women to put up more

\textsuperscript{121} Hall Fullerton to Mrs. Bailey, June 23, 1917, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.

\textsuperscript{122} Mrs. Andrea to Mrs. Bailey, June 27, 1917, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.

\textsuperscript{123} “Food Special Tours Northeast Orange County: More Than a Thousand Persons Thronged to Train at Seven Stops,” \textit{New York Herald}, July 4, 1917.
produce. By emphasizing the military value of dehydrated foods, they were seeking to influence the very place that trained American officers.

On June 27th, Thomas E. Milliman, Orange County Agricultural Agent, sent a general letter out to Farm Bureau members regarding the upcoming train, indicating the cooperation between the OCFPB and the Farm Bureau, and announcing that he would be giving a lecture on how to deal with insects and blight during the train programs. This was done presumably to attract farming men and home gardeners in addition to the expected housewife audience. By attracting men to the train, the OCFPB would only increase its own legitimacy in the eyes of the local community and provide more community support for Hoover’s food conservation recommendations. In addition, the OCFPB was also expanding its role as purveyor of expert advice, from the kitchen outward into the world of business and society at large.

That same day, Mrs. Bailey received a letter from the Assistant General Passenger Agent of the Erie Railroad which read in part, “I have advised Mr. Hooker of your wishes in connection with mentioning Mrs. Wagstaff as Captain for Tuxedo Township. He has arranged with Underwood and Underwood the photographers, to have a man aboard the train, which will result in considerably favorable publicity through pictures in the various Sunday supplements throughout the country.” The men from Underwood and Underwood would indeed go on to take a number of photos, some of which made it into newspapers and magazines around the country. It is not known whether the film Mrs. Andrea mentioned being made of the trip was ever made or, if so, whether or not it survives to the present day, but as with other such films

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124 T.E. Milliman to Mrs. Bailey, June 28, 1917, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
125 Erie Railroad Company to Mrs. Bailey, June 28, 1917, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
126 Including the undated Country Gentleman magazine page Gillian pasted into the scrapbook.
made at that time (notably those made by the Woman’s Land Army), it may have gained wide
distribution. By working with Underwood and Underwood, the OCFPB, like the Long Island
Food Reserve Battalion, sought to use their influence as women in New York society to bring
food conservation information to a national audience.

Figure 10 – The women of the Orange County Food Preservation Battalion’s “Conservation Special” at Central Valley, New
York. Note that most of the women in the crowd appear to be middle class or higher and the few children in attendance.  

The train finally began its journey on Monday, July 2nd, 1917 in Tuxedo, NY. Tuxedo,
Tuxedo Park, and the surrounding area were at that time a wealthy enclave and home to many of
the Battalion’s members. For the next five days the OCFPB, Mrs. Andrea, and her assistants
endured a grueling pace, visiting between seven and nine towns per day, with just an hour,
sometimes two, at each stop and as little as fifteen minutes between stops. In addition to the

127 “Food Conservation Trip a Success” Erie Railroad Magazine 8, no. 6 (August 1917), 338.
ladies on board the train, the “town captains” of each town would drum up local support and arrive to act as support staff to the women on the train while it was in their town.  

Figure 11 – Undated image from an unidentified source, pasted into the scrapbook. Presumably the ladies of the Orange County Food Preservation Battalion giving demonstrations for the “Conservation Special.” The caption reads, “Women of New York have undertaken to instruct the children of foreign parents in patriotism. It is not altogether a useless or fancied service either, as the tendency to colonize and maintain old world traditions is hard to overcome.” Orange County, particularly in the “black dirt,” “onion belt” region near Pine Island, had large populations of Bohemian and Slavic immigrants.  

The women of the OCFPB seemed determined to make their instruction train as accessible as possible. Unlike their Long Island counterpart Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt, Jr., who provided child care out of doors and on the fly, Gillian Bailey herself, assisted by Mrs. Henry Bacon, organized a nursery in the Pullman car “[t]o provide for the babies of farmers’ wives while the mothers go through the train [. . .].” The train, in addition to providing childcare for mothers, also provided foreign language interpretation, including Polish, Italian, and other

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129 Undated, unidentified image cut from a magazine, c. 1917, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
130 “‘Food Special’ On Second Trip,” *Evening Sun*, July 3, 1917.
languages in Goshen, if not at every stop. Finally, so dedicated were the ladies to spreading the gospel of food conservation that when the train stopped at Craigville, NY to take on water, “[a] lone farming woman presented herself […] and the whole battalion left the Pullman to go to the demonstration school in the baggage car and give an exclusively individual show for the audience of one.” Again the ladies of the OCFPB worked hard to expand their influence in communities they might not ordinarily come in contact with.

In addition, these society ladies seemed to listen to the people they were trying to educate. As the train continued, the emphasis on canning seemed to give way to the dehydration plants and homemade drying racks that communities, businesses and individuals could use to preserve foods indefinitely and quite cheaply. From the *Middletown Times-Press*, July 5, 1917:

The route lay through the ‘onion belt’ of Orange county. At Pine Island and Florida, the reception the instruction train got was particularly inspiring. For the first time since Monday large numbers of men were in the crowds which eagerly asked the instructors how vegetables may be dried and therefore preserved for future use. Several farmers asked how to manufacture flour from potatoes. Mrs. Bailey explained the operation of a family flour mill, on the style of an ordinary coffee mill, purchasable from $3 to $5. The reports as to crops were excellent along the entire route, farmers declaring particularly that there has never been a larger onion crop.

