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DISCOVERIES IN THE MEANING OF DOMESTICITY:
MIDDLE-CLASS WOMEN AND CULTURAL CHANGE IN THE
UNITED STATES, 1870-1900

by

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1982

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INTRODUCTION

When Eva Moll wanted to bring her absent friend Hattie Parkerson to mind in 1898, she conjured up an image of Hattie at home, where "everything impressed itself so deeply upon my memory that if you have made any changes in furnishings or the arrangement of the furniture, I believe I could put everything where it was when I was there." Belle Litchfield, in 1899, sent Hattie a photograph of the exterior of her new home in Southbridge, Massachusetts, and then took careful pains to describe the interior: "The room where the corner Bay Window is, is our library. . . . [she then put herself into the picture] where I now sit writing. The chamber above it is my chamber, and the bay window over that is my studio." Her description would not have satisfied an architect, but that was not Belle's intent. She hoped to recreate for her friend a sense of a home—not of a building—where people lived and moved within the various rooms, where the dramas and comedies of the domestic world played on their own timeless stage. Both Eva and Belle manifested an attitude that seems to have been common among late-Victorian American women of the middle class: an over-riding concern with the interior arrangement of domestic space and the furnishings and articles of the home.¹

Most middle-class American women of the late 19th century lived out their lives within the domestic realm, performing tasks that had come to be identified as intrinsically female: caring for small children, tending the ill or aged, and managing the daily operations of the household. These things have been so closely identified with Victorian American womanhood that it has

been possible to overlook the existence of home as an autonomous cultural creation, despite the fact that it has its own descriptive name. Historians frequently have noted the existence of the set of beliefs and activities called "domesticity" without analyzing it as a distinct cultural manifestation operating within a physical space as well as an emotional arena. Yet for the average late-Victorian woman who accepted the conventional wisdom of her time—who was neither a reformer nor a reactionary—the home was a constant physical presence, the arena wherein the behavior of day-to-day life helped to define the meaning of domesticity.² This study is an attempt to understand something of what that domesticity meant for the majority of late 19th century middle-class women who remained within the home. The constructs of "domesticity" and "home" had such a variety of ideals and realities for the late Victorians that it would be impossible to deal with all of them in the context of one short thesis. In this regard, the question which had most intrigued me was the relationship of the individual woman to cultural definitions of domesticity, and the effect of a physically and economically mobile society on a stabilizing institution such as the home.

The fact that the world changes, becomes what it was not before, is a commonplace notion and one which is manifestly true. However, the late Victorian mentality saw this concept as an underlying factor in human motivation. The late Victorians manifested their awareness of American mobility in reactions ranging from fear and defensiveness to pride. The cult of the individual, and the Horatio Alger rags-to-riches stories, institutionalized the possibility of change as a part of the American experience. Late Victorian definitions of what it meant to be an American hinged on the relationship between a profound awareness of cultural and physical change and the perceived need to stabilize or standardize American social institutions. Although mobility always had been a contributing factor to the reality of

American political and social institutions, after the Civil War it became a part of the cultural awareness of Americans. The United States Census Bureau, in its documentation of the 1880 census, concentrated almost exclusively on the fact that Americans frequently changed their residence. The attention given by the Bureau to this one aspect of American life at the expense of others points to the notion that for almost the first time in American experience, the fact of mobility became a conscious part of national self-definition.³

Historians of the period 1870 to 1900 have discussed the set of reactions to change in light of several institutions such as the family, business, the church, and politics. Of all of these, however, the least-explored is the family and, especially, that construct of feminine experience within the family which we call "domesticity." Several insistent questions come to mind which bear on this gap in our knowledge about the late Victorian family. What happened when the family unit was faced with the overwhelming awareness of a changing culture? How was domesticity, an essentially conservative construct in the 19th century, reconciled with the virtues of a mobile society? Within the set of relationships and constructs that was "family," did change become standardized in order that the home could represent stability at the same time that it accepted mobility as a part of American existence? In particular, how did domesticity deal with the trans-Mississippi frontier, a new and potentially disruptive area? I have chosen to approach these questions by discussing three manifestations of domestic space: domestic architecture, interior arrangements, and public domestic space. In addition, I will discuss the behavior of individual women as they came to grips with social mobility. These areas should demonstrate the interpenetration of cultural ideals and individual realities, and suggest something of the complexities of both. In addition, and more to the point

of this study, they should illuminate the adaptation of the late 19th century American home to the emphasis on the value of change in American experience.

This exploration into domesticity begins with the contrast between various cultural definitions of home and its architectural reality in the "last American frontier," the trans-Mississippi West between 1870 and 1900. A time of massive social, cultural, and economic change, the thirty years after the Civil War presented women with special challenges. Their position in the family no longer seemed clear when more children began to attend public schools and more husbands spent their days in offices. The seasonal flux of biological time still governed the home, while the world of business and manufacturing increasingly oriented to the organization of time—clocks and schedules. In addition, altered public definitions of home tried to accommodate the domestic realm to the larger culture. For some commentators, especially the rising class of professional architects, the suburban cottage came to stand for continuity in the face of change. While bespeaking upward mobility through individual ownership, it reinforced the viability of the stable, single-family unit. Its preferred suburban location recapitulated the removal of domestic life from the materialistic life of the city, the office, and the factory. This emphasis on separation, however, bothered some reformers, who offered a variety of devices whereby domestic values could be preserved intact and yet still influence the world of materialism.

In the trans-Mississippi West, the single-family house was the preferred dwelling. At first, settlers' homes bore little outward resemblance to the standard middle-class home, the balloon-frame cottage. Despite their seeming differences, however, the sod houses and dug-outs of the frontier fulfilled the same spatial requirements as the suburban cottage. They did not, however, share the symbolic overtones of the wood-frame house. Although they were better adapted to prairie existence, "soddies" and dug-outs continued

in use as dwellings only as long as it was economically necessary. The wood-frame house, with its implications of "civilized" living, replaced sod construction on the prairie by about 1900. The public meaning of home, in other words, contained important symbolic nuances whose expression was well-defined and which cut across regional lines. This implied at least two essential aspects of woman's relationship to the home. First, the middle-class home was an important private expression of national values, which reinforced the need for some kind of stable domestic existence within a context of social change. Second, these values could be expressed and understood through the manipulation of physical clues. The importance of an architectural shell in exhibiting status reinforced the public role of home life; but it leaves unexplained why women like Eva and Belle expressed more awareness of the interior of their home than the exterior. In order to approach this question, we must turn to a set of ideal values delineated in the popular literature--magazines and books--of the last thirty years of the 19th century.

One must be careful in assuming that "ideals" and reality are parallel in any historical period, for the two usually diverge so much that one is tempted to claim they are unrelated. However, the presence of an ideal in a culture can alert us to a perceived problem, which the ideal is designed to answer. The key to the importance of domestic interiors lay in the prescriptive literature on woman's domestic role after 1870. Late 19th century attitudes linked aesthetic and moral values together, seeing them in fact as identical. A major component of this notion was the belief that physical objects could instill values or teach morality by their mere presence. The domestic paragon of the morally useful and lovely object was the "what-not," a thing with no intrinsic meaning of its own, but which was valued for its associations, the memories it could call forth, and for its ability to communicate information about a family's history and hopes. The

what-not was a sort of metaphor for the condition of late 19th century married women in the home: no longer teachers in a world of schools, no longer producers in a world of factories, no longer managers in increasingly smaller families, middle-class women were essentially homemakers. Except for the social or political role chosen by female reformers, the middle-class wife seemed to have only one function remaining to her--that of creating a home that would be a "haven in a heartless world." This seemed to threaten the autonomy of the individual woman as well as the family.

The suddenly self-conscious field of interior decoration became a concern of the middle class at the end of the century. Between 1870 and 1900, this field largely was the province of women acting in their capacity as homemakers, and especially middle-class women newly interested in an area that previously had been the concern of the rich.⁴ Writers in the popular press told women it was woman's job to create an instructive home, one which would provide moral and aesthetic lessons to the family. Women were told they could do this by the manipulation of objects--the furnishings and fixtures--within the home. I have termed the set of beliefs that explained this role for women the "ideal of domestic decoration."⁵ Domestic decoration elevated and mystified the arrangement of home spaces and objects, asking women to identify their concepts of womanhood with the expressive power of the physical home. It provided an over-arching and "other-directed" meaning for women whose domestic world was changing rapidly and, perhaps, incoherently.⁶ The ideal seemed to provide an all-embracing answer to two essential questions facing the late Victorian homemaker: first, it suggested a rationale which supported women's place in the home; and, second, it completed the transition from being a producer for the family to a consumption-oriented economic participation. These were two crucial elements of change in the definition of domesticity.

The relation between marketing techniques, the increase in the availability of various types of goods, the standardization of machine-made articles, and woman's role as a consumer for the home is exceedingly complex.⁷ David P. Handlin has pointed out that the transformation from a production- to a consumption-oriented society in the 19th century created challenges for American women in the home. Faced with increasing industrialization, they had to determine what mix of industrial articles and home-crafts their family could afford, and then choose the objects of the home with that in mind. The resulting selection dictated what American homes would look like. This change also meant that women needed some kind of standard whereby they could choose effectively in the marketplace. Advertising fulfilled a part of this requirement, whether one views it as reflecting cultural values, as helping to shape them, or as a combination of both. Women themselves provided a set of criteria based on cost-effective purchases, which limited the amount of money spent on manufactured articles at the same time that it emphasized an aesthetic of usefulness. Handlin termed this phenomenon the "beauty of economy," and traced the transference of women's knowledge as producers of goods to their selection criteria for mass-produced articles. Handlin points out that the beauty of economy and the homemaker's frugality were positive virtues in the middle-class home of the early 19th century (just as they continue to be today in the homes of the lower middle class.)⁸ Domestic decoration, in the late 19th century, acknowledged that women were a part of the larger world once they began active involvement in the marketplace, and that beauty no longer needed to be strictly economical in the sense of home-made. However, it did not question the cultural prescription that woman's place was in the home. Instead, it tried to accommodate that position to the change in the national and individual economies, and to explain woman's role in an increasingly materialistic society which was

basically at odds with early 19th century domestic existence.

This awareness of the marketplace leads us to an area essential to understanding both the public and private meanings of domesticity, and to the home's accommodation to change. The marketing system of the late 19th century provided a fairly even distribution of similar goods around the country, reinforcing the national similarities between domestic interiors. Catalogue sales and retail techniques provided women anywhere in the country with a wide range of industrial products. Advertising and sales methods recognized the importance of the market's female constituency, at the same time that they reinforced home-centered values. In fact, the accommodation of the marketplace to feminine values points to the strength of the perceived need to encourage women's economic participation as consumers in ways that they would find acceptable. Large urban department stores presented their commercial goods in opulent, consciously-refined surroundings. They provided places within the building where women could engage in activities they had previously done at home, such as visiting, dining, or reading. Smaller towns, without large stores, still had public places where women could spend time outside the home yet within the ambiance of domesticity. Ice-cream parlors or soda fountains provided a public space equivalent to the home. This intrusion of feminine values into the marketplace provides the most striking example of the late 19th century's changing definition of domesticity.

Finally, we are left with the question of how individual women expressed their concept of feminine values through the arrangement of domestic interiors. The ideal of domestic decoration does not explain the reality of experience for the women to whom it was addressed. However, its insistence on the importance of material objects was supported by the physical appearance of middle-class Victorian homes. Hand-made and yet similar in appearance, many

decorative objects of late-Victorian homes represent untold hours of careful labor on the part of literally thousands of middle-class women. In addition to these home-crafted objects, there were the numerous products of an industrial society which filled Victorian homes—wallpaper, Morris chairs, reproductions of paintings or prints, highly-decorated stoves, fireplace screens, ceramics and statuary. Women evidenced concern over the arrangement of these objects in their homes, and seemed to derive personal meanings as well as broader cultural ones from their presence. This was especially noticeable in the care taken by women who lived in the makeshift environment of the frontier.

A few comments on the methodology and sources used in this study would be appropriate at this point. Historians frequently discuss the American woman's experience by contrasting an essentially urban eastern seacoast population with a rural or agricultural western one. Rather than use this geographical distinction between eastern and western, the contrast between rural and urban values and experience proved a more fruitful way of understanding changing concepts of domesticity.⁹ Sociologist Harry Braverman points out, justifiably I believe, that there was less difference in the lives of people who lived in rural areas around the country than between those in urban and those in rural areas. Despite their distance from the more populous East, the women of late 19th century Kansas or Nebraska, for example, lived much the same sort of life they would have lived in rural or small town areas of Ohio, New York, or Pennsylvania. Braverman notes the persistence of semirural and rural areas only a few miles from New York City as late as 1890.¹⁰ This point became obvious on studying the diaries of women who kept records before and after their move to Kansas. Many of the sources used dealt in one way or another with existence near the line of settlement which moved through Kansas after 1865. There are certain

problems attendant upon using a volatile area such as a frontier to seek out attitudes toward change. A frontier can be both a testing and a proving ground, and whether the emigrants viewed the trans-Mississippi frontier as a utopian "City on the Hill," in John Winthrop's words, or as a place to replicate their former existence is an undecided historical issue. In addition, the state of frontier historiography, especially about women, is such that our image of the trans-Mississippi West remains clouded by unanalyzed myth and regional self-justification.¹¹ Without trying to remedy these problems, I have confronted at least the late 19th century myth of frontier hardship in order to discover how, or if, Kansans transplanted the ideal of home directly or whether it was changed within the context of the Kansas frontier. The existence of a belief in the power of the home to transform individual character was an essential part of woman's ideal role, and hinged directly on her ability to create a satisfying domestic environment even in a frontier area.

Books and magazine articles written by and for urban, middle-class women provided the substance of the ideal of domestic decoration. For the actual experience of late Victorian women, I have used sixteen diaries and journals, several reminiscences, and over fifty letters written by women between 1870 and 1900. While such a small sampling is hardly conclusive, these primary sources seemed fairly representative. They included women on the frontier, farm women, and urban women. Some were born in Kansas, others came to Kansas from eastern states, and none were recent immigrants to the United States. They probably were all white women, but for some there are no details of their lives except a scattered letter or a diary which does not mention "race, color, or previous condition of servitude," or, in two cases, their first names. This study focuses on Kansas (and to a lesser extent, other areas of the trans-Mississippi West of the late 19th century)

largely because these were the sources available to me. On its own merits, however, Kansas can be taken as a representative area. It presents a microcosm of possible experience in urban and rural areas.