Clearly the idea of dehydration was attractive to farmers and businessmen facing a bumper onion crop and potentially no way to preserve them before they spoiled. Onions, particularly those varieties not specifically bred for long storage, are susceptible to mold and rot if held for too long. The OCFPB must have been overjoyed at the sincere interest by men and farmers in this particular area of food preservation.

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131 Undated newspaper article from Goshen, NY “Demonstration Train – To Instruct People In Drying Fruits and Vegetables,” Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
133 “Erie Food Special Draws Large Crowd In This City,” *Middletown Times-Press*, July 5, 1917.
The Orange County “Conservation Special,” with its attention to small towns and the needs of mothers and non-native speakers, proved that society women could be sensitive in their approach to community education. It is unclear whether or not Orange County’s efforts had as much regional and national impact as Long Island’s, but they certainly made an impact locally. As Gillian wrote in an article for the *Erie Railroad Magazine*.

That we should meet with any welcome from the people we were so anxious to help was a great question especially so when we were organizing and met one or two people who thought the train was bound to be a failure because the women would consider it an interference in the field in which they had held sway for so many years; but when the first steps were taken it was astonishing and most gratifying to feel the unanimous support and encouragement which rose like an army around us.¹³⁴

**Figure 12 – “Catch the Surplus Now”** – This little cartoon shows the abundant maiden of the Summer of 1917, her skirts overflowing with produce, being dutifully followed by the American Housewife, her giant preserving pot in hand.¹³⁵

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¹³⁵ National Emergency Food Garden Commission, “Raking the Gardener and Canning the Canner: How the Photographer, Humorist, and Cartoonist Treat the Men and Women Who Have Been Raking the Garden and
With the success of the instruction train came the desire to have a more permanent place to instruct those interested in learning. The OCFPB began work on establishing a canning kitchen almost immediately after the instruction train. Letters to Mrs. Bailey from Mrs. Andrea indicate the OCFPB was having a difficult time locating a suitable person to operate their proposed canning kitchen. In a letter to Mrs. Bailey dated July 16, 1917, Mrs. Andrea wrote, “It is almost impossible to find anyone who can go out of the city, and especially as New York has one or two Canning Kitchens now.” The referenced canning kitchens in New York City were likely those of the Mayor’s Committee of Women on National Defense. Working with Mrs. M. C. Migel, who was in charge of finding a qualified home economist to run the kitchen, Mrs. Andrea suggested that any woman trained in home economy could be trained to can and that she (Mrs. Andrea) would train such a person herself. The demand for home economists trained in food conservation methods, especially canning, made it difficult to find qualified people. Andrea’s suggestion that a trained economist could be taught the particulars of canning indicates a certain level of desperation. Most home economists were likely already attached to schools, colleges, or farm bureaus and may have been reluctant to leave their posts.

In typewritten minutes from a July 30th, 1917 meeting in the home of Mrs. Henry Bacon, the OCFPB agreed to hire “Miss Edith Allen” for the month of August at a rate of $175.00 per month. Trained at the University of Texas, in 1915 Edith Allen was working for the Extension Division of Oklahoma A. & M. College, writing lesson pamphlets on cottonseed oil and Canning the Food Products.” Washington, DC. 1917. Form 6. Page 2, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.


Orange County Food Preservation Battalion meeting minutes, undated, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook, 1917-1919, Archives, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
overseeing ‘better babies’ contests. The OCFPB had gone far afield indeed to find its qualified home economist.

After the difficulties in finding a suitable home economist to run it, on July 30th, 1917 the OCFPB officially agreed to open a Canning Kitchen in Chester, NY. That same day the New York Times published an article outlining Woodrow Wilson’s appeal to the women of the nation to can the perishable harvest to save every bit for consumption.

On August 3rd, 1917, Mrs. Bailey received a letter from Roscoe Smith, president of the Orange and Rockland Electric Company, rather reluctantly agreeing to provide free electricity to the canning kitchen for two months. Mr. Smith (somewhat notorious in Orange County history for his stinginess – he would later go on to found Museum Village in Monroe, NY) ends the letter by asking them to be frugal and only use the electricity during the daylight hours, when it was presumably cheaper to produce.

139 “Family Circle Section,” The Interstate Farmer (Muskogee, OK) 22, no. 5 (Sunday, August 1, 1915).
140 Orange County Food Preservation Battalion meeting minutes, July 30th 1917, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
142 Roscoe Smith to Mrs. Bailey, August 3rd, 1917, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
Finally, on August 13th, 1917 the canning kitchen was opened in Chester. The building they inhabited was the former Yelverton Inn, and it still stands today. Miss Edith Allen was hired to manage the kitchen and help the women of Orange County answer the President’s appeal. On August 14th Miss Allen gave a lecture at the Fireman’s Hall in Monroe and another on August 15th at Gillette Hall in Harriman, presumably to drum up publicity and support for the kitchen. On August 18th, a letter from the Orange County Agricultural Agent to the county constituency mentions Miss Allen:

At Chester the Orange County Food Conservation Battalion has set up a canning kitchen and office. Miss Allen, formerly connected with the Federal Government, is in charge. Miss Allen realizes well that the canning of food products is well understood here and in this connection her duty is to stimulate an interest in canning, drying and saving, and to show the newest practices. If any of you have had trouble with canning vegetables visit the kitchen at Chester or arrange for a

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143 Original photograph, c. 1917, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
demonstration in your town. You may bring your own vegetables to Chester on any Wednesday and there can them under the personal direction of Miss Allen.\textsuperscript{144}

The connection made between Edith Allen the “federal government” lends legitimacy to a young woman who might not be taken seriously otherwise. In addition the mention of “trouble with canning vegetables” almost certainly refers to the dangers of canning low-acid vegetables in the days before widespread use of pressure canners. As a university-trained home economist, Miss Allen would have had up-to-date, scientific information on the safest methods of canning such vegetables.

The arrangement of the Canning Kitchen was quite progressive. As the agricultural agent mentions in his letter, local women could bring in their own produce and jars (and sugar, in the case of fruit preserves) and use the facilities to do their own canning, with the assistance and “direction” of Miss Allen.\textsuperscript{145} In addition, four “girls” were hired at fifty cents per day to act as assistants.\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{144} Orange County Agricultural Agent to unknown, August 18, 1917, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{146} Handwritten monthly cost list written in pencil directly on the scrapbook page, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
Figure 14 – Unidentified women wearing the Hooverized food conservation outfits recommended by so many newspapers and magazines are here preparing fruit for canning. The woman at right appears to be operating a hand-cranked slicer.\textsuperscript{147}

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Figure 15 – Here, in a shot pulled back from the first, unidentified women prepare vegetables and fruits for canning at the Chester Canning Kitchen.\textsuperscript{148}

\textsuperscript{147} Original photograph, c. 1917, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
Figure 16 – Unidentified women fill jars near enormous stock pots.\textsuperscript{149}

Figure 17 – Unidentified women cut corn from the cob near an enormous canning boiler.\textsuperscript{150}

\textsuperscript{148} Original photograph, c. 1917, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.

\textsuperscript{149} Original photograph, c. 1917, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
On August 17th, 1917, the Orange County Farm Bureau wrote to Mrs. Bailey inquiring as to whether or not Edith Allen would be retained over the winter. The Farm Bureau was looking to hire a “food reserve agent,” but wanted to avoid duplication of services in the county. Mrs. Bailey responded on the following day, asking whether Edith Allen could be retained by the Farm Bureau as the “food reserve agent.”

It is unclear when exactly Edith Allen’s tenure with the OCFPB ended, but she was replaced the following spring. In May of 1918 she published an article entitled “A Comparison of Drying and Canning” in the *American Journal of Home Economics* and in August and

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150 Original photograph, c. 1917, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.

151 Original photograph, c. 1917, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.

152 Mr. Thomas E. Milliman to Mrs. Bailey, August 17, 1917, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook, 1917-1919, Archives, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.

153 Mrs. Bailey to Mr. T.E. Milliman, dated August 18, 1917, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook, 1917-1919, Archives, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
September of that year published several articles, cowritten by Jenoise Brown Short in The Designer magazine. Leaving the OCFPB clearly did not hinder her future career.

Six months later, almost to the day, on February 19th, 1918, Mrs. Bailey received a letter from T. E. Milliman of the Orange County Farm Bureau offering a solution. According to Milliman, the state had offered to pay for a “competent woman” to “be at the service of the County” but under the creative control of the OCFPB. A woman by the name of Miss Snodgrass was recommended by Cornell University, and Milliman suggested that an interview might be arranged.154 To Gillian and the OCFPB, this solution must have seemed like a godsend. In 1917 they had struggled to raise funds to keep the canning kitchen and their own organization going, soliciting cash donations from local women and the likes of Mary W. Harriman alike, as well as securing $300 from the Orange County Home Defense Committee.155

Clearly retaining Miss Edith Allen for the winter had not panned out. Although we may never know what the OCFPB thought of Miss Snodgrass, they did end up coordinating with the state to hire a “conservation agent”: one Mrs. Lillian Meeker. Funnily enough, an undated article from the Monroe Gazette entitled, “Orange County Food Battalion” incorrectly called her “Mrs. Lillian Wacker:”

Mrs. Lillian Wacker is to direct the [Canning] Kitchen and the Food Conservation work of the county. Mrs. Wacker is a graduate of the Home Economics Department of Teachers’ College in New York. Last summer, she was one of the experts of the Mayors’ Food Committee. She is the present teacher of Domestic

154 Mr. T.E. Milliman to Mrs. Bailey, February 19, 1918, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook, 1917-1919, Archives, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
155 Orange County Home Defense Committee to Mrs. Bailey, August 7, 1917; Mary W. Harriman to Mrs. Bailey, August 29, 1917, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook, 1917-1919, Archives, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
Science of the Friends Seminary of New York and of one of the evening High Schools. She is also a Red Cross Dietician.\textsuperscript{156}

We know the name is wrong and not that it is a different person because Mrs. Lillian Meeker taught at the Friends Seminary of New York and organized the New York City Food Aid Committee.\textsuperscript{157} It seems ironic that, after struggling to find someone to run the canning kitchen in 1917 due to the establishment of canning kitchens in New York City that the Chester kitchen should now be staffed with someone who had possibly worked at those same New York City kitchens the previous summer.