It is so difficult to separate the individual from his or her culture, and hence arrive at a starting point for their interaction, that any discussion of their relationship almost inevitably falls into a circular form. This study is not intended to arrive at a climactic beginning, a "big bang" for a new concept of domesticity. It is, rather, an attempt to integrate the behavior of late 19th century middle-class American women with the values of their society, and to explore some of the possibilities of what that companionship meant for both within a mobile society. In addition, I hope it suggests that an understanding of the position of women in Victorian society could be broadened immeasurably by explorations in both domestic material culture and the meaning of aesthetics in American life. Isabelle Litchfield's suggestion to Hattie Parkerson in 1899 could have been written for our benefit as well: "Our home is so very convenient and pleasant too—" she said, "but you must come and see us in it—" ¹²

CHAPTER I

THE AMERICAN DREAM HOUSE AND THE "LAST FRONTIER"

The home as haven, and its importance in defining economic and moral status, reflected a particularly vital late Victorian ideal. The rather rapid settlement of central and western Kansas between 1865 and 1900 presents a microcosm of the confrontation between the values of the stable family home and the tempting freedom of a new and changing world; and it provides a perspective from which to study the reality of the Victorian model home.¹

Housing reformers, popular literature, and the magazines of the rising class of professional architects of the late 19th century tried to give a new significance to the single-family American home. They lauded American houses as bastions of traditional values and as places of escape from the hectic life of the city.² For many late 19th century social commentators, the home itself, and the living spaces within it, symbolized American stability, the potential upward mobility of the working class, and a civilized continuity of national values. [Fig. 1] Home ownership, in fact, increasingly came to define a family's middle-class status, whether the home was designed by architects or built from one of numerous pattern-book models. Dr. William F. Channing counseled his readers that "One of the chief conditions of . . . independent [existence] is that the home shall be owned by the individual or family, not rented."³

The attention to the importance of the physical home reflected a concern with the moral condition of the American family. "Our homes are what we make them—good, bad or indifferent—and their precepts and practices are

necessarily more or less sharply defined, intensified and demonstrated in our individual lives," wrote the editor of Good Housekeeping in 1885. "They are the fortresses from which the battles of life are really fought. . . ."4 This image of the American house provides a fruitful point from which to view late Victorian attitudes toward the ideal home. In describing the cultural institution of the family, the editor used a physical metaphor to stand for that group or aggregate of persons which constituted, for the late Victorians, the foundation of the state and the transmittal or moral and religious values. The home, as opposed to the house, meant a particular physical shell within which resided a group of people who, taken together, constituted a collective soul. A house was not a home without a family-soul; and a family was not a spiritual unit without harmony. Harmony presumed the separate but equally necessary functions of family members, both within and without the house; and it presupposed that woman's role in the home rested on her capacity to create an orderly, pleasant ambiance in the midst of the changing world outside the home.

Protestant religious theorists of the 19th century made direct connections between the home, spirituality, and the guiding role of women within the family. One historian has called the centrality of woman's role in the home "domestic pietism," and described it as "the association between home and heaven" which presented the home "as a sacred space but also acknowledged the home's separation from this-worldly life." Domestic pietism equated mother-love with God's love, to the extent that Henry Ward Beecher, in the 1850s, tried to make God a woman, who "pardons like a mother, who kisses. . . offense into everlasting forgetfulness." Another Protestant spokesman, Horace Bushnell, in Christian Nurture (1847 and 1861) attempted to establish an almost biological link between the womb and the home, the latter continuing the nurturance of the child after birth. Bushnell's

organic motherhood extended the biological links between mother and fetus to the moral influence a mother had over her growing children. The theology of domestic pietism meant that home was not just woman's sphere of work or influence; it constituted her very body and soul, a physical replica of mother's, that is God's, love.⁵

The imagery of domestic pietism separated the home sharply from the material society within which it functioned. The metaphor used by Good Housekeeping's editor contained an element of uneasiness which hinged on this separation. His image of the home was embattled, a fortified castle or "fortress" from which the family soldiers went forth to fight, or to which they retreated when faced with overwhelming difficulties. Other evidence shows that for all family members the home was not always the haven of refuge described by many prescriptive writers. In a short story entitled "The Yellow Wall-Paper" (1891), Charlotte Perkins Gilman recounted the process of her mental breakdown in fictional terms. She chose as the setting for the story a children's play room in the attic of an old house in the country. There she gradually came to identify herself with an imaginary woman she believed was trapped behind the tortuous, "suicidal" pattern of the yellow wallpaper. The wall covering acted as the symbol of her emotional vertigo and spiritual incarceration.⁶ While Gilman's story was personal, she based it on a feeling her contemporaries would have understood. The home as a prison, which kept women in and the world out, had by the late 19th century become a central metaphor for the actual home-bound condition of urban American women of the middle- and upper-middle classes.⁷

Several female reformers of the late 19th century had suggestions for increasing the actual social and political power of the home rather than merely relying on its power of suggestion to change society. As an advocate of radical feminism, Mrs. Gilman had definite designs for women in the

larger world outside the home. She believed that the happy single-family represented a deeply rooted ideal in American life, but one based on religious myth; and that its reality was unhealthy and disappointing. Mrs. Gilman's answer was to free women from gender-specific work based on conventional ideas about woman's capabilities. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, on the other hand, argued from the assumption that woman's place was in the home and that was her glory. Since the home itself did not seem able to work social change through influence alone, the W.C.T.U. held that if women were only enfranchised, they could change society by infusing American politics with feminine values. In addition, after 1870 a growing ideology of domestic science called for improvements in women's work place in the home to make a homemaker's job less time-consuming and more efficient. Domestic science represented an attempt to professionalize the home in the same way that other fields moved toward specialized functions in the late 19th century. Some domestic science advocates such as Christine Frederick argued that this would give women more leisure time which they could then use for self-improvement. Domestic science still maintained, however, that woman's place was in the home.⁸

Opinions as different as these nonetheless shared the assumption that the home was not all that its supporters claimed it should be or could be. The influence of the family seemed to decline in direct proportion to the amount of praise it received. The rapid growth of urban or public culture, the Gilded Age capitalistic economic system, the increase in foreign immigration to the United States, and the mobility of a nation rapidly filling in the trans-Mississippi West, all seemed to threaten the stability and sanctity of the home. The trans-Mississippi frontier, in fact, represented one of the supreme tests of American cultural institutions. The image of permanence which many cultural commentators connected with the family home

was concomitant with the incredible growth of new settlement in the Midwest and West after the Homestead Act of 1862 and the resolution of the Civil War. Areas under cultivation expanded so rapidly that by 1890 Frederick Jackson Turner and others proclaimed the closing of the frontier. If New England put the values and traditions of Old England on probation in the 1600s, the American West of the late 19th century seemed to press the same challenge on the values and traditions of American culture. This "last American frontier," with its potential farmland, manufacturing centers and mineral wealth, posed the supreme test of the ability of the family—and its symbol the home—to accommodate to the rapid changes of a seemingly unformed environment.⁹

Like other areas of the trans-Mississippi frontier, Kansas was a place for people who had difficulty, for whatever reasons, getting by in the eastern regions of the nation, as well as a place for people who hoped to get ahead in the new territory. As the Kansas Immigration Bureau put it:

There have come many of the poor, from our own country
and from foreign lands—many of the young, rich only in
their honest ambitions—many of the middle-aged, hoping
that under our bright skies they might renew their
youth and repair the losses of the past. . . .¹⁰

Carrie Robbins commented on the reality of this claim when she travelled with her husband to check their land in eastern Colorado. There they found a widow and her eight children living in a dugout. "They are English people," she said, "who were formerly wealthy. They have come to Colorado to recover, if possible, their lost fortune. They dress in velvet all the time."¹¹ Carrie Robbins, who was from Illinois, was a more typical immigrant than Mrs. Henderson, since most of the immigrants to the trans-Mississippi west had come from relatively recently settled Eastern states. Following a

decade of high immigration in the 1860s, the 1870 census reported that 38,205 immigrants came to Kansas from Ohio, 35,558 from Illinois, 30,953 from Indiana, 29,775 from Missouri, and 15,918 from Kentucky, to name only the top five places of emigration. Out of the entire Kansas population in 1870 (364,399), a minority of 17.4 per cent (63,321) were born within the state. Kansas was not alone in this mobility. The 1890 census reported that 61.92 per cent of the entire population of the country were born outside their state of residence.¹²

Partly because of the availability of land, late 19th century Americans were an extremely mobile people. Immigration to Kansas continued at high levels off and on until 1900. Not only did Kansans frequently move on to other areas outside the state but they moved often within the state itself, from dugout to sod house to frame house, from farm to city or from city to farm. As a family's economic status altered, so did their home, so that women must have found creating a permanent dwelling place a difficult task. Martha O. Farnsworth, who was born near Winfield in south-central Kansas in 1867, moved seven times in the four years of her first marriage. She went with her husband to Topeka, from there to Colorado, back to Topeka, and then to California. From California they returned to Topeka, only to move once more to eastern Colorado and finally to return again to the Kansas capital. Each move necessitated finding a new home to rent, since the couple could not afford to buy. Mrs. Farnsworth's case was somewhat unusual, since the moves were made in hopes of finding a climate more favorable to her husband's health. But even in the first two years of her second marriage, to a healthier man, she moved three times. They began in rented rooms, moved in with her parents-in-law, and finally purchased a small home of their own on credit.¹³

The fluctuations in the national economy in the Panic of 1873 and

the depressions of the mid-1880s and 1890s caused many families to live without the male breadwinner for weeks, months, or even years at a time as he left home to find work wherever it was available. Before their move to Kansas in 1870, the Dimonds lived in Forest County, Pennsylvania. Susan Dimond's husband, Will, left the family for weeks at a time to work at various oil field jobs until they decided to emigrate to Kansas. The Butcher family moved to Sun City, Kansas in 1896 from the East, but the father left soon thereafter to find work in Earleboro, Oklahoma. After a year, he set up a butcher shop in Earleboro and the rest of the family joined him. If they were not off earning money, men often travelled far to hunt, fish, trap or gather firewood. Women sometimes went along on these camping expeditions, but generally stayed behind to tend the livestock, garden, crops, and the house. Julia Hand, settled on a farm near Hutchinson, Kansas in the 1870s, dreaded her husband Burt's frequent absences not so much because of the loneliness (there were several families within walking distance) but because she had to do the work of two while he was gone. In addition to the sheer physical strain, she found less time for reading and letter writing, which usually occupied a portion of her leisure time. Such mobility was both a contradiction of the ideal of a stable home, and an integral part of the middle-class dream of upward mobility. The themes of self-betterment and self-sufficiency run through the primary sources as the main reasons why these settlers moved so frequently, although individuals defined the conditions for autonomy in many different ways. For the Butcher family, it was owning a butcher shop; for the Dimonds, it was owning a farm. Both, however, saw self-employment as the ideal.¹⁴

The amazing mobility of late 19th century Americans caused a great deal of concern for many commentators. The Tenth Census Report of 1880 editorialized on its own findings, noting that the

Imagination is fairly staggered at the figures which exhibit in detail the migrations thus summarized. When we read of 229,391 natives of New York residing in Michigan, and of 186,391 natives of Ohio residing in Indiana, we try in vain to comprehend the magnitude of the movement which had yielded such results.¹⁵

The awareness of this fluctuation in places of residence prompted some observers to make a variety of suggestions to counteract such instability, some of which focused on the home. Charles Eliot Norton, in an article for Scribner's Magazine in 1889, advanced the notion that people drew "nourishment from material things, from visible memorials, from familiar objects. . . . And it is this nourishment that the true home supplies." By "true home" Norton meant the hereditary home, one that had been in the family for at least two generations. Norton believed that, because Americans had so few "man-made" monuments to which the national consciousness could cling, ancestral homes were even more important for America than for other nations. And America, lamented Norton, faced a decided paucity of ancestral homes. Such concerns showed a renewed interest in "American exceptionalism" typical of the late 19th century, and emphasized the capability of the physical home to alter the individual, and hence the national, character.¹⁶

Other social critics reflected a vernacular orientation. They acknowledged that middle-class attitudes often took advantage of America's lack of conservative traditions to create a personal, comfortable style more in keeping with the national background. A.F. Oakley claimed that Americans should have no trouble assimilating foreign building styles and making them their own, because they were "not hampered by local tradition" For this reason, originality in homes "should be more strongly asserted here than in older countries." John R. Spears, writing for Scribner's

in 1887, offered a panoply of uniquely American homes. In "Odd American Homes," Spears catalogued various frontier, back-country, and make-do houses from teepees to cabins, from sod houses to lighthouses, to Chinese houses in mining-towns, "built of old vegetable and meat tins filled with earth. . . ." Without advocating a mass conversion to these sorts of houses, Spears commented that "igdlus" were "cleaner than the slums described in Jacob Riis' book," and that the sod houses he had seen were both "comfortable" and "decorated in rare taste." In an era of newly-awakened national consciousness and increasing mobility, many Americans looked to housing for an explanation of their country's uniqueness, its traditions, and its future. For Kansans, the future lay in expanded settlement; and settlement meant, if not Charles Norton's ancestral homes, at least the stability provided by comfortable, well-decorated dwellings even if they were sod houses or dugouts.¹⁷

The settlement of the Kansas frontier, like others before and after it, called for the presence of both agricultural cultivation and merchant and manufacturing centers in order to reach an ideal state of civilization. Kansas boosters of the late 19th century dwelt lovingly on the state's wide expanses of untilled land, waiting to be broken and put under cultivation. Evan Jenkins, an assayer for the federal land office, claimed that Kansans were capable of extending a desirable civilization into the wilderness, . . . by industry they would convert the waste places into fields of plenty, and cause them to bloom like the gardens of beauty.¹⁸

At the same time, booster books and magazines emphasized that Kansas had delightful towns where all the comforts of civilized living were available. Julia Hand echoed this sentiment in her diary when she described the buildings around Glasgow, Kansas as "beautiful," and Emporia as "quite a pretty place."¹⁹ Boosters pointed out that hospitals, schools, shops, and churches

were a part of the Kansas scene, as well as the unfettered vistas of the unlimited prairie. The Kansas Immigration Bureau, an organization of community leaders from across the state, issued an information pamphlet in 1890, attesting to the advantages enjoyed by Kansas residents:

They [Kansans] believe that on these healthful prairies, and in these fertile valleys, may be built up a state, populous, rich, and strong—a State of smiling farms and busy shops, of schools, newspapers, churches, and peaceful homes—an imperial state, midway between the oceans, and serving as the New Keystone of the grander Union of the future.²⁰

Boosters focused on the theme of a confluence of civilization and wilderness hardship, where the best of both emerged from the tempering fire—civilization shedding its effeminate qualities and clipping the wings of the wilderness though never destroying its capricious, vital spirit. One could have the best of both worlds in Kansas according to its promoters; indeed the perfection of the late 19th century image of a tamed but unconquered wilderness perfectly suited the state.