The kitchen would remain at the center of OCFPB activities, despite the fact that it often took a back seat in the media to more sensational events like the instruction train. The Battalion intended at first to collect donations of produce for Battalion women and the home economists to can or otherwise preserve to send to their “boys” in the military. But as they soon found out, the professionalization of military supplying stymied their efforts. And unlike on Long Island, there were no nearby military training camps to purchase their produce for local consumption.

One interesting focus of the Orange County Food Preservation Battalion and later by the New York State Food Commission was the emphasis on dehydration as the future of food preservation and conservation. With speculation that food dehydration was how Germany was feeding its armies, interest in Orange County, NY ran high. “The value of the dehydration process, though it is only just becoming known in this country among people in general, is quite generally conceded. German [sic] before the war began had erected enormous dehydrating plants

\textsuperscript{156} “Orange County Food Battalion,” \textit{Monroe Gazette}, undated, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook, 1917-1919, Archives, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.

\textsuperscript{157} “War Work of a Quaker School,” \textit{Gas Logic} 23, no. 6 (June, 1918), 5.; \textit{Daily Standard}, August 1, 1917.
and had dried and stored a supply of staples sufficient to last its civilian population six months.”158

Gillian Bailey and A. Louise Andrea had had trouble securing a dehydrating plant for the “Conservation Special” back in July. G. A. Sykes of Gentlewoman magazine had been assisting in the effort to find a commercial dehydrator for the train. He wrote Gillian on June 25, 1917 to say that he had found one from “the Gordon people,” who were willing to loan it, but it had already been promised on loan to the New York School of Agriculture on Long Island, directed by Albert A. Johnson. Mr. Johnson refused to loan it to the OCFPB before it came to the school. Sykes wrote, “Mr. Johnson said that the Erie [Railroad] had never done anything for them and he emphatically and most discourteously refused to consider letting it go on the trip.”159 Although he was closely involved with the Long Island Food Reserve Battalion, clearly Mr. Johnson did not feel the same patriotic camaraderie and spirit of cooperation as Ralph Peters and Hal Fullteron did. Poetic justice was later served, however, as on September 1, 1922, the New York Times published a piece calling for Johnson to be fired for mismanagement of funds as related to the agricultural school.160

In early 1917 boycotts in New York City against onions and potatoes had a huge impact on the farmers of the “black dirt” region of Orange County. The following year, in early 1918,

during the winter and spring, conditions for shipping potatoes which farmers, who had been unable to dispose of their 1917 crop, had on hand, were very poor due to the unseasonably cold weather and the bad condition of the roads. This together with the fact that there was an unusually large quantity of potatoes

158 “Preached Gospel of Dehydration to 7,000 Persons,” Herald – New York City, July 8, 1917.
159 G. A. Sykes to Mrs. Bailey, June 25, 1917, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
carried over, made it very evident that there would be a surplus of potatoes dumped on the market in the spring, which would drive the price down to the point where farmers would be discouraged from making a normal planting in 1918.¹⁶¹

This surplus of potatoes led to an increased emphasis on getting households to use potatoes as a cheap substitute for bread and other starches [see: Figure 22]. New food conservation agent Lillian Meeker also emphasized potato recipes, including potato biscuits and potato doughnuts.¹⁶²

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¹⁶² “Orange County Food Battalion,” Monroe Gazette, undated, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
¹⁶³ “Eat More Potatoes,” undated (but clearly 1918), newspaper unknown, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
One of the most popular topics of the OCFPB’s 1917 “Conservation Special” was the premise of grinding your own potato flour in the home and on the farm.\textsuperscript{164} Community dehydration plants and homemade kitchen driers were also enthusiastically received, especially in the Pine Island, “black dirt” area where onion and potato farmers were hardest hit by boycotts and transportation issues.\textsuperscript{165} As \textit{The Evening Telegram – New York} reported on July 5, 1917, the route lay through the ‘onion belt’ of Orange county, from Goshen to Middletown. At Pine Island and Florida, where the population is predominantly Slavonic, the reception the instruction train got was particularly inspiring. For the first time since Monday [July 2] large numbers of men were in the crowds which eagerly asked the instructors how vegetables may be dried and thereby preserved for future use. Several farmers asked how to manufacture flour from potatoes. Mrs. Theodore Bailey [. . .] explained the operation of a family flour mill [. . .].\textsuperscript{166}

In her \textit{Erie Railroad Magazine} article reporting on the “Conservation Special,” Gillian Bailey wrote, “That we brought encouragement and help to the large market growers is evident by the fact that we are expecting at least three commercial dryers to be run, each one capable of drying two tons at a time, and when these three huge machines are being run to their full capacity I shall feel that Orange county will be doing her bit.”\textsuperscript{167}

And indeed, there was a great deal of interest in installing community dehydrators all over Orange County:

At Middletown, Mayor Thompson became so interested in the possibility of a local plant of this sort that he will take up the subject with the town’s Chamber of Commerce. Near by the Department of Correction of New York city has a seventy-eight acre farm, and officials from this farm came to ask Mrs. Andrea

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\textsuperscript{165} \textit{Ibid}.
how they could save the corn, beans, tomatoes, and other things raised on the farm until markets for them could be found.\footnote{\textit{\textquoteleft\textquoteleft Preached Gospel of Dehydration to 7,000 Persons,	extquoteright\textquoteright}, \textit{Herald – New York City}, July 8, 1917.}

Individuals were also interested. The OCFPB’s Mrs. M. C. Migel said “that a community dryer is to be installed on her estate at Monroe, N.Y., as an incentive to others. Mrs. H.D. Pulsifer, who owns the 700 acre Houghton farm, at Mountainville, N.Y., is another person who showed interest in the ‘community dryer.’”\footnote{\textit{ibid.}} Port Jervis, too, showed a great deal of enthusiasm in the potential of a community dehydrating plant. In a letter to Mrs. Bailey about her impending magazine article, a representative from the Erie Railroad wrote congratulating her about the press coverage of the train, including this tidbit, “Port Jervis, you will note by reading the Union report, is deeply interested and its business men have taken up the question of a community dryer.”\footnote{Erie Railroad Company to Mrs. Bailey, July 9, 1917, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.}

Unfortunately for Gillian’s optimism, community dehydration plants did not take off in Orange County as planned. In an article entitled, “Chamber of Commerce Discussed Drying Plant – City and Community Not Large Enough To Support the Proposition,” the \textit{Port Jervis Union} recounted the decision:

At a special meeting of the Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce held on Tuesday evening in the Chamber of Commerce office, No. 30 Jersey avenue, the matter of the purchase and construction of a vegetable drying plant for use by the city and surrounding community at a minimum expense of $1,650 was brought up and thoroughly discussed. […] [A]fter a long discussion, it was decided that Port Jervis and the adjacent farming territory was not large enough to
support such a plant whose installation would warrant the expenditure of a considerable sum of money.\textsuperscript{171}

Indeed, although home made dryers seemed popular and commercially made ones could be had for as “little” as five dollars, the commercial dehydration plants proved out of reach for most communities. The narrow profits to be made on dehydrated vegetables just could not warrant the up-front expense. And as the war wore on and agricultural production improved, the demand for dehydrated foodstuffs seemed to decline. By 1919, when the war was long over and the “Victory Special” was touring the state, no mention of dehydration was made. Perhaps the length of time to dehydrate and the difficulty in reviving dehydrated vegetables, in particular, made the process less palatable to farm wives and individuals. Canning took less time, and the results were much easier to use – just heat and serve for most vegetables, and canned fruits could be eaten as-is.

Despite the ultimate failure of their dehydration efforts, the Orange County Food Preservation Battalion soldiered on. Sometime in the spring of 1918, they issued a report, which was partially reprinted in the \textit{Monroe Gazette} in March.\textsuperscript{172} In it, the Battalion recounted how they disposed of all of the canned produce people had donated, selling some to the Food for France Fund, some to Acker, Merrel & Condit Co., and the rest through “other sources.” The report went on to list the reasons why they were “unable to dispose of the canned product to an Army Camp or any Soldiers who were serving our Country.”\textsuperscript{173} The reasons listed included lack of can uniformity, glass jars could not be shipped abroad, and the fact that “It was impossible to

\textsuperscript{171} “Chamber of Commerce Discussed Drying Plant – City and Community Not Large Enough To Support the Proposition,” \textit{Port Jervis Union}, undated, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.

\textsuperscript{172} \textit{Monroe Gazette}, “Will You Help Your Country Again? Orange County Food Battalion Asks for the Support of Every Land Owner in the Country” March 30, 1918.

\textsuperscript{173} “Report of the Orange County Food Preservation Battalion,” 1918, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
purchase the proper tins on such short notice when we were organizing work for the summer.””

The report, presumably written by Mrs. Bailey, went on to emphasize, “consequently the soldiers abroad could not have been shipped to even if we had donated the entire output [underline original].”

The report stated:

Fully realizing the disappointment which this act would cause many people who had generously contributed to the Kitchen last summer, with the idea that their gift was for the soldiers, and feeling responsible for them, our Chairman called on the Food Administration in Washington to find out if there was not some way in which we could keep our agreement with these contributors. […] The following letter was a result of the interview, and we insert it here in the hope that all who read may realize that the Canning Kitchens throughout our Country are not the fads of hysterical men and women but an actual need which have and will continue to aid in the fight against the cruel privations of war.

“[N]ot the fads of hysterical men and women” suggests that the OCFPB had indeed encountered some resistance to their efforts, along the lines of accusations of “patriotic hysteria” other efforts were also receiving. The letter, from a representative of the United States Food Administration, congratulated the OCFPB on their conservation work and emphasized the need to continue their efforts in 1918, further buoying Bailey’s argument that food conservation was not only necessary, it was an imperative supported by the federal government.