An essential part of this melding process revolved upon the home, the civilizing and uplifting agency of late Victorian culture and the physical embodiment of the family.²¹ In fact, on the trans-Mississippi frontier the home became one of the most important reminders and promulgators of civilization, since it usually preceded the establishment of churches, schools, and newspapers. Except for those areas where groups or colonies founded a rural town, the basic unit of settlement on the trans-Mississippi frontier was the family; and since the provisions of the Homestead Act required that a building be erected in order to maintain claim to the land, the most natural and legally provident thing to construct was a house. The sod house, in fact,

came to symbolize the settlement of the Great Plains, and especially that portion west of the 99th meridian where the land was relatively dry and virtually treeless. [Fig. 2] As Roderick Cameron later noted in Pioneer Days in Kansas (1951): "That beautiful motto, 'Ad astra per aspera,' meaning 'To the stars through hardship,' . . . might well be paraphrased 'From a soddy to God.'"²²

The dugout or sod house, so much a living part of the Kansas frontier between 1850 and the 1880s, by 1892 had become instead an idealized emblem of Kansas' resilience and strength, and of the population's ability to transplant the values of civilization and the home and family to the frontier. Booster books and reminiscences written late in the century presented the material features of the sod house or dugout as emblems of moral worth. "Ironquill," in "The Kansas Dugout" (1892), echoed the castle metaphor of Good Housekeeping's editor as well as the overtones of domestic pietism when he or she eulogized the cave-like residence as an underground fortress filled with a cathedral light:

Stuck in a Kansas hillside, far away,
Is a cabin built of sod, and made to stay;
Through the window-like embrasure
Pours the mingled gold and azure
Of the morning of a gorgeous Kansas day.²³

Solomon Miller, in the same year, testified to the womb-like nurture of a sod house in "The Homes of Kansas":

The sod-built homes of Kansas!
Though built of Mother Earth,
Within their walls so humble
Are souls of sterling worth.

In rhetoric, the sod house of Kansas took on all the attributes of the American

middle-class dream house. Autonomous and individualized, it contributed to the civil strength of the state and to the moral and spiritual health of its occupants. Miller's poem continued:

Though poverty and struggle
 May be the builder's lot,
 The sod-house is a castle
 Where failure enters not.

. . . .

God bless the homes of Kansas!
 From the poorest to the best;
 The cabin of the border,
 The sod-house of the west;
 The dug-out, low and lonely,
 The mansion, grand and great;
 The hands that laid their hearthstones
 Have built a mighty state.²⁴

Never mind that most Kansas homes contained no fireplace because of the shortage of wood on the prairies; never mind that it was structurally difficult (and usually undesirable because of cost) to construct an actual castle from sod bricks; never mind that failure did attend the efforts of many Kansas settlers: the essential power of the home as a symbol of moral strength and the continuity of the family reached its zenith in the potentially disruptive frontier environment. The reality of housing in late 19th century Kansas, however, reflected the changes wrought in the ideal by expediency; and perhaps something of the class-conscious underpinnings of the Victorian dream house.

Reminiscences or propaganda pieces about the Kansas frontier point to the conclusion that residence in a sod house or dugout was a mandatory exper-

ience for all immigrants, and that living in a sod house was a temporary "hardship" overcome by hard work and upward mobility. To a certain extent these seem to have been true, with the provisos that not all immigrants lived in dugouts or sod houses, they did not all build the same kind or quality of residences, and not all immigrants experienced their dwellings in the same way. It would seem that nothing about the physical features of a sod house render it intrinsically temporary or a hardship. Even so, the use of sod houses as dwellings was virtually abandoned by 1900.

By the 1870s, eastern Kansas was a well-settled mix of urban and rural areas, and past the initial frontier conditions. In the towns, at least, settlers found the transition to their new place of residence relatively easy. The Bingham's immigrated by boat and train to Junction City, Kansas in 1869 when the eastern portion of the state was relatively well-settled. When they arrived, they rented a room at the city hotel where they stayed until Mr. Bingham had built a frame house in town. They had planted trees and a garden on their lot by the time they traded it for a small farm outside town. The Junction City area is riverine bottom-land and trees for building were plentiful, so the previous owner of their new farm had built a small shack on the property out of cottonwood boards. This "shack" was considerably more uncomfortable than a sod house or dugout, but was not necessarily temporary. "It was plastered except where the woman [the previous owner, a widow] had filled in, or tried to, the warped places in the up and down boards of the sides," Mrs. Bingham later recalled. Rain blew in when it was windy and ran across the floor. One of the first things the Bingham's did was to plaster the shack and add a buttry to make the dwelling more comfortable and convenient. They continued to improve the shack until it was quite liveable.²⁵

Dugouts and sod houses came in as many varieties as there were builders;

however, certain similarities among them did exist. [Figures 2 through 5] Evan Jenkins described a combination sod house and dugout as an "excavation" approximately "twelve by fourteen feet, more or less. . .with large forks set firmly in the ground at each angle. . . ." Poles were laid across the top "sufficiently strong to hold a heavy weight of sod for the roof." The front portion of the dwelling was "generally built of stone or logs, with spaces left for a door and one or more small windows. The floor is the earth, leveled and smoothed with a spade."²⁶ [Figure 3] The average sod house also was twelve by fourteen feet, although rooms were sometimes added on and "soddys" usually had three or four windows. Otherwise, the two were very similar in construction. Generally, a sod house or dugout consisted of one large room, although curtains frequently were hung to separate sleeping from living quarters. Sod-wall partitions took up too much space since the bricks were approximately one foot by two feet, and so were not used as frequently as curtain or board separations. It was possible, however, to build five- or eight-room "soddys," although not typical. Unless carefully supported with upright beams, sod-brick walls tended to buckle under their own weight. This limitation in the materials rendered imitating the construction of two-story, wooden balloon-frame houses very difficult and more costly. The Gordon Haumont family raised one known exception to the usual style of sod houses twelve miles northeast of Broken Bow, Nebraska. It took nearly eight years to finish and, given the nature of the building material, was a remarkable feat of engineering. It had a brick chimney, shingled roof, split-wood door, and even a double window.²⁷ [Fig. 6]

Generally speaking, the dugout or sod house was a temporary expedient, used as a home only until the family could afford a frame house. As Emily Combes put it, "Yes, we do see the sod-house, dugout, adobe, or whatever it is, occasionally, but it is rapidly giving way to something better." The

"something better" was a wooden cottage or, in areas where stone was available, a rock house. Some sod houses, however, continued in use long after the settlers had built wooden barns, outbuildings, and impressive wind mills. [Fig. 7] It has been argued, not very convincingly, that such homesteads maintained the use of the "soddy" as a dwelling because of a fondness for the tradition they represented.²⁸ One more likely explanation can be found in economic priorities. Sod houses or dugouts that continued in use as homes usually accompanied farming or ranching enterprises where the primary financial consideration consisted of planting and harvesting, keeping stock fed and watered, and storing grains or produce. With limited capital available for the purchase and shipment of lumber to the virtually treeless western prairies, any extra money for lumber went into farming operations.

The late 19th century image of the sod house as a "hardship," a part of the justification for or differentiation of Kansas mores, masks other reasons why such seemingly temporary houses were acceptable to so many settlers long beyond the time when a family might have moved into a frame house. In the first place, nearly everyone who homesteaded in the drier plains regions spent at least some time domiciled in a sod house or dugout. In this sense, it was a shared experience which implied frontier conditions rather than economic class, and it provided a needed sense of community. An enterprising settler with minimal building skills or some outside help could build either type of dwelling from available materials. If they wanted a wooden door, window frames or floor, the settlers could purchase these at relatively little expense locally, roughly put them together out of cottonwood or other riverine or creek bottom scrub trees, or purchase them ready-made and shipped via rail, boat and wagon to the nearest town. Oscar Babcock of North Loup, Nebraska left a record of his expenses for a fourteen-foot square dugout in 1872. He paid a total of \$2.78½ for eighteen feet of lumber for the front door,

a latch, a pipe for the stove chimney, three pounds of nails, and a window (at \$1.25, the single most expensive item).²⁹ Essentially the same materials were needed for a sod house, except that "soddys" often had more than one window and needed extra beams for the roof. Only when wood frame houses began to appear on the prairie did the continuance of neighboring sod houses take on the aura of poverty and economic hardship. Even then, it is not altogether clear that building with available materials denoted economic class in everyone's experience. The Fritchie family built a log cabin in 1910 in Lawrence County, Illinois, when they could just have easily have constructed a frame house. John Fritchie was a reasonably well-to-do merchant who owned his own general store and dressed his family in manufactured clothes. He built a log cabin rather than a frame house because it was warmer and less expensive.³⁰

Secondly, despite their appearance and the materials of which they were made, the sod house or dugout fulfilled the same spatial requirements as the average middle-class or lower-middle-class home of the late 19th century. A random sampling of extant frame houses built in various Kansas towns in the 1880s and 1890s shows that the average dimensions for each of the four usual rooms (parlor, kitchen, living room and bedroom, or two bedrooms) was approximately twelve by fifteen feet--nearly the same size as the average sod house or dugout. Both the frame house and sod house essentially were boxes, although wooden houses typically had higher ceilings.³¹ The techniques of balloon-frame construction and the standardization of materials dictated these similarities in frame houses; but the same was not necessarily true of sod houses, which used different materials. At any given time, most families only used one of the rooms available to them in their houses. Without air conditioning or central heating, most families in any type of house lived in one or two rooms during the winter, and spent a good deal of time outside in the summer. In the winter, a family spent most of its time in the kitchen,

where the coal stove kept them warm. Parlors, in particular, generally remained closed off winter and summer, except on formal occasions. This is not to say that the living experience of families in a one-room sod house and a four-room frame house were identical; however, they were not as different as might be supposed. The main ingredient which a simple sod house lacked was a firm definition between public and private spaces within the house itself, an important symbolic ingredient in housing that probably set some sod house dwellers apart from other families. Even lower-class housing in at least one section of Kansas observed this division of home spaces into rooms. In southeastern Kansas, where lead and zinc mining formed an important part of the regional economy, there are numerous extant houses built by or for the employees of the mining companies. These small, three- or four-room balloon-frame houses possibly were pre-fabricated in sections, and then shipped to Kansas and put up. They are identical in room-size and shape with many houses owned by middle-class families in these towns. The essential ground plan for all these types of houses was a square or short rectangle, whether they were one-story or two.³²

A third possible reason why dugouts or sod houses continued in use came from the fact that they met existing vernacular requirements for home design. Andrew Jackson Downing, whose pattern-books went through numerous editions in the 19th century, provided the model of an ideal middle-class home: a square cottage of wood construction with at least one bay window to allow more sunlight and provide visual interest to the surface. [Fig. 8] Jackson's homes essentially were boxes, with optional towers, porches, dog-leg rooms, or applied exterior decoration to add a sense of architectural style and individuality. As John Kouwenhoven has pointed out, the typical 19th century American home was economical to build, simple in design, and had a flexibility of ground plan that allowed for additions in room-sized

units. Any architectural decoration that was present was usually applied, and followed the cultivated tradition of historical European styles such as Gothic, Italian, or Tudor. The sod house or dugout met all these requirements (except for room additions in the case of the dugout). It was even possible to achieve individualized exterior decoration, as Figures 9 and 10 show. The physical ideal of home beauty was largely applied or decorative, and revolved around a very few symbolic clues. Wooden window frames and glass windows, wooden doors, and an essentially square or additive shape provided the basis on which to hang antelope antlers instead of jig-sawed gingerbread molding, or to cultivate a colorful roof of wildflowers growing in sod. With a stove, curtains, a bird cage, some books, personal bric-à-brac, pictures, and floor coverings to decorate the interior, a house took on the essence of the ideal home even if the exterior and interior symbols did not exactly match those in the pattern books and fashion magazines.³³ [Figs. 11a and 11b]

A fourth reason for maintaining a sod house or dugout on the plains stemmed from weather conditions that set the Great Plains apart from much of the rest of the nation. Both types of houses were cooler in summer and warmer in winter than wood-frame construction. Susan Dimond's family lived with friends in a sod house for the first few months of their stay on a farm near Cawker City, Kansas. They then constructed a wooden frame house and moved in just before winter started. However, that extremely cold winter of 1872 forced the Dimonds to move into the basement of their frame house. The "basement" really was nothing more than an earth cellar, hastily excavated under the house after the latter had been raised on blocks.³⁴ Dugout living lessened the ever-present danger in spring of tornadoes or cyclones since such dwellings were built into the side of a hill. On the far western prairies, where rainfall was relatively slight, there was little danger of the earthen houses melting; and the baking sun of a Kansas summer

could do little harm to dirt walls. Sod houses, despite the fact they were built of earth, proved no absolute guarantee against the frequent and destructive prairie fires because they contained the dried root system of prairie grasses. But wooden frame houses certainly were not any better in that respect. In addition, if properly cared for sod houses were quite durable. Barbara Orringderff points out in True Sod (1976) that the average life of such houses was 25 to 50 years. If stuccoed, cemented, or plastered, some sod buildings have stood for more than 80 years.³⁵

The absolute practical advantages of sod houses or dugouts on the western prairie still were not enough to help them survive as inhabited dwellings much past 1900. Nearly every family, as soon as they could afford to do so, constructed some type of wood frame or rock house. This fact alone is testimony to the power of the image of what constituted a home. By 1900, very few families anywhere in Kansas still lived in sod houses or dugouts, and the difference between an urban and a rural existence in the state was no longer noticeable in housing architecture. Despite the spatial resemblance between wood-frame and sod houses, the former seemed to have had a special appeal which perhaps in part was based on economic or class considerations. More important, however, was the appeal of taste in that the culture defined the wood-frame house as "Home."

The sod house could not hold its own, despite its obvious practical advantages and its adherence to the underlying requirements of vernacular housing types, because ultimately it was not a wood-frame house and a wood-frame house was the standard emblem for upward mobility and the achievement or assertion of middle-class status. Because of this outlook, the image of hardship on the frontier, which no doubt was an experiential fact at some point, came to stand instead for the initial stages of upward mobility. This is reflected in attitudes toward housing, when Emily Combes noted that

sod houses were being replaced by "something better" in Kansas, or when boosters such as Solomon Miller contrasted the "low and lonely" dugout with a "grand and great" mansion. Thorstein Veblen has pointed out that the essence of consumption was its conspicuousness, by which he meant the economically wasteful use of accumulated goods or property. In order to denote status, an individual had to do more than simply exist, or exist simply. Constructing a sod house with a shake roof [Fig. 4] or double-windows [Fig. 10] in an attempt to replicate some of the possibilities of wood-frame construction, required extra labor, engineering skill, and money. The sod dweller often reproduced the emblems of an ideal middle-class house without reproducing its underlying substance in the form of a pattern-book cottage. This refusal or inability to relate the extraneous details of style to the underlying function of an object came to denote a middle-class failing in the eyes of cultural critics. However, the changes in frontier housing emphasized that "beauty" was for the middle-class a non-practical thing. The "function" of beauty was its ability to suggest an ideal, or a perceived cultural significance. It was not that form was divorced from function in the sense that the wooden house was not practical on the prairies; but rather that the settlers defined "use" or function culturally rather than mechanically. The presence of a wood-frame house on a frontier farm signalled a lack of differentiation between geographical regions. It made the statement, to all who cared to listen, that the frontier was "civilized" according to prevailing definitions of that term.