In June of 1918 the Canning Kitchen reopened, this time under the supervision of Mrs. Lillian Meeker. *Orange County Farm Bureau News* celebrated this with an article entitled, “Food Regent Appointed:”

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174 “Report of the Orange County Food Preservation Battalion,” 1918, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook 1917-1919, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
175 Ibid.
176 Ibid.
Mrs. Lillian Meeker, an experienced demonstrator in food conservation, has been appointed to the position of Food Conservation Agent for Orange County with headquarters at Chester. Mrs. Meeker works under the Executive Committee of the Orange County Food Battalion. Her salary is paid by the Federal Government working through the Food Conservation office at Ithaca [presumably Cornell University]. Mrs. Meeker has had many years of experience in teaching and demonstrating food subjects. For some years she taught in the public schools of Brooklyn and New York and for the past year or so has been food demonstration agent in a large private school at Brooklyn. She holds degrees from a number of Colleges and other institutions of learning.  

Once again a professionally trained home economist would take up the work of demonstrating, assisting housewives with food preservation, and lecturing around the county. Mrs. Meeker seemed to have left her post at the Friends’ Seminary in New York City as a domestic science instructor quite abruptly, presumably as soon as school was out. Her first month at the canning kitchen (June) coincided with a magazine article which pegged her as the school lunchroom manager. The above article lists, almost with hyperbole, her professional qualifications, likely to impress upon the general public her absolute authority on all things related to food conservation. One major difference from the previous year was that although Meeker was reporting to the ladies of the OCFPB, she was in fact paid by the Federal government, likely through the New York Food Commission. The shift from volunteer-run private organizations to state- and federal-controlled professionals had begun.

**The State Takes Over**

Although voluntary organizations like the Long Island Food Reserve Battalion and the Orange County Food Preservation Battalion had started the race to win the war though food, they

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177 “Food Regent Appointed,” *Orange County Farm Bureau News*, undated, but likely June, 1918, Orange County Food Preservation Battalion Scrapbook, Archive, Museum Village, Monroe, NY.
178 “War Work of a Quaker School,” *Gas Logic* 23, no. 6 (June, 1918): 5.
began to pass the baton to state agencies like the New York State Food Commission and Cornell University in late 1917.

Figure 20 – Two images from *Railroad Men* magazine show interior views of the “Thrift Special.”

Just a few weeks after the OCFPB’s successful “Conservation Train,” Cornell University operated a “Thrift Special” in central New York in conjunction with the New York Food Supply Commission. Starting in Pulaski and ending at Hudson, the train taught canning and other food preservation methods for three weeks in July and August of 1917. The two train cars stayed in each town for a full day, with two home economists giving lectures, answering questions, and giving a two hour canning demonstration each afternoon. “The visitors to the car averaged 150 or 200 a day, in spite of the terrific heat which lasted through a good part of the run.” Like its Long Island and Orange County counterparts, Cornell’s “Thrift Special” used the power of railroads to reach people in small towns and rural areas across the state. Unlike in Long Island and Orange County, the train spent an entire day in each town. This was probably because the

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180 Ibid.
pace of earlier instruction trains was too great a stress on the home economists to continue for longer than a week, as the “Thrift Special” did. It also gave residents more time to interact with the home economists and the home economists more time to impart their educational goals.

At the close of 1917, although much had been accomplished on the food conservation front, there was still work to be done. With the arrival of the year 1918 came a renewed sense of urgency. Hoover had just released his first wheatless and meatless days schedule in October of 1917, but by 1918 it was clear that more drastic measures were necessary. In February of 1918 Hoover introduced the “50/50” rule that other whole grain flours, such as cornmeal, be purchased in equal weights, pound for pound, to wheat flour. He also introduced his strictest meal schedule yet: “of 21 weekly meals, 7 should be wheatless, 7 meatless, 4 without meat and wheat, and 3 unrestricted.”

Throughout the spring of 1918, the Food Administration adjusted recommendations regarding meat and wheat to reflect the commercial supply. It also promoted the use of potatoes to consume 1917’s bumper crop.

In addition to tightened rationing, canning and other food conservation efforts continued. The OCFPB’s Canning Kitchen at Chester, NY continued into 1918 and The New York State Food Commission worked to open community canning kitchens throughout the state, particularly in New York City: “at the close of this fiscal year [1918?] plans are completed for the operation of forty canning centers by the Conservation Bureau in New York City, in public school buildings during the summer months.”

Staffed by professional home economists, these “thrift kitchens” utilized many of the same principles as the Orange County Food Preservation

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181 Eighmey, *Food Will Win the War*, 219.
182 Eighmey, *Food Will Win the War*, 219-220.
Battalion. Some, such as one kitchen in Buffalo, NY, included commercial dehydration plants.184

In a report on extension work in 1918, Cornell University recounted its work with community canning kitchens, stating that, “in every community where a kitchen has been established, there has been a marked increase in the development of community and social comradeship.”185 The report also mentioned “city work,” in New York City and elsewhere on such topics as sanitation, “the care and feeding of children,” and “the adjustment of household budgets to meet post-war conditions.” It closed the home economics section with this tellingly Progressive tidbit, “Significant work in Americanization has been done by helping foreign women with their home problems.”186

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185 Montgomery Robinson, “Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics in New York During 1918,” Cornell Reading Course for the Farm Home (July, 1919), 34.
186 Robinson, “Extension Work,” 34.
In 1918, Cornell University, the New York State Food Commission, and New York Central Railroad converged to put together their own “Victory Special” instruction train. This train essentially replaced those put together by the LIFRB, OCFPB, and other railroads, as well as the “Thrift Special” of 1917. The professionalization of food conservation had also led to consolidation. None of the private, voluntary organizations put on an instruction train in 1918.

According to the *Report of the New York Food Commission*, the “Victory Special,”

has covered both sides of the Hudson Valley and the New York Central lines; Long Island on the Long Island lines; Albany to Binghamton over the D. & H. Railroad, and will operate from Binghamton to Buffalo over the lines of the D. L. & W. Railroad; and from Buffalo back to Albany over the New York Central.  

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It covered nearly the entire state with this extensive itinerary. Although the OCFPB did not operate another train in 1918, the Erie Railroad is left off of the “Victory Special” list, perhaps because the Orange County ladies had done such a thorough job of educating the public there.

By publication of the report in 1919, the “Victory Special” had “visited over 100 towns and reached directly more than 10,000 housewives. As many as 1,850 persons have visited the train for instruction in one week.” Miss Lucille Brewer, a Cornell home economics professor who helped write many of the school’s “Reading Courses for the Farm Home,” was one of the most qualified home economists to operate such instruction trains. Following the war, Miss Brewer would emphasize the value of milk as a food, which was reflected in the demonstrations she gave on the “Victory Special” during the 1919 season.

In a Cornell Reading Course for the Farm Home published in April of 1919, leading home economists Flora Rose and Martha Van Rensselaer outlined “A Program for Thrift in New York State.” In it they reminded their readers that there was a global shortage of goods and materials, prices were rising, and Americans had taken on a national debt. Only through personal and community thrift, including investment in Liberty Bonds, could this debt be discharged. This article seems to capture the catalyst for the state and Cornell University to continue the Victory Special.

Even though the war was over, the Victory Special rolled on, visiting towns all over New York state well into the fall of 1919. Focus shifted from working towards victory to celebrating it, but the emphasis on home economics, thrift, food saving, and alternative foods with high food value, such as milk, continued. For instance, on July 16, 1919, the Elmira Star-Gazette published

a short article about the imminent arrival of the “Victory Special” in nearby Big Flats, NY. Gone were the admonishments to save wheat and meat; “can or collapse, dry or die.” In their place were exhortations to “learn how to be thrifty in health, wealth and wisdom.” The train spent an entire day in each town or city, with afternoon demonstrations by home economist Lucille Brewer, a much more manageable pace than earlier trains with different stops every hour. Topics included “how to make a home made fireless cooker, and an iceless refrigerator; they [visitors] will also be shown the possibilities of making new clothes out of old, as well as plans for making convenient kitchens, airy bedrooms, and attractive living rooms.” Food preservation, particularly canning, was still at the forefront, but the emphasis on nutritious food continued: “An exhibit of foods, showing their comparative values to the body convinces the housewife that food must be bought in terms of nutritive value as well as in pounds and quarts, if her dollars are to be wisely spent.” A September 4th, 1919 article in the *Jamestown Evening Journal* mentions Lucille Brewer demonstrating the use of a steam pressure cooker.

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191 *Ibid.* A fireless cooker, colloquially called a “hay box,” was a special type of insulated box into which a pot of boiling food would be placed, then covered and left to cook for the whole day. Fireless cookers were touted as both fuel- and labor-saving devices. Iceless refrigerators used evaporation to cool foods in households without access to ice.
The popularity of instruction trains continued across the country, but the fact that the “Victory Special” continued throughout 1919 indicated that people in rural areas still wanted the information presented by home economists like Lucille Brewer – information which institutions like Cornell University were only too happy to provide. The Progressive values of thrift, food conservation, nutrition science, technological advancement in the home, and sanitary home design and interior décor all found both willing propagandists and apparently willing listeners in the instruction train movement.

After the War

After the Armistice was declared in November of 1918, the Long Island Food Reserve Battalion and the Orange County Food Preservation Battalion virtually disappeared. The OCFPB

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194 “Lucille Brewer giving demonstration, or preparing for one, in one of the cars, with no audience visible. Date is 1919. Troy photo.” Rare & Manuscripts Collection, Cornell University Library. http://he-photos.library.cornell.edu/image.php?record=271
scrapbook’s last dated entry is for July of 1918 and it ends with a series of self-produced posters folded and pasted into the back. The ladies of the OCFPB appear to have gone back to their normal lives. Gillian Bailey and her husband continued to live at Stoneywold Farm in Harriman. Major Theodore Bailey, fresh from the war, published a book entitled *Military Courtesy* in 1919. Gillian would go on to become a passionate collector of the trappings of her youth – founding the “early American Museum at Harriman” and donating artifacts to everyone including the Farmer’s Museum in Cooperstown, NY, Phillipse Manor in Tarrytown, NY, Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts, and Colonial Williamsburg.¹⁹⁵ In 1956 she wrote *The Recollections of Gillian Webster Barr Bailey for Her Descendants*, a self-published, typewritten tome about her childhood in New York City and summers at Stoneywolde Farm.