The importance settlers placed on reproducing a particular kind of architectural shell emphasized the notion that a certain type of house was better than some other. There was a qualitative difference between houses and the continuity of the home rested not on the practical existence of a house but on the ideas such a house conveyed. In the sense that home was

an "idea," it could be transported anywhere. John Kouwenhoven notes that one characteristic of the Victorians was that they "ordered their attitudes toward life in harmony with concepts which they merely wish[ed] were true" ³⁶ In light of the preceding discussion, we could postulate that the late Victorians went one step further than Kouwenhoven suggests. Rather than only ordering attitudes, they created a physical world to replicate the ideal world they wanted to become true.

CHAPTER II

WOMEN AND DOMESTIC DECORATION

The guiding spirit and vital soul of an ideal Victorian home was the wife and homemaker whose presence transformed an architectural shell into a Home by the selection and arrangement of domestic spaces and objects. The promoters of Kansas settlement expressed this awareness of woman's role when they urged male settlers to cultivate the earth of the West, and female settlers to cultivate the minds and hearts of the inhabitants of the frontier by establishing tasteful homes in the new land. Frontierwomen brought with them the furniture and books, the pianos and pans, that would attempt to recreate the stable family home wherever they went.

In The Northern Tier (1880), Evan J. Jenkins described a Kansas scene that could have taken place in any middle-class parlor in the nation: "In one of those dug-outs which I visited on a certain rainy day, an organ stood near the window and the settler's wife was playing 'Home! Sweet Home!'"¹ Female immigrants to Kansas carried the emblems of culture with them on the trail. Julia Hand was on the way to Kansas from Illinois in a prairie schooner when she presented her husband with "a volume of Shakespeare" for his thirtieth birthday. Some women kept their Eastern standards on the frontier. When Mrs. Carrie Robbins moved with her husband to Kansas from Quincy, Illinois soon after their marriage in 1887, they lived in a sod house in the sagebrush and cactus flats near Cimarron in the southwest. At a dinner with some neighbors, she commented on the delicious meal which was "well cooked and well served. [The] table was really elegant with nice linen

and silverware." Despite the fact that Carrie Robbins found herself on the vast open space of western Kansas, with their nearest neighbor a prairie dog colony, she applied her Illinois standards to Kansas homemaking and did not find it wanting.²

The settlers of the Kansas frontier of the 1870s and 1880s strove for domesticity, attempting to accommodate rough, make-do living arrangements with comfort and coziness. The Kansas frontier was not so much conquered, as it was domesticated, and women played a leading role in this transformation. "The neat calico dresses and sun-shade hats of the ladies, and the cheap but durable raiment of the gentlemen," remarked Evan Jenkins, "were in harmony with the times, and with the plain domestic spirit that prevailed in the homestead region."³ If the Pilgrim immigrants of the 17th century looked to God for help in civilizing the wilderness, Kansas immigrants looked to his 19th century helpmeet, the middle-class Protestant woman. As Julia Hand put it, in a near-perfect juxtaposition of frontier existence and cultural awareness, "I read some and carry buffalo chips." Kansas women, whether in rural, frontier, or urban areas, attempted to reproduce the visible symbols of home that were such an important part of the late Victorian cultural ideal of cultivated domesticity. Part of their concern over the arrangement of home spaces stemmed from the fact that, for the most part, the domestic interior was their main work place. But they also showed a concern that the environment they created would have positive associations and carry symbolic messages.⁴

Evan Jenkins noted the connection between Kansas women on the western frontier and their ability to transmit culture through the objects and arrangement of domestic interiors. He praised the urbane quality of even the most modest Kansas homes and acknowledged that credit for this condition went to women:

Many of those 'dug-outs'. . .gave evidence of the refinement and culture of the inmates; they sheltered families who had 'seen better days' and enjoyed pleasanter experiences than roughing it on the frontier. The wife had been reared in the older states, as shown by the neat and tastefully-arranged fixtures around the otherwise gloomy earth walls.

Jenkins' reference to the transmission of culture focused on the woman's ability to turn sod walls and a dirt floor into the equivalent of an Eastern parlor. "A neatly polished shelf, supported by pins driven into the wall, contained the holiday gift books, album, and that indispensable household treasure, the family Bible."⁵

A photographic record of such a dug-out verifies his claims. Figure 12 shows the interior of a dugout in Ford County, Kansas. Despite the crowding, it is evident that the homemaker had found a place for everything. Since the photograph was taken as a permanent record of their living arrangements, she probably set out her best items for the benefit of the family history, or to send to relatives or friends "back East" to illustrate the cultured style of dugout life; and bear witness to the similarity of her present environment with that she had left behind. She propped the massive family Bible on top of the hutch, and on the table in the foreground, which was carefully covered with a cloth, set an impressive fancy tea service. Pictures and a calendar hang on the already-loaded walls near the stove, while a birdcage and books were prominently displayed. The apparent "sloppiness" of the clothing and other objects hanging on the wall compares favorably with the more calculated casualness of other interior scenes in Figures 13 through 16. This type of studied casualness was intended to communicate comfort, and an expression of comfort was closely tied to the

communicative ability of non-necessary material objects. Mrs. Willing, in "Helpmeets," explained to her readers that one homemaker "had wrought miracles of comfort—a ten cent paper on the wall, fresh and cheery, a bright rag carpet, a white bed spread, groups of engravings from the Repository [a magazine] and some pencil sketches. . . .," when she decorated the family home. In other words, actual comfort in the form of soft chairs, warm blankets, or heated rooms was not as necessary in home decoration as the appearance of comfort communicated through physical objects. Comfort, in this sense, also was linked closely to an ideal of economy whereby the homemaker could provide pleasing surroundings using ingenuity in her purchases as well as her own creative skill. Some objects themselves expressed relaxation such as the shawls draped over pictures or the mantle, and the "throw" pillows on chairs or divans. Or comfort could be expressed via a carefully-planned jumble, as though the rooms were "lived-in." [Figs. 14 and 16] In the dugout, where space was at a premium and the items were "arranged" for the picture, there is the same sense of studied casualness as in the other rooms. The owner of the dugout has managed to express the ideal of comfortable, inexpensive, pleasant home surroundings by carefully positioning her visual clues to achieve order in a tight space. A doll even sits in the infant's chair, a symbolic reference to a child who would not have remained still for the length of time it took to expose the photograph, but whose presence would help to define a "family" rather than an individual's dwelling.⁶

The developing importance of Americans' overwhelming reliance on their visual sense was a landmark of the 19th century. Although an American did not "invent" photography, it was an American—George Eastman—who popularized it. After the appearance of his Kodak Brownie camera in 1888, photography provided a way for people to capture the visual presence of their lives and, not always incidentally, the things around them. It is surely no accident

that photography appeared during a century which placed such a high premium on the communicative ability and reality of the physical world. Photographs were essential icons in every home, and hundreds of pictures were taken of the exterior of houses in order to record the family home. However, early photographic methods still required a great deal of available light in order to record an image, so relatively few photographs of architectural interiors exist. Many that do survive focus on the same imagery as the illustrations in popular magazines and books; others represent a type of iconography that is related to the traditional domestic genre scenes of middle-class culture. They illustrate the transference of at least some portions of the ideal home into middle-class life in the trans-Mississippi west. For example, we can make a further comparison of the intent and content of the Ford County dugout photograph by looking at Figures 17, 18 and 19. In each of these last three photographs, a table has been set, with varying degrees of elaborateness, for a meal. Figure 17 probably shows a lower-middle-class dining room since the chairs did not match one another and the table service largely was inexpensive ceramic or glass. Figure 18 shows a middle-class home where all the chairs matched and the service was silver or silver-plate, as well as ceramic. Figure 19 is an upper-class home in San Francisco. In each one, however, the intent of the record is identical: to exhibit the abundance of the family, and to illustrate the skills of the homemaker who provided these transient examples of the domestic art of table arranging. The preparation of a table for holidays or parties was a "high art" form within the aesthetics of the household; and correct positioning in the placement of dishes, silver and glassware expressed a refined, educated sensibility. While acting as housekeeper of her father's sod house in Rice County, Kansas, Emily Combes prepared an elaborate meal with four kinds of meat, three of vegetables, jelly and relishes, dessert and coffee. She "added to the table that 'charm of

civilization' napkins and a white table cloth using for decoration a bowl of wildflowers and green leaves." "I was quite proud of myself," she added. Even in the upper-class or upper-middle-class household, where the job of setting a holiday or party table might go to a servant, the homemaker received the credit since this function expressed the homemaker's skill in beautifying the home.⁷

Certain objects, in addition to their practical uses, possessed symbolic meanings. Their presence in a home testified to a cultured sensibility in control of the household. Figures 20 through 23 document a middle-class "genre piece" of the late 19th century: a piano, carefully draped by a shawl, with one or more people in attendance. Women appear most often in such photographs, but occasionally males were present as spectators or vocalists. Music played a special role in the Victorian definition of culture, one which was essentially female, and seems to have been present in all areas of the country. Mrs. Sweet, who lived on a farm in Baldwin, Kansas, took piano lessons from a Miss Doyle, who came out once a week to give music lessons and usually stayed for dinner. Small, collapsible pump organs were available in the late 19th century, and it was probably this type of instrument which Mr. Jenkins heard in the dugout he visited. A piano or organ was one of the signals which communicated not only middle-class status but culture and refinement as well, whether one lived in a dugout, a frame house, or like Mrs. Bishop [Fig. 22] in a rented room in Junction City. Books were another signal intended to communicate the degree of a family's culture. Domestic decoration manuals and magazines pictured shelves laden with reading material, as well as vases, plates and pictures, partially transforming the status of the book to that of decorative object. Figures 24 and 25 are illustrations from Clarence Cook's The House Beautiful (1881 edition), and Figures 26 and 27, interiors of Kansas homes. The objects displayed are all

essentially the same type. Figure 26, an interior view of the living room of the Rob Roy ranch house in Kansas, has nearly the same arrangement as Figure 24, with a center plate hung over the mantle and statuary and feathers or shells. Photographs and diaries indicate that the emblems of cultivated life transferred to the frontier, although they did not reproduce exactly the substance of fashionable taste. Emily Combes had to settle for wild-flowers instead of cultivated blooms, and the dugout dweller could fit a collapsible organ but not a full-sized piano into the small space. The necessity for a certain amount of make-shift in the accommodations of the home in Kansas rural and town dwellings was seen by Kansans as both a virtue and a liability.⁸

A curious and almost schizophrenic mingling of attitudes appeared in most public, and some private, statements about the quality of Kansas life.⁹ This was evident in Chapter I, when Kansas boosters somewhat defensively claimed that the rough prairie state was healthier than other areas, at the same time that they claimed that all the advantages of civilization were present in Kansas. This seems to have been a rural phenomenon rather than a regional one. Newspapers such as The Rural New Yorker (which had a large circulation in all farming areas of the country) carried articles or letters to the editor upholding the cultivated ideal of urban or semi-urban life for farmers' wives. In "A Country Housekeeper's Ideal," Annie L. Jack protested that it was as easy to lead a "refined" life in the country as in the city. "There need not be any roughness in our amusements; there is every facility for a beautiful and cultivated life, if one can have flowers and books, even if the other surroundings are simple and inexpensive." Emily Combes wrote to her fiancé in April 1871 from Manhattan, Kansas that "The houses here are neat and pretty, many being built of stone and furnished nicely—plenty of books, carpets, pictures, piano. . . .One meets some very cultured people."¹⁰

Others claimed that being rough around the edges was a positive quality. An article in the Manhattan (Kansas) Nationalist on January 13, 1871, claimed that Kansas women were not ignorant of fashion in house furnishings, but that the family and its needs took precedence over the whims of outsiders.

Therefore excuse my preferring the comfort of my family to the entertainment of my acquaintances. And, society, if you choose to look in upon us, you must just take us as we are without pretence of any kind; or you must shut the door and say good-bye!¹¹

This tendency may, perhaps, in part have derived from the mixing in the Kansas of the late 19th century of two American ways of life that were in conflict on the national scene—that is, the pull between an agrarian existence and the growing influence of large cities and urban centers.¹² It also, however, represents a part of the transition women were experiencing as they went from producers within the home economic system to consumers of mass-produced goods in the marketplace. In this respect, the tenor of the articles directed to women in The Rural New Yorker changed dramatically over the last thirty years of the 19th century.

In the 1870s, the magazine contained two sections for women. One concentrated on recipes, gardening tips, and prescriptive articles on how to make a home more comfortable and attractive with very little money. Downplaying the importance of objects, these articles urged women to concentrate on the inner spirit of the home: on music, books, and good feelings among the family members in order to create a congenial home. In addition, there were many articles which claimed that rural women did not need to follow fashion since that was too expensive. By the 1890s, there was only one section for women, which seems to suggest that rural women were no longer identifying themselves as "farmers' wives" or "farm mothers" but as something

economically different from the frugal helpmeet. The women's section was reduced to advice on the latest clothing styles, articles against woman's suffrage, information on tenement reform, and advice on how to follow fashion. The articles still evidenced concern with economy, but this was now in relation to guidelines on clothing and furniture styles rather than home canning. By 1899, the newspaper no longer separated rural women from the urban ideals which appeared so strongly in magazines that were not oriented specifically to a rural audience.¹³

Some Kansas women of the upper-middle class focused on woman's ability to create congenial home spaces with little money. On April 23, 1887, Miss Hattie Parkerson delivered a lecture on "How to Improve the Home" to the Domestic Science Club of Kansas State Agricultural College. The main theme of her paper revolved around improving the life of farm families, and she envisioned that the route to betterment lay with the farm homemaker:

. . .there should always be a pleasant sitting room [in the farmhouse], which a woman's ingenuity can make very comfortable & attractive at comparatively small expense if necessary, where instead of working until nine or ten o'clock at night, the family may together enjoy a chapter from a new book, the late papers or perhaps a new piece of music, gaining new ideas and fresh inspiration for the next days labors.¹⁴

Hattie Parkerson was the unmarried niece of one of Manhattan, Kansas' wealthier families, and an educated woman who attended the Kansas State Agricultural College in the 1870s. She probably was familiar with the prescriptive literature on woman's place in the home, and her sentiments echoed the late 19th century ideal of woman's essential role as a decorator of domestic spaces.

Miss Parkerson's public comment reveals her commitment to the creation of a home sphere that provided a safe haven of rest and refinement away from the world, even though her private diary made no mention of the ideal. It is instructive to note here that the "world" her subjects were to rest from was the dawn-to-dark, exhausting work-day of the farmer rather than the urban world of offices and cash-grubbing condemned by social critics of the East. Miss Parkerson acknowledged that neither the nature of work nor where one worked made a difference, but that the home space was a haven of rest for the farmer as well as the city-dweller. This expands the notion of the home as a haven of refuge against materialism. More than just a response to urbanization or industrialization, the home panacea was also a response to the perceived disintegration of the family and the breakdown of domestic values, no matter how an individual interacted with the outside world. In addition, the vehicle of rest—the style of home spaces—was the same in both an urban and a rural context.