Elisa Migel and her husband Moses Charles Migel would go on to do extensive work for the blind. While in the Signal Corps, M. C. Migel was asked to help manage a ward of soldiers who had been blinded in the war. This instilled in him a lifelong interest in the plight of the blind and he went on to found the American Association for the Blind, helping to standardize Braille and becoming friends with Helen Keller.¹⁹⁶

The end of the war meant the end of mandatory sugar and fuel rationing and an end to Hoover’s voluntary recommendations. The nation had pulled together for less than two years, in many instances before the American war machine could even operate at full capacity.

Food aid to the Allies continued after the Armistice as war-ravaged France and Belgium struggled to feed the nation on another year or poor harvests. With much controversy, Herbert

¹⁹⁵ “Mrs Bailey, Rare Book Collector, Dies,” *Otsego Farmer (Cooperstown, NY)*, October 26, 1961.
¹⁹⁶ Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 42-49; 82-83.
Hoover did ask Americans to continue the voluntary rationing to free up food for aid to Europe, including the defeated Germany. But for most Americans, that was a bridge too far. It was one thing to abstain on behalf of “our boys” and the starving women and children of Belgium and France. It was quite another to give up favorite foods for the defeated enemy. Hoover’s primary argument was that “famine breeds anarchy,” and, conveniently, that America had a surplus to dispose of.\textsuperscript{197}

Hoover himself would continue food aid, orchestrating relief for post-war Europe and again for the Russian Famine of 1921-22, despite opposition in the U.S. arguing that he was literally feeding Bolshevism. He served as Secretary of Commerce under Presidents William G. Harding and Calvin Coolidge. He would ride the hero worship popularity of his role in the First World War and as a relief administrator all the way to the White House, only to find that his pro-business, small-government ideas would serve him ill when the United States was hammered with the stock market crash of 1929, just months after he took office. He lost reelection to Franklin D. Roosevelt and lived a relatively quite post-presidency life, only to take up relief work again when the Second World War broke.

The canning kitchens presumably ended with the war. The Orange County Food Preservation Battalion ran on private donations and whatever appropriations they could beg from county and state governments. Many others were funded by temporary war organizations like Home Defense committees. With the resumption of commercial canning, it is unlikely that the canning kitchens established all over the state continued much beyond 1919. The skills taught, however, remained, as women in rural areas in particular continued to can produce as they

\textsuperscript{197} Veit, \textit{Modern Food}, 74.
always had, but adapted to new methods. It is unclear whether the food conservation efforts and education of the First World War had any lasting direct impact, but it is likely that the new skills women honed during that time continued to serve them as the nation struggled with the Great Depression and then mandatory rationing during World War II. Community canning kitchens were also revived during World War II by both private organizations (like the OCFPB) and by municipalities and states, mostly to afford women the opportunity to access equipment like pressure canners, which were in short commercial supply.198

Interestingly, the home dehydration methods so touted during the Great War were virtually forgotten by World War II, perhaps because by the 1940s most American households ran on electric or gas ranges, rather than coal or wood-fired ranges of the Great War, which stayed hot all day, making it easy to build homemade drying racks that used the radiant heat of the stove to do the work. With reliable temperature controls on modern ovens, fireless cookers also fell by the wayside, only to be reinvented in the 1960s as the electric slow cooker. Commercial dehydration, particularly with milk and eggs, was emphasized during World War II, but gone were the days of dehydrated carrots and spinach at West Point.

Instruction trains, however, did continue. Not only the “Victory Special” of 1919, but other instruction trains around the country continued the food conservation and home economics education the war had helped popularize.199 It is not clear how often instruction trains continued after 1920, but state-funded county extension offices, farm bureaus, and agricultural and home

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economics agents persisted their efforts to educate those in rural areas, with varying degrees of welcome and success, on a variety of topics.

Conclusion

The impact that society women ultimately had on food conservation efforts in terms of significant numbers is questionable. Food historians Amy Bentley and Harvey Levenstein agree that American consumption of meat actually went up during World War I, thanks to the rising fortunes of the poor. But while the impact in terms of real food actually saved may have been negligible, the spread of scientific principles and new methods of canning and preserving food, as well as the spread of new nutrition information such as the calorie seem to have made a noticeable impact on the lives of rural, town, and city women of all backgrounds. In July of 1921 Cornell University published a Bulletin for Homemakers entitled “Permanent Gains of the Food Conservation Movement.” In it, author Henry C. Sherman argued that food conservation efforts spread scientific information about the importance of fruits and vegetables, whole grains like corn, and milk in Americans’ everyday diets. Without the drive to send “wheat, meat, fat and sugar” to the Allies, Americans might never have realized the health benefits of vitamin-rich fruits and vegetables, instead continuing to focus on calorie-rich foods. Whether or not this realization would have come without the intervention of the war is questionable, but Sherman made a valid point that World War I oversaw a massive expansion of nutrition information among the general populace.

By volunteering their wealth and free time toward the war effort, society women like Gillian Bailey did make a difference, particularly when their efforts were accompanied by flexibility, sensitivity, and attention to the needs of ordinary people. They and women like them
helped spread the gospel of home economics, for good or ill, across the country. Although the patriotic spirit of food conservation did not affect everyone equally, and although it had some negative connotations for feminism, the spirit of camaraderie among white women in New York seemed infectious as ethnic and economic lines were crossed in the fight to “preserve or perish.”
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