Her comments reflect the presence of the ideal of home in at least one person's imagination, and also revealed several attitudes that were present in the prescriptive literature of woman's sphere in the last thirty years of the 19th century. A "woman's ingenuity" was her unique skill in combining the objects of the home or her cleverness in designing "ingenuous" spaces and articles—that is, her innocence and inherent nobility projected onto the home environment a tastefully-designed parlor wherein the family could gather at night to expose themselves to culture. Such a gathering place reinforced the family structure and togetherness under the homemaker's expert guiding hand. In addition, it acted as a tonic, sending them forth in new spiritual health to the next day's labors. This reveals the largely passive, emulative role women were told to take as homemakers, as well as the importance of woman's aesthetic ability to manipulate beauty in inexpensive ways.

Of the approximately fifty extant papers delivered to the Domestic Science Club between its formation in 1876 and 1900, none dealt with domestic science proper—that is, the improvement of the work life of women in the home by efficient planning and rational execution of the homemaker's function. Miss Parkerson's plea focused on the power of the home itself to seduce its occupants into positive paths rather than on recipes for leftovers or suggestions such as those promoted by Christine Frederick which included elaborate card files and record-keeping systems for the homemaker.¹⁵ Recognizing the economic priorities of farm families, Parkerson asked them to spend more money on improvements in their homes, rather than on land, out-buildings, machinery, livestock, or orchards. In an attempt to use urban values to justify a rural existence, she claimed that if some money were spent to make home life itself more pleasant that children would remain on the farm, that "farmers boys and girls would not be so ready to exchange their bright, airy, country homes for close work and small pay in the cities."¹⁶ Other Club papers were on subjects that Ellen Richards, the founder of the Lake Placid Conferences, probably would not have recognized under the sobriquet "domestic science." A lecture on the life of abolitionist Lydia Marie Francis Child, probably given some time in the 1880s, used the example of her housekeeping talents to illustrate her moral elevation. The lecturer claimed that Mrs. Child's ability to create a house that was "always neat with some appearance of quiet decoration, showing at once the artistic taste of the hostess and conscientious economy which forbade its indulgence to any great extent," paralleled Mrs. Child's efforts on behalf of the anti-slavery movement. Sloppy home arrangements would have been impossible in light of Lydia Child's lofty spiritual actions and motives. The lecturer did not, however, explain how such an active woman raised her children, took care of her minister husband, wrote for abolitionist papers, engaged in

speaking tours, and maintained a beautiful home. If she did indeed perform all these functions, she either had a servant or died young. Either way, the image was more essential than the fact, for the lecturer presented Mrs. Child's life as a lesson in woman's role. Other papers covered topics in natural history and the importance of suppressing bodily appetites in favor of the life of the intellect.¹⁷ Domestic science, according to the Club members (some of whom were educated at Kansas State University, the first land-grant institution to offer a complete course in Domestic Science) was supposed to educate woman's taste so that she could refine and beautify her home in order that her family would continue to enjoy the benefits of home life and the uplifting influence of mothers. This would suggest that the late 19th century concept of domestic science, at least for some educated women, was not the progressive program outlined by reformers but was more closely linked to women's aesthetic and educational mission in the home.

The example of Mrs. Child points to the value system maintained by these Kansas women, which held that frugality should be balanced with beauty, and that adaptability and practicality were more important than following the dictates of prescribed fashion. A part of woman's ingenuity was her ability to create fine home surroundings at as little cost as possible. Historian David P. Handlin refers to this preoccupation with the cost-effective selection of objects as the "beauty of economy," which continued to be the dominant aesthetic ideal in middle-class homes until well into the 20th century. The task of balancing tasteful surroundings and inexpensive purchases fell to women, who took this aspect of consumption very seriously. A woman's ability to economize was as important as her creativity in home decoration. Mrs. French asked her brother in April 1891 whether Solomon was keeping the family farm at the same time that he had opened a store. "Is his wife any help to him at all, in using economy," she inquired anxiously."¹⁸

Kansas women generally evidenced great concern for their role as women responsible for maintaining a congenial and civilized home environment, within the constraints of economy. Contrary to the dictates of magazines, however, frequently their attention to home spaces was as much for themselves as for their families. Mrs. Bingham regretted the move from Junction City to a small farm outside of town. Her first experience of the small farm dwelling, and her realization of its distance from the tree-lined streets of Junction City, shocked and frightened her.

When I went into the little one-room place, with a loft reached by ladder, the tears came to my eyes, thinking of the contrast with the neat new home we had left. . . .I was afraid to step out of doors. I might step on a snake.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Bingham reconciled herself to her new home once her furniture and fixtures were in place. "We finally got things in shape to live. A bed in one corner, the cupboard in another, the stove in another, with chairs and tables between and around." For Mrs. Bingham, the division and distribution of the interior spaces and objects of the home was an important part of creating a livable situation. Her first thought was for the interior of her home, and she carefully arranged her furniture to create a sense of orderliness even in the small space.¹⁹ Mrs. Sweet, who moved to a farm near Ottawa, Kansas, spent her first days in her new home freshening and arranging the fixtures and furniture. Her diary carefully notes each object she had brought, and possessively refers to all of them: "I worked at arranging things and unpacking my white dishes. . . .I fixed my safe and unpacked my glass dishes." She put down carpets, hung pictures, put up curtains, papered the walls, and painted some of her furniture. With these tasks accomplished, she felt she had transformed a house into her home.²⁰

Home, in this sense, could be anywhere as long as one had the things which made anywhere into one's special place. Home was transportable, in other words, by transporting objects.

In their diaries and letters, homemakers frequently made allusion to themselves as aristocrats or "queens." This may have indicated an awareness on their part that the home could symbolize economic status. Ella Whitney wrote to her cousin Hattie Parkerson in 1872, "How do you like keeping house on your own responsibility. I expect you feel as grand as a queen and step about." Mrs. Bingham felt the crowning touch in her cottonwood shack was two carpets which she had brought with her from New York. When these were down on the floor, she felt "quite aristocratic." It is also possible that the use of words such as these continued the cultural metaphor of the home as a castle. Either way, the central position of the home for women is evident. For Mrs. Bingham, her New York carpets provided links with other homes she had lived in as well as a sense of personal completeness and pride.²¹

The open frontier of the 1870s rendered maintaining the quality of the home environment especially difficult, and this was a major part of woman's role. Carrie Robbins noted in her journal that she was not pleased with her first impressions of western dwellings, but she remained undiscouraged.

". . .I had my first look at a sod house, rather low, dark and gloomy looking on the outside, yet with floors, windows, and the walls plastered. They are pleasant and comfortable upon the inside. I think I can make ours seem home-like. . . ." The sod house in which she was to live with her husband had been recently put up, and plaster and tools lay everywhere inside. "The center table consists of a huge barrel filled with everything from a shirt to a toothpick. My first thought was, 'Oh, how can I ever make a home out of this confusion?' 'But I must not get discouraged. I think I can make it cosy with patience and perseverance.'"²²

The situation frequently was not much better in the towns, where housing was short and women often had to make do with what was available. "I cant bear the idea of living in the Preston house it is so banded up and there are no conveniences either," lamented Emma Denison in 1873. "It is nothing but a dreary house, pretty enough on the outside but ugly enough inside." The living room had only one window, and it faced north to catch the meager sunlight of a Kansas winter.²³ In fact, rented or hired living spaces were more common than the ideal of ownership would indicate. The Eleventh Census in 1890 noted that in Kansas, 31.03 per cent of the population lived on tenant farms and 49.85 per cent of the population lived in rented or leased houses.²⁴ Lizzie H. Brown wrote to "Nancy" from Fort Scott, Kansas in 1877 that she had "rented out my two rooms upstairs, the front room furnished with bedroom furniture, the back room unfurnished, to a newly-married couple for \$10.00 a month." Sophia Bennett Crowe noted in her diary in 1874 that "Mr. Pruden was here to get me to board his daughter."²⁵ Most farms and homes that were listed in the census as owner-occupied had some kind of mortgage encumbrance.²⁶ Martha and Fred Farnsworth purchased their three-room house on credit in 1895, and Lizzie Brown told her correspondent that their home was not paid for and "it will be sometime before we are even in the world."²⁷ Many families frequently shared their living space with transient visitors or with paying boarders which added to the fluidity of the group occupying any given house, and sometimes caused tension among the inhabitants. Julia Hand frequently complained about the extra people who played periodic parts in the family's life. On 20 April 1873, her anger and resentment over the constant visiting of her neighbors erupted. "Mr Pansey and Girl call also Mrs. Benedick comes in on us it makes me mad and I will get so mad I will insult some one yet," she fumed. "[H]ere I am sick and have to cook for these folks." Mrs. Hand was not adapting well in

general to frontier life; but there was no question that the frequent hospitality dictated by frontier existence taxed her almost beyond endurance and added to her unhappiness.²⁸

Carrie Robbins and Emma Denison mentioned the ugly exteriors of their dwellings, but focused sharply on the interiors. For many women, the inside of their homes mattered more to them than the exterior. It is evident that domestic space had a special meaning for some Kansas women. While they had to strive, at times, to reconcile their vision of home to a sod house or dugout, or to rented spaces and over-populated quarters, by turning to the orderly and meaningful arrangement of their household goods, they made the task easier.

Many diaries and letters indicate that this process of arranging the fixtures and furniture was important for women's sense that they were performing an essential task, as well as reestablishing their own sphere. It comprised a part of homemaking that included not only the usual women's work of washing, ironing, and cooking, but the additional duties of tending the livestock or plowing in rural areas. The arrangement of the objects of the home, however, ritualized a special function within a time frame that set women's domestic life apart from a clock-regimented society. In the first place, it was tied in with the seasonal changes of the household and marked the transitional points of the year in the spring and fall. This was the same whether the woman kept house in the city or on a farm, and would not have varied much from New York to Kansas to California. Much like traditional Japanese culture, which dictated that the pictures on the walls of a home and the colors of cushions and mats coincide with the change of the seasons, taking down heavy winter drapes to replace them with lighter summer shades or removing wool carpets in favor of mats or light rag-rugs were seasonal chores that varied little from year to year, but which were always

special events among the usual household tasks. Susan B. Dimond moved to a farm near Cawker City, Kansas in 1872. Entry after entry in her diary, beginning when she was in eastern Pennsylvania and continuing while she was in Kansas, simply stated, "Done my usual work," or "Done my housework." Then, in the seasons of change her entries became more detailed, with such comments as "varnished a bedstead" or "commenced to cover our lounge in the evening," "worked on my counterpain, & papered some up stairs and fixed up the chamber." Her work varied little in content from Pennsylvania to Kansas, with the difference that in Kansas it was more difficult to keep things clean because of the dust.²⁹

Secondly, even women who had the help of regular servants usually reserved the largest part of this seasonal activity for themselves. Mrs. James Horton of Lawrence, Kansas, whose diary almost never mentions her attention to the details of housework unless her servant was ill, noted in April 1874 that she "took up North-chamber carpet & cleaned room." During the course of the month she installed wallpaper in the hall, put down carpets in the bedrooms and on the stairs, removed the blinds so they could be painted, and "arranged Books." Such entries in her diary received the same weight as her trips to Leavenworth, her social and literary meetings, and her reading habits.³⁰

For newly-married women, the formation of a home took on an increased importance as the symbol of conjugal happiness. "Ella and Harry are just as cozy as they can be," Emma Denison commented during her own betrothal. "It made us just a little bit homesick for our cozy little home that is to be."³¹ Martha Farnsworth, whose alcoholic and tubercular first husband once threatened her life with a shot-gun, lived what she described as a "dreary, lonely life in tears." Nevertheless, her home symbolized the happiness they were unable to achieve in their marriage. When they sold most

of their things to move to Colorado, in order to cure her husband's illness, she sadly noted the sale. "Breaking up housekeeping and we had only just begun. Our last day in this little home, and while I have been more unhappy, than happy, in it, I hate to leave it, for here we began our married life and had hoped to be so happy." When her first husband died, she gave away or "burned up" the silverware, blankets, bedstead and other household items in order not to be reminded of how unhappy she had been. Her second marriage, to Fred Farnsworth, gave her all of the happiness she had missed in the first. While living with his parents, she remarked that she and Fred purchased a "new Gasoline Stove," their "first purchase. . .in household furnishing." They later purchased a small home of their own in Topeka. "We have nothing in our home, and are very 'close run,' yet we are buying our home and are happy." A home of their own meant the opportunity to maintain an individual relationship and a family unit. With virutally no funds, Mrs. Farnsworth set about to create a pleasant ambiance by decorating the rooms.

I have one pretty Wolf rug, which I placed in front of a Bench, I made myself and covered, then I have a box, covered and two chairs. I got at [the] grocery, common, manila wrapping paper and made window shades, and we have our Piano, and we have music in our home and are happy. . . .

Two months later, extra overtime money from her husband's work at the post office allowed them to buy "an oak lounge and a little oak rocker. . . ." In late summer she put the final touches on the interior of their home by selecting and installing wallpaper for the house. "Got a lovely Terra Cotta Ingrain, with 18 inch border, for the Parlor; a beautiful pink flowered, gilt for the dining-room and Leavender [sic] flowers for the bed-room and we will have a dear 'little nest' when once we get settled."³² The image of a "nest"

was an appropriate and common one for the homemaker. Out of found objects such as grocery wrapping paper, hoarded treasures such as the Wolf rug and the piano, the addition of various purchased wallpapers, a rocker, and a home-made bench, Martha Farnsworth created the personal space within which she and her husband hoped to raise a family. In the damp cellar under the Dimond home, Susan Dimond assured her family's material and spiritual comfort as well as her own. "We moved our stove and bed down into the basement this afternoon," she noted in her diary on 28 November 1872. "We were over to Dyton to dinner. . .brought some pictures home to hang in our basement." Lacking funds for commercial wallpaper, she used newspapers to cover the earth walls. Even in the most extreme situations, either under economic or emotional strain, or physical inconvenience, the objects within the home represented to women something of the essence of the role they believed was theirs.³³

Rather than consider a dugout, a rented room, or a damp cellar as temporary living arrangements, and hence ignoring the physical aspects of the home environment until they had a permanent home, women took the time and energy to hang pictures in a windowless cell. The domestic environment was an important element in women's concept of home. Like Julia Hand, who began moving her household goods into their sod house before it was finished, the arrangement of domestic space was one of women's first considerations in the frontier environment.³⁴ No doubt a portion of this concern stemmed from the fact that home was a woman's place of work, and organized quarters simplified household tasks. On the frontier, objects which women brought with them to their new home provided personal links with their past. Neither of these things, however, explains why Dimond bought pictures to hang in a temporary shelter, or the proud, detailed description of Farnsworth's wallpaper, or why the anonymous decorator of the Ford County dugout wanted her fancy tea service at center-front for the photograph. In addition to the personal

meanings associated with objects, the homemaker's awareness of her culture's definitions of domesticity also were present. By placing a part of the home's significance on objects, Americans attested to the essentially mobile nature of the physical home. A piano, a picture, a table set with napkins in the "wilderness" told the world that a cultivated woman was present, one who believed in the value of home.

CHAPTER III

THE USEFUL WHAT-NOT AND THE IDEAL OF "DOMESTIC DECORATION"

The middle-class ideal of woman's role in the late 19th century dictated that the wife and homemaker provide refined surroundings for her family as an essential part of creating a stable, instructive home environment. The fulcrum of this ideal rested solidly on a woman's taste—that is, her judgment in selecting and arranging the objects which filled the rooms of the family house. Decorated home spaces were to provide artistic examples of good taste for the inhabitants, especially the young, and to reinforce the relationships between family members. In addition to these private uses, late Victorians expected the parlor and hall, the most public home spaces, to show at a brief glance not only the intellectual and spiritual condition of the inhabitants, but the fact that the family lived a decent, comfortable life. The home environment essentially was a woman's creation even though the physical shell was designed or built by males.¹

Any attempt, therefore, to understand the Victorian home environment and its relationship to feminine values must include an understanding of the objects which filled its spaces, and the purposes envisioned for such objects by their owners. If anything exists which can be said to represent the Victorian era, aside from the Queen herself, it is the "what-not," a non-descript thing that had no purpose of its own yet which gave its name to a piece of uniquely 19th century furniture, the what-not cabinet. [Fig. 28] Bric-à-brac was ubiquitous in Victorian houses, and ranged from the vestibule to the bedroom. In Life on the Mississippi (1874), Mark Twain humorously

described the interior of a composite home, in any given town along the banks of the Mississippi River. In prose as crowded and dense as the rooms he detailed, Twain enumerated the furniture, pictures, wall coverings, draperies and fixtures which made such rooms a jumble of sensations. In the parlor, he noted the presence of a "[p]yramidal what-not in the corner, the shelves occupied chiefly with bric-a-brac of the period, disposed with an eye to best effect. . . ." There were two sea-shells, one with the

Lord's Prayer carved on it, . . . quartz, with gold wart adhering; old Guinea-gold locket, with circlet of ancestral hair in it; Indian arrow-heads, of flint; three 'alum' baskets of various colors. . . works of art which were achieved by the young ladies [of the house]; their doubles and duplicates to be found upon all what-nots in the land. . . .

In addition, the cabinet contained "desiccated bugs and butterflies pinned to a card," a "sugar-candy rabbit" in an advanced state of decomposition, a "small Napoleon, done in wax," daguerreotypes and a "pewter presidential-campaign medal." Over the what-not cabinet, in a "place of special sacredness," was a watercolor done by a young niece who had come once for a visit.² Such a cabinet, with its stored treasures, presented a small replica of the rooms themselves with their abundance of objects; and, as Twain pointed out, the what-not cabinet or its equivalent appeared in nearly every home with any pretension to culture. The cabinet functioned as a small museum for the family's relics, performing the office of a shrine, or altar, wherein the physical details of the family's history and hopes were displayed for the edification of family members and the delight (and in Twain's case, amusement) of visitors. In homes too small, or too poor, to have a what-not cabinet, small wall shelves or brackets, the mantle, or the china cupboard, collected

the souvenirs. [Figures 29 through 31] The what-not itself may have been undefinable or nondescript to a stranger unacquainted with the family; but to its owners it possessed meaning, value, and usefulness. The what-not served essentially the same purpose as the religious icons and pictures which graced the shelves or walls of working class homes—that is, as a reminder of the family's values and as a source of inspiration. At least a portion of the late 19th century American woman's culturally defined spiritual and social calling revolved around her ability to select objects for the home which would play a similar didactic part.³

Under the pressure of wide-scale social and economic changes, cultural commentators asked middle-class American women to transfer their sense of themselves as fountains of moral and religious values to the physical space of the house and the objects it contained. In this process, women could enhance their role as consumer through the careful selection of things that could help carry on their role as spiritual exemplar and educator. Women in the late 19th century were urged to focus the theology of the home on the blossoming field of "domestic decoration" and use the management of space and, especially, objects within the home to define themselves and their roles. From the 1870s on, a torrent of books and magazine articles appeared, written by and for upper- and middle-class women, which celebrated the need for natural, instructive surroundings in the home, and attempted to explain canons of taste to be used in the purchase or creation of domestic objects.

This emphasis on things—and the placement of them within the house—and the increased concern for the household as a physical environment which could impart spiritual values, developed within a potential change in the role of women in the public and private sectors of American life. In A Treatise on Domestic Economy (1841), Catharine Beecher had presented one of the first efforts to explain the ideal position of the female homemaker in

a democratic and technological society. Her philosophy utilized the advances in technology to simplify and professionalize the management of the home and elevated all the functions of family care to the status of a science. To this end, she provided a comprehensive plan which interrelated all aspects of woman's job as homemaker, from her economic and social duties to the best way to set a table. According to Beecher, woman's duty in a democracy was to supervise and manage the home so that males could be free to manage society. A major part of Beecher's justification for this view relied on professionalizing woman's role as homemaker, turning it into a function only a woman could perform effectively. In Beecher's system, women brought their area of expertise—caring, sympathy, appreciation of beauty, all the things, in short, that made them women—to the task of creating a home that ran efficiently under their enlightened management.⁵

In the late 19th century, however, the urban home and family were not the essential social and economic units envisioned by Beecher but merely adjuncts to the world of telephones, steel-processing plants, steam ships, time clocks, horseless carriages, and public education. Yet the status of the home had profound implications for women's sense of their importance since "woman's sphere," by tradition and belief, was still the home. Siegfried Giedion tells us that the 19th century only dared to be its "true self" in its "places of work," by which he meant offices. The typewriter did bring middle-class women into the office as stenographers and typists; but these working women were young, single, and a part of the work force only until they married. The place of the "true self" for Victorian women of the traditional gentility—the middle- and upper-middle classes—continued to be the home, a place increasingly defined as a sacred island of potential leisure and relief from the material world.⁶

Perhaps because the family seemed threatened, the home became an

extremely important symbol of stability for the late 19th century. It came physically to embody the continuance of family ties in a changing world that appeared bent on destroying the social fabric as well as woman's sphere. Dr. William F. Channing placed the continuation of the state firmly on the shoulders of the American home. "The first step toward social order is to secure the independent existence of the individual or family in a home which . . . shall be a castle inviolable and safe from all intrusion." Channing, and others like him, was convinced that single-family dwellings for workers would nullify the threat of labor unrest. Writing for Catholic World in 1870, "A Grandmother" blamed the disequilibrium of a capitalist economy on the failure of mothers to raise their daughters "for the high responsibilities and duties of home. . . ." Despite the efforts of some housing reformers who called for communitarian living arrangements, shared kitchens, or planned apartment complexes, the single-family dwelling remained the cultural ideal with the most pervasive spiritual power, especially for the middle class. It was "childhood's temple, and manhood's shrine--the ark of the past and future."⁷

In large urban areas, at least, this cultural ideal met a different reality. Technological changes, such as inexpensive commercial canning, improved water supplies, sewage disposal, and home electricity, gradually reduced the amount of time a woman had to spend on physical chores. By the turn of the century, more and more middle- and upper-middle class urban families were spending less and less on servants and the purchase of large homes. Instead, their incomes were flowing to durable consumer goods and apartment living. In a world where men were absent from home the greater part of the day at work, where there were fewer children and those of school age were sent away to boarding or day school, where there were few or no servants to manage, and the regular chores were simplified, women perceived

themselves as no longer central figures in important social units. Instead, they reigned supreme over absence and leisure; and the "cult of domesticity" seemed to have degenerated into a ritual divested of action, represented by a symbol, the home, which was losing vitality in a society oriented to the office and factory. Many women still believed the home was their proper sphere, but it had taken on more passive social and personal significance. Within this context, popular literature redefined woman's place, stressing the economic and social demands made on homemakers—the necessity to constantly refine the outward evidence of their family's status through what Thorstein Veblen called "emulative consumption," and to provide moral lessons for their families through interactions with the physical environment of the home. This transformation of woman's role bound her tightly to the home and, at the same time, linked womanhood to an indirect influence. [Fig. 32] "The thought of. . .a home raises the duty of women to a very high level," Marian Ford remarked in an 1881 article for Potter's American Monthly. "It is not her mission to dust and scrub. . .but to watch the blossoming minds of her children, and to foster each budding taste and inclination for wisdom and goodness which they develop." The leisure time provided by improved technology and fewer children was to be devoted to self-cultivation and improvement—not for oneself, but for others. Woman's divine "mission" was to care for the garden of the home, passively "watching" and "fostering" her charges rather than actively directing, guiding, or leading them. An article in The Ladies' Repository for 1871 put it succinctly: "The moral influence of mothers is greater than that of any other class; so let them see that their example . . .is correct. Let them try to become themselves what they would have their children to be." One of a "mother's first duties" was self-improvement, and time spent reading or studying was time well-spent for the model homemaker. In "Helpmeets," a minister's wife related the story of one homemaker

who learned German "with her book spread open on her ironing-board." Such self-improvement cultivated women's sensibilities, helping to refine their aesthetic sense in order to improve their ability to judge the uplifting qualities of the physical environment, and enabling them to communicate that knowledge through their arrangement of home spaces and objects.⁸

A major part of her personal example revolved around the homemaker's ability to recreate her own and her family's persona in the home environment. One essential component of domestic decoration was communication, but self-definition also was important. In his Theory of the Leisure Class (1899), Veblen noted that the homes which middle- and upper-class women fashioned were the showcases of the male's financial status. While no doubt true, such a strictly economic interpretation omits the possibility that women also were communicating information about their own position as the creators of an environment that would uplift and inspire the members of their family. The authors of Beautiful Homes (1878) encouraged homemakers to ensure that "each home [possessed] an individuality of its own which [would make] it as entirely distinct as any human character."⁹ Functioning as a picture of the inhabitants, a home should resemble its occupants as closely as possible, or at least impart information about them. Clarence Cook several times reminded his readers that "[t]he room ought to represent the culture of the family,— that is their taste, what feeling they have for art; it should represent themselves, and not other people. . . ."¹⁰ Individuality was hard to achieve, however, and in an issue of House Beautiful, Benjamin Estes complained that "[a]ll houses are unconventional in precisely the same way."¹¹ All of these authors, and others, had suggestions for the American homemaker on how to make their dwellings unique and expressive. Unfortunately, most of them consisted of a new list of fashionable guidelines on how to be "unconventional" rather than positive suggestions about how to develop or express individuality.

A central question for the Victorian homemaker thus necessarily emerged—how to distinguish between the worthy and the worthless, between those things which were useful to the home environment and those things which would distract from the urgent mission of education. An article on lace collecting in the December 1901 issue of House Beautiful suggested the problem. "The mania which exists at the present day for collecting objects interesting and uninteresting, worthy and worthless, is astonishing," the author noted.¹² A sea-shell may have served as a functional home for the sea-snail; but, confined within the what-not cabinet or shelf in a 19th century house, it lost its original function and became ornament.¹³ If she was to educate her family, the homemaker needed to consciously reunite ornament with some kind of usefulness, whether the original function or not. She could look for a shell with "the Lord's Prayer on it," or she could choose objects which would communicate information in more subtle ways. Helen Raymond Wells reminded her readers that "[a]ll of a child's first ideas and actions are simply reflections and imitations of what is going on around him."¹⁴ With the child as a blank slate, a mirror of its environment, mothers had to be extremely careful what was reflected.

Late 19th century Americans, as Howard Mumford Jones points out, lived with the "profound conviction that the visible world exists." This awareness of the physical reality around them led the late Victorians to the parallel conviction that environment had a direct influence on character and morality. As a result, they were very concerned about the relation between ornament and art, or form and function; and they consciously strove to understand the difference, if any, between the two. It was essential for the to make such a distinction, since the physical home environment worked for good or ill on her family members, especially but not exclusively the children. In this context, an appreciation of the finer things of life was not simply

an abstract matter of aesthetics. "Good taste," according to the progressive educational reformer Colonel Francis W. Parker, "is a quality intrinsic in character and morality. . . ." The same taste that "discriminates the ugly from the beautiful" also separated the "evil from the good, unrighteousness from righteousness. . . ." The editor of Harper's Bazaar, Mrs. M.E.W. Sherwood, built her theories of domestic decoration around the influence on personality of furniture, carpets, and wallpaper. "Indiana divorce laws may be perhaps directly traced to some frightful inharmoniousness in wall-paper," she claimed in Appleton's Journal in 1876. "The soothing influence of an Eastlake bookcase on an irritated husband has never been sufficiently calculated." The beautiful was beautiful whether as manners, emotions, cleanliness, or oil paintings; and dirty hands or awkward furniture were the equivalents of lax morals and unsound ethics.¹⁵

In trying to deal with the problem of how to unite form and function into an ideal of Beauty, so that "good taste" and moral truths would permeate the home, the authors of Beautiful Homes, or Hints in House Furnishing (1878) offered criteria which the middle class should use in discerning objects which would be "artistic." The middle class, according to Beautiful Homes, was entitled to the same luxury as the rich. The only difference was that the middle class could use less luxury, at a cheaper price, and often in imitation. Imitation, these authors insisted, was in perfectly good taste so long as such objects were "appropriate" and "useful."¹⁶

The issue of an object's authenticity was closely related to its ability to communicate the outlines of a canon of aesthetics. In his history of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Calvin Tomkins has noted that its founders justified the need for the museum by pointing to its value as an educational resource. As Joseph C. Choate put it, the museum would "gather together a more or less complete collection of objects illustrative of art in all its

branches, from the earliest beginnings to the present time. . . ." Such examples would serve for "the instruction and entertainment of the people," and as historically verified models for "students and artisans in every branch of industry," to show "what the past has accomplished for them to imitate and excel." In this context, the museum collected and exhibited hundreds of plaster casts which reproduced works of sculpture or decoration owned by other museums or individuals. The "great truths" of "great art were knowable through an object's physical form rather than its authenticity as an actual creation from the artist's hand. Such perennial validity existed, like a Platonic Idea, outside the fact of artistic production itself. Since home objects were to serve the same basically didactic function as "great art," the homemaker could accept imitations as valid educational models. This gave her at least one necessary guideline to use when selecting mass-produced objects in the marketplace.¹⁷

Whether real or imitation, however, objects were most appropriate when they harmonized with the general ambiance of the home, the use to which a room was put, and with the personalities of the home's inhabitants. Part of the homemaker's function was to insure a harmonious combination of home objects since woman's aesthetic sense was the exact counterpart to her unique ability to create harmony and balance in interpersonal family relations through the force of personal example. The first "desideradum" of domestic decoration, said A.F. Oakley, was "unity of expression in the whole scheme."¹⁸ Correctness of form paralleled rightness of function when an object was one which added beauty to the home. Beauty and usefulness, in fact, should be joined so that the two formed, in the words of Beautiful Homes, a "perfect pair" and united a "perfect whole," much like a married couple. "One is conscious of beauty, of the serenest loveliness, but it is toned down to one harmonizing chord" in the best homes, Mrs. Sherwood claimed in an article

on New York houses in Harper's Magazine (1882). For the middle class, art of necessity would be chiefly decorative, but the essential point of decoration was its appropriateness or harmony with the whole environment. It could be an inexpensive copy so long as it was useful in this sense of correct or in "good taste." These authors, and others, lamented the American penchant for insisting on the importance of usefulness over beauty; but, if the two were united and equal, no harm was done. As Mrs. Sherwood put it:

There are no glaring colors, no senseless and obtrusive frescoes, no crowd, no oppressive display of bric-à-brac in this house, yet bronzes and medals and gems lie about, . . . There is an over flowing beauty, but there is order and appropriateness.¹⁹

In speaking of usefulness, Victorian Americans had something particular in mind, which bore directly on woman's combined role as educator and domestic decorator. Useful did not necessarily mean that an object actually performed a function such as holding soup or hats, or keeping out sunlight that might fade carpets. For late 19th century Americans, the best art told a story or imparted a moral, whether it was a painted allegory of justice, or a chromolithograph from Louis Prang. In much the same way, Victorians treasured what-nots chiefly for their associations, for the memories what-nots could stimulate, and for the education in beauty their presence could provide. Clarence Cook, a well-known New York art critic, joined the chorus of voices on correct domestic decoration in his book The House Beautiful (1877). Cook claimed that fashion sanctified the presence of vast quantities of "bric-à-brac" in American homes; however, he emphasized that fashion was not their main purpose. The living room was "an important agent in the education of life. . . ." In a "house of wide-awake children. . . these objects, when they are well chosen, and have some beauty of form or color, or workmanship,

to recommend them, have a distinct use and value, as educators of certain senses--the sense of color, the sense of touch, the sense of sight." According to Cook, an object's use was educational and resided largely in its experiential qualities.²⁰ In his chapter "Woman's Aesthetic Mission" in Art in the House (1878), Dr. J. von Falke pointed out that the objects of the home surrounded children during the time they were growing up, and that from such an environment "we receive our first impressions, and. . .we are first impelled to cultivate the aesthetic sense." Indeed, such an education in aesthetic awareness continued throughout a lifetime, and the experiential influence of the objects in the home was "perpetual," affecting adults as well as children. Since many people might never visit a museum, a monument, or a mansion where fine art could be seen, beautiful home surroundings were essential if the taste, and hence the morality, of the middle class was to be educated.²¹

In "What to Give, Some Christmas-tide Suggestions" (1901), Madeline Yale Wynne forcefully recommended that each gift should express the giver as completely as possible, thereby communicating personal meanings through the affiliation of objects with memory, past experience, or imagination. While gifts have no doubt always been selected for such purposes, Wynne wanted the gift giver or recipient to make the relationship between beauty and usefulness a conscious notion. The giver could put some "wisdom into the humble-serviceable or the aesthetic-trivial memento" by looking beyond its surface appearance to its deeper associations. Instead of just a rag-rug, one could find "the summer, the hillside, and the sweet Adirondack fragrance coming to one in short lengths."²² Short lengths of rug or short lengths of fragrance were identical, and both could be purchased at a shop in New York City. In Wynne's view, things stood for other things or feelings outside their actual existence, and the ability to smell the mountains in one's rag-rug represented more than just an amusing hallucination. In the privacy of one's own dwelling,

one could learn through objects not only about sensations but also an awareness of underlying harmony and beauty. Through physical things, one could learn values in an almost organic way by a process of emotional osmosis. "The beautiful picture or softly tinted wall, the peaceful drapery," purred the authors of Beautiful Homes, ". . . may perhaps be the means of opening some fount of wisdom, else closely sealed, or touching some sensitive nerve of thought, otherwise dormant."²³

Alice Morse Earle, in China Collecting in America (1892), noted that one way to instill a spirit of patriotism in individuals was to use plates and mugs with pictures of Revolutionary heroes painted on them. In this way, the family members could imbibe knowledge about the valor of America's own heroes with every bit of nourishment they consumed.²⁴ Probably the ultimate example of the home itself as an educator and uplifter appeared in an article by Clare de Graffenried in The Forum of May 1896. Speaking to the issue of housing for the working classes, Graffenreid began by saying that "[t]he two civilizing agencies of highest value for laboring people, next to industrial training and baths, are bay windows and front door-bells. . . ." The front doorbell meant home as opposed to the common tenement hallway, and a bay window marked "the first departure from the merely needful and useful, the first outreaching for beauty and the ideal."²⁵ Graffenreid's spiritual redemption for the poor inhered in the physical fact of a private house, where function fraternized in the most intimate way with the sublime.

The well-appointed home, in other words, filled with appropriate objects, each having possible associative meanings or feelings, could serve as an education in beauty, sensory awareness, patriotism, upward mobility, or whatever value the homemaker believed was justified. Sensual experience of the objects within the home acted as an educator, prompting the inhabitants in the same passive but essential way that woman prompted by her personal example. If

the mother had less opportunity to teach values in a direct and active way, she could impart values indirectly by providing home surroundings through which her family could find transcendent meanings. The woman who carefully selected a vase, a hat-stand, or a picture, and chose the colors of her walls and draperies with care, elevated the status of the object to that of a communicative being possessed of a soul; and she retained her role as the chief moral teacher of the home. The woman who made such choices was, like the rare and exotic what-not, not just a "harem beauty," in Charlotte Gilman's revealing phrase, but a being invested with purpose, endowing her job as consumer with the highest moral concerns.²⁶

This emphasis on the decorated home frightened some commentators. It threatened to bring the values of the marketplace into the home along with the furniture, and to further undermine the stability of the family structure. Dr. Oscar Chrisman, in his address before the National Congress of Mothers in 1900, expressed the fear that women would concentrate too much on creating a fine home instead of on education in the science of motherhood.²⁷ However, the new cultural prescription integrated the concept of motherhood with the physical home, which women created as a purposeful outward manifestation of spiritual principles as well as cultural aspirations and moral lessons. It was not that an obsession with domestic decoration threatened the quality of American motherhood, or necessarily reflected only the selfish narcissism of fashion, but rather that it was an attempt to adjust the mother's role to a materialistic society. If middle-class women felt they could no longer control husbands, sons and daughters, or indeed any part of the world outside the walls of their houses, popular magazines and books told them they could still educate through objects and could still affect character by controlling the quality of their home environment.

Some women, like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, wanted women let out of their

"prison" and into the larger world. Others, such as the reformers of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, hoped to extend the umbrella of the home over society as a whole. For the middle-class woman who stayed within the tenets of domesticity, the ideal of domestic decoration provided a justification for her attention to material goods. A beautiful home, containing carefully selected and arranged objects, could create a sense of timelessness, where "under the soothing influence of an aesthetic, perfect bliss [the senses are] mingled with the half consciousness of tangible things just passing away and being merged into the unknown."²⁸ Homemakers literally could turn the "prison" described by Gilman and so many other 19th century women into another world. The woman who created such a spiritual haven, who took pride and care in the environment she provided, could conceive of herself as performing a vitally useful service. Like the what-not, her meaning did not rest in the fact of her existence but in the ideas and emotions she could suggest to her family through her attention to the details of the domestic environment.

Domestic decoration explained the function of beauty as the alteration of character through emulation of an ideal. The symbol meant more here than practical physical considerations. Because the emblem affected individuals in a direct way, it had absolute practical consequences. Veblen explained the workings of American society by reference to economics and the way the consumption or use of property exhibited economic status. The ideal of domestic decoration justified the striving for personal betterment by reference to aesthetics. Both explanations, however, pointed to the same phenomenon: the importance of public and private displays of domestic values.

CHAPTER IV

THE DOMESTICATED MARKETPLACE

The ideal of domestic decoration partially bridged a transitional point in women's role as homemakers by emphasizing the importance of their ability to make meaningful decisions regarding the home environment. As American society of the late 19th century moved from an emphasis on production to consumption of goods, woman's position within the home moved with it and she increasingly oriented her role as homemaker to the purchase of goods and services within the marketplace. The transition from women as producers of essential goods and services in the home to women as "purchasing agents" was slow and uneven.¹ Most homes reflected the fact that homemakers purchased some ready-made items while they continued to make others by hand. The "beauty of economy" dictated that homemakers determine what portion of the family income could go to machine-made goods, and what portion and type of home articles could be hand-made. The ideals of domestic decoration gave them one set of criteria to use in purchasing objects, and stressed that the origin of goods was less important than their contribution to the home. Most women were willing to continue to create home-made articles for domestic decoration—the personal touches that added comfort to the family domicile such as carpets, curtains, or cushions—but they no longer carded the wool or wove the cloth. While they might raise chickens in order to sell eggs, and thus participate in a direct way in the market economy, they also participated by spending their own or their husbands' earnings on items which other hands or machines had created.²

An understanding of what this transition from producers to consumers meant to a definition of domesticity is vital to an understanding of women's experience. If the actual creation of strictly utilitarian or marketable goods defined women's economic place in the family in the pre-industrial world, the decrease of that function inevitably altered her role and her identity. That certain segments of society found this loss troubling is clear from the strident defense of the value of home life and the insistence that a woman's moral example was as vital as her actual participation in the family economy. On the other hand, reformers interested in woman's public capacity gradually cultivated and enlarged the economic role of female consumers in recognition of the potential power of that position. Florence Kelly, of the National Consumer's League, described woman's public sphere as a consumer when she said: "Since the exodus of manufacture from the home, the one great industrial function of women has been that of the purchaser." The League (1900-1923) hoped to increase the power of women as consumers and then use that power to effect reform in the working conditions for lower-class women and children.³ The new profession of advertising also was aware that women took their job as purchasers seriously. Charles Austin Bates, in his six-volume work on sales method (1902), emphasized both the female consumer and the fact that she made rational, informed decisions:

The way to advertise is simply to give the news of the store. . . .If there is some new weave of dress goods, women will be interested in knowing how wide it is, what colors are shown, if it is rough or smooth, and then always the price.

He went on to add:

It has been said of women that neither sickness, death, heat, cold nor high water will keep them from a bargain

sale of dry goods. This may be true. . . , but look into the reasons for it. It is the woman of the house who usually does the catering and contriving and economizing for the family.

Bates even noted what he perceived to be a sex-specific difference in shoppers. Men, he said, tended to buy "altogether from windows. They pass clothing store after clothing store and look in the windows until they see something that they like, and then they go in and buy it at once." To bring in the male shopper, therefore, a store had to have attractively-trimmed window displays. The female shopper, on the other hand, wanted to know quality and price. Bates plainly considered the female shopper the more important, since his entire work promoted a philosophy of advertising that informed the shopper of the prices and quality of the goods sold.⁴

Magazines and books coached women to exploit this economic function to enrich their social mandate to educate, and to bind the two together within the context of homemaking. Woman's entrenchment in the domestic sphere made this seem a logical cultural development. Dr. von Falke claimed that woman's sphere generally excluded her from participation in the fine arts; but her place in the home included—indeed demanded—her attention to the morally powerful aesthetic details of the home environment. The house was "the province which I would assign to woman for the working out of her mission as a promoter of the beautiful. . . ."

Instinctively true to her nature, she has preferred the minute and charming, the delicate and amiable, the tender and graceful, and has cultivated it diligently, lovingly, patiently, with talent and skill, . . . but yet in a humble style.

With an unconscious echo of Catharine Beecher, Dr. Falke pointed out that

husbands, engaged in "useful ways, in making and acquiring money," did not have the time or inclination to develop their aesthetic perceptions in active ways. Their wives, however, in whom "taste" was almost a biological attribute and whose task it was to create a place of respite from the outside world, were infinitely well-suited to provide the countless small details of a beautiful home.⁵ Creating a tasteful home environment increasingly involved choosing among the goods of the marketplace those things that would define the quality of the family unit, accentuate a woman's personal attainments and judgment as a homemaker, and not strain the family finances.

Machine-made goods were increasingly available in all areas of the country, and home-crafts and mass-produced articles frequently rubbed shoulders within households. Store merchandising and advertising techniques present in Kansas towns, for example, were little different from those in larger urban centers, as were the goods which could be purchased. Kansas was, and remains, predominately rural in nature. Nevertheless, the nationalization of the market economy at the end of the century, and the ongoing improvement of the transportation system, provided even far western Kansas with links to Eastern and Midwestern marketing centers. Whether women purchased their goods directly from stores, from travelling salesmen, or from catalogues, the range and type of available goods were fairly even across the country by 1900.⁶ The methods of purchase and places where things could be bought, however, were different in urban and rural areas, as were the experiences of the female consumer in contact with the world of merchandising.

The necessity of dealing in the marketplace on an expanded scale could either challenge or reinforce woman's place in the home. In woman's public sphere, the urban department stores were among the first of the post-bellum institutions to reflect the national marketing network, and to respond to the desires of women as consumers.⁷ Large metropolitan emporia, such as

Wanamaker's, Macy's, Marshall Field's, and I. Magnin's, offered every conceivable sort of product at cheaper prices than smaller concerns could afford. Their size enabled them to cut down on the costs of the middleman, or eliminate them entirely. They could buy in large lots, and even in some cases produce the goods on their shelves themselves. Kansas in 1900 did not have the equivalent of a Wanamaker's or Marshall Field's; but its stores managed to offer wide choices in merchandise in a variety of ways. Most of the large retail stores of the 1880s and 1890s had begun during the Civil War as wholesale outfits, selling to smaller concerns around the country. They continued their wholesale trade, and in some cases utilized direct catalogue sales to individual customers. Potter Palmer's, and its successor Marshall Field's, carried on a wholesale business and catalogue sales until at least 1900. The same merchandise that was available to urban customers in Field's Chicago store was available through retail outlets in other states. Kansas stores, which had smaller physical plants than the metropolitan department stores, utilized local wholesale warehouses or catalogue sales to increase the range of goods they offered. The Kitchell & Marburg store in Topeka, which sold tools, household goods and sporting equipment, had catalogues available from every American and many German manufacturing and wholesale firms. If the store did not have a requested item on its shelf, it could either order from one of the catalogues or send a messenger a few blocks to the local wholesaler who could often provide the necessary item.⁸

The all-in-one department store inevitably reduced the uniqueness of the items offered, a special problem for women who were supposed to focus on individuality in the home environment. When Macy's or Wanamaker's, for example, purchased a truckload of bed-linen, they reduced the degree of choice in style, quality, and fit for the purchaser. Department stores were not at fault, however, for they merely sold the standardized, mostly machine-made goods

which an increasingly prominent middle class demanded. The desires of the middle class for inexpensive, practical, durable goods were making their impression on the definition of good taste after more than a century of fashionable attention to imported aristocratic styles, both European and Oriental. Self-appointed purveyors of good taste quickly decried this intrusion of popular cultural values on the national attention. They complained most frequently about the newness, sameness, and lack of individuality evident in American homes. This concern with sameness paralleled the widespread effort to standardize an "American" way of life. Added to woman's mandate to educate her family through objects was the task of showing the rest of the world the uniqueness of her home, her family group, and herself. The uniformity of mass-produced articles made this a difficult task.

Advertisers exploited the desire for uniqueness and exquisiteness by linking it to the search for the inexpensive so crucial to middle-class sensibilities. At Marshall Field's, women could find "an extensive stock" of shawls in "Rare Designs and Styles! and Lowest Prices!"; or carpets in "exclusive patterns" for "low prices."⁹ Charles Austin Bates told his readers in 1902:

A woman who possesses a little independence of thought, allied with a genius for doing as she pleases in the matter of dress,. . . finds the bargain day or the bargain counter a joy forever. The woman who dares to be original will ornament her house, too, from the spoils she gathers at cheap sales.¹⁰

In one of its early mail-order catalogues, Montgomery Ward's capitalized on the theme of uniqueness. In complete unassembled houses offered for \$1,198, the front door and colonial windows gave "a distinctive touch of individuality which [made] the 'Florence' pleasingly different from the ordinary home."¹¹

Due to the volumes of correspondence they had received from women who wanted the magazine to relay more information on inexpensive home decoration, the editors of House Beautiful claimed that they were providing more practical advice and suggestions on how to achieve a tasteful home less expensively. An editorial note in the January 1902 issue attributed increased circulation of that periodical to the magazine's new emphasis in its contents.¹²

The large urban department store provided a somewhat different atmosphere for the shopper and homemaker than was available in smaller cities, which extended the concept of home space at the same time that it focused on shopping as a social adventure. In the bigger urban centers, shoppers never had to feel they had even left home. In 1878, Macy's provided a place within the store itself where women could sit and read the daily newspapers or write letters, thereby extending the home roof over the palace of fine and consumable arts. Living in the cities, or the nearby suburbs, with fewer duties at home, allowed women to take the time to go out for lunch and perhaps meet friends at one of the city's restaurants. Daytime visiting among women, traditionally done at home, became a public amusement, and the department stores quickly took advantage of this change. Several of the emporia installed lunch rooms, and advertised Ladies' Luncheons. Marshall Field's Chicago store, in 1890, opened a small tea room with fifteen tables. The fifty-six patrons who were served on the first day were welcomed with a red rose on their plates. Within a year, the company enlarged the lunch room to serve 1,500 people per day. Eventually, this tea room became only one of several restaurants on the store's seventh floor.¹³ By 1890, a woman shopper in a large metropolis could spend her entire day in one store—contemplating works of art, selecting and purchasing objects for her home, reading, writing letters, and dining or visiting with friends. Even in their role as consumers, urban women took their traditional sphere with them. Or rather, the department stores provided

homes away from home for the woman shopper.¹⁴

Even by 1900, Kansas did not boast a city large enough to have such luncheon facilities within department stores themselves. However, they did have public spaces designed especially to attract women, and in particular, women shoppers who might want a lunch out or a quick bite to eat in the afternoon. Ice cream parlors provided a physical extension of feminine space and nearly every town of any size in the nation contained at least one such amusement. Figure 33 shows the Burt Ward Soda Fountain in Junction City in 1901. The space is essentially formal and contains the potted plants and statuary that were familiar objects in Victorian parlors, the public space within the house. In contrast, the saloon pictured in Figure 34 is a male public space without acknowledged cultivated clues. The one piece of statuary is lost among the bottles, which play a decorative as well as a functional role. Bottles serve a decorative function in Mr. Ward's establishment as well; however, in that case they are arranged in orderly rows within their own cupboard. Comparing the saloon with the male "den" in Figure 35 provides a useful contrast of male public space with female home space. The Wolfville room, clearly a man's study, has the orderly yet casual appearance of any other room in a Victorian home. Pictures and knickknacks, especially the portrait of the mother and child in its leafy frame, attest to the cultivated, "feminine" sensibility of this man's private space. In the home, even a man's private space was likely to be feminine in character. Domestic space essentially was feminine, to the extent that women's public places such as department stores or soda fountains carried over the atmosphere and symbolic imagery of domestic interiors. Women sometimes went into saloons to purchase beer for their husbands, but most middle-class women would not have dreamed of passing the afternoon in such quarters. Men frequented ice cream parlors; however, social consciousness dictated that such public arenas were essentially

a part of woman's sphere, a physical and moral extension of feminine home spaces. (In that regard, one suspects that Mr. Ward did not accidentally pose with his son for this photograph of his establishment.) In essence, then, female consumers operated within a feminized marketplace, catering to their response to material culture which was essentially "conservative," in the sense that it conserved the domestic world.

Department stores, naturally enough, focused on selling the profusion of goods they offered. However, one sales method linked the household objects sold with supposedly higher forms of culture and with the growing focus on objects as educators within the domestic environment. At the owner's request, architects designed Wanamaker's Philadelphia store as a classic monument, a work of art that would stand the test of time, an eclectic paean to the high culture of merchandising. The building contained a 2,000 seat auditorium, an enormous pipe organ, and a central court with marble columns. New York's Siegel & Cooper Company had a fountain presided over by the statue of a Greek goddess. The ladies' waiting room at Macy's, New York, was furnished in the style of Louis XV, and the adjoining room was a small art gallery where women shoppers could peruse fine oil paintings. Throughout, the stores tried to create the impression that customers were perambulating through a museum of fine arts and tasteful bibelots, and the line between the two was self-consciously thin. Harry Gordon Selfridge, in charge of retail merchandising at Marshall Field's in the late 1880s and 1890s, saw to it that the store had a special room for the exhibition of craft products. The first display consisted of the designs, wallpaper, and furniture of William Morris' artisans in a room where the goods could be both shown and sold. Later, he opened another gallery where "art linens" and small paintings were for sale. If middle-class women could not afford such articles, the department store invited them at least to make the connection between buying humble objects

for the home and experiencing Greek statues, marble columns, and "high art."¹⁵ Similarly, in Manhattan, Kansas in December 1893, the O. Huntress store hired an orchestra to play during one of its sale-days. At a sale in May 1900 at the Spot Cash store in Manhattan, "Professor Wilson a landscape painter occupied the corner show window. . .and greatly entertained large crowds of people who watched with interest the wonderful rapidity with which he painted scene after scene."¹⁶ The pictures were given away as prizes with each one dollar purchase. The store linked artistic production with the act of purchasing its merchandise, suggesting at the same time that its products were at least rubbing elbows with "fine art," and creating a festive atmosphere.

The physical size of the larger urban department stores made shopping a different experience in Wanamaker's, for example, than it was in the Kitchell & Marburg store. Sheer size allowed metropolitan stores to provide the shopper with a large public environment. The stores were huge physical plants wherein the shopper could lose herself, wandering through room after room and floor after floor of goods, literally overwhelmed by the range of objects and choices offered. The stores played on this fact, using promotional devices to give "going shopping" the character of an adventure. Store openings or sales were festive occasions, heavily advertised, and presented with the same ballyhoo as a circus.¹⁷ In Manhattan, Kansas, the small but ambitious Spot Cash store advertised free dinners for three days in January 1900, when customers could come as often as they liked and eat as much as they wanted. According to the Manhattan Nationalist, "over 1,000 people" accepted this invitation to the culinary promotion. While the Spot Cash store was considerably smaller than a Wanamaker's or Marshall Field's, it used the same promotional techniques as these larger concerns.¹⁸

Just what sort of a change for women this festival of merchandising

indicated can be seen if one makes a quick comparison to earlier attitudes. Susan Warner's best-selling novel of 1850, The Wide, Wide World, had pitted the young heroine against a shop clerk. She returned home from a shopping trip exhausted and upset by the rudeness and chicanery she encountered in a local store.¹⁹ Such feminine disgust with the secular world of merchants and materialism was a relatively common attitude in the group fantasy of the antebellum sentimental novel. But by 1890, that materialistic world was consciously catering to women as consumers. Many late Victorian middle- and upper-class women no doubt found shopping an exciting experience which implied increased mobility for their sex. The New York World referred to Macy's as "a bazaar, a museum, a hotel and a great fancy store all combined." A middle-class woman from Moodus, Connecticut communicated something of this when she referred to a shopping trip to Hartford as a "vacation."²⁰

Department stores, however, were only one aspect of the domesticated marketplace. The late 19th century domestic world still existed within the fluid time structure of the pre-industrial world, unlike the time-conscious environment of schools, offices, and factories. Consumption, for women, drew on the same kaleidoscopic variety of sources as did their social and personal lives. It was not uncommon, for example, for women in one area to purchase goods from a friend or relative in another area. Hattie Parkerson, in Manhattan, frequently asked her cousin in Topeka or friends in other towns to send her samples of cloth from which she could make a selection, and would then have them send her the goods she had chosen. Such correspondence often included news of family matters as well as the business transaction.²¹ This purchasing method was integrated closely with women's usual domestic habits. It continued the reinforcement of social ties once provided exclusively by the creation of home-made articles at quilting bees or spinning parties, and kept consumption completely within the domestic sphere.

Before the advent of suburban horse trams or horseless carriages, women who lived in rural areas more than five miles from a town seldom went to the shops. Julia Hand, for example, stayed on the family farm for eight months after their arrival in Kansas before she made her first trip to town. It is difficult to determine the feelings of women such as Mrs. Hand about shopping since when they did go to town their attitude toward the trip was equivocal and mixed with the reaction to a change of environment. Any kind of town marketing activity was a novelty for the farm woman. In rural areas, however, the marketplace frequently came to women in the form of peddlers or door-to-door salesmen. Such individuals provided a chance to combine gossip, news-gathering, and general socializing with the purchase of goods. Peddlers often provided entertainment for the entire family in the form of jokes, stories, and card tricks, and sometimes stayed overnight as guests in the home. In addition, catalogue sales brought the products of the larger world directly into the home.²²

Homemakers in small towns also dealt with delivery wagons or door-to-door salespeople, who could become familiar persons within the urban housewife's daily world. [Fig. 36] Such facilities meant that women did not have to leave home to purchase goods, which saved them time on the one hand, and deprived them of the "excitement" of the marketplace on the other. However, urban women could choose the most efficient purchasing method depending on their needs at the moment. At the busiest times of year for the homemaker, or in bad weather, it no doubt was gratifying to have one's groceries delivered rather than spend the time going to town for them. On the other hand, women who lived in or near towns often spent a portion of nearly every day among the stores, either purchasing goods or simply making a "tour," as Martha Farnsworth called it.²³

Shopping for some city-dwelling, middle-class women of the late 19th

century frequently was something other than merely the act of purchasing necessities, although such was often the case.²⁴ Shopping was seen by some women as a relatively frivolous although enjoyable activity. Martha Farnsworth sometimes put the word shopping within quote marks or underlined the word for emphasis. Underlining usually occurred when the shopping trip referred to was accompanied with a social visit to a friend, when she went shopping with someone else, or when it was followed by a dinner at a restaurant or friend's house in the evening. She often went shopping simply to fill leisure time. She found that taking care only of herself and her husband did not fill her days, and she almost never had any money to spend on anything but necessities during her first marriage. She went shopping alone or with friends as a social activity since much of her "shopping" was "looking" rather than making purchases. She also was aware that there was something not quite right in her husband's refusal to provide her with money for personal purchases. One of the few times she allowed herself to complain openly about his treatment of her concerned his refusal to give her money to purchase anything other than the household necessities.²⁵ Mrs. James Horton of Lawrence, Kansas referred to a trip to the furniture store as a "visit," with all the social implications of that word even though she was "visiting" with chairs and tables. (Figure 37 suggests one reason why the unconscious metaphor of a social call suggested itself to Mrs. Horton. Dumm's carpet room in Junction City replicated the interior of a fine home, in the same way that urban department stores suggested connections between domesticity and the marketplace.) Mrs. Horton made at least one recorded trip to Leavenworth, Kansas to visit Julia (either a friend or relative), purchase a bedstead, washstand, and towel rack for her home. Julia returned with Mrs. Horton to Lawrence to continue their socializing, and their shopping.²⁶

The relationship between the growth of leisure time and the relegation

of women to a passive role within society seems to hinge on their position as purchasers or consumers of material goods. Thorstein Veblen's analysis of upper-class women as consumers has become the standard explication of the links between increasing leisure time for women as they were freed from a strictly productive role, and their tendency to identify themselves with non-necessary material goods as they became consumers. Veblen's placement of consumption within a context of conspicuous waste presents this economic activity as one which, by implication, stifles women's sense of their importance. The thrust of this outlook rests on definitions of "leisure" and "consumption," two concepts which have varying meanings in different historical contexts. Lacking in Veblen's analysis was the perspective of the women he described.

Veblen's approach assumed that women of the wealthy class created extravagant home environments only to emphasize the economic power of their mates, and that the time they "wasted" on non-productive (i.e., social) pursuits highlighted the financial status achieved by their husbands. However, upper-class women wielded immense social power and prestige within their own female circle, a circle of events from which husbands routinely were excluded either at their wives' insistence or their own choice. The upper-class social world of Newport, Rhode Island in the closing years of the 19th century relied on young naval officers or male social climbers to provide a masculine element. The former were non-threatening within the domestic world of Newport because they were, by definition, of a different class. The latter were non-threatening because they made female concerns their own concerns. Fashion, correct etiquette, the social pecking order, and dynastic marriages were the chief concerns of both the upper-class women and their youthful male supporters, concerns which were essentially status-oriented, conservative, and different from the more democratic and changeable world of high finance which concerned the husbands of society's elite.²⁷ Thus, what Veblen perceived as

other-directed, non-productive leisure seems, from the woman's perspective, to be a self-aggrandizing, productive expression of the ultimate purpose of woman's separate sphere in the 19th century--that is, to conserve the ties of the social, hieratic, domestic culture which paralleled the egalitarian industrial outlook of a capitalistic society.²⁸

We can counteract Veblen's jaundiced view of consumption by pointing to the positive difference it made in women's lives in the late 19th century. It is clear that both urban and rural middle-class women of the late 19th century were aware that not all of their time needed to be occupied in the actual labor of maintaining a household, and that they were grateful for the respite from labor provided them by an industrial society. In a letter to Hattie Parkerson in 1892, Nell Chaffee told Hattie not to be concerned that bad weather had destroyed the latter's fruit crop. "[I]f you had no fruit you had none to care for, and. . .you will find something for a substitute." She went on to add that it was "so different from the way it was twenty years ago when one had to depend wholly on his own resources for supplies." The lack of fruit to preserve was a "gain" since it meant less work, and canned goods were available to fill the gap.²⁹ A producing society needed consumers, yet there was no intrinsic reason why those consumers should have been women. The act of purchasing allowed women to combine "leisure" activities--such as visiting--with productive activity in the act of providing supplies for their homes and families as well as themselves. Consumption, in other words, was not leisure activity in the sense of "non-productive time," but one which provided both a purposeful and enjoyable link with the world outside the home at the same time that it reinforced domestic values within the marketplace. In terms of the larger economic realities, it was a step on the path to a consumer rather than a producer society. The contribution of women to this economic change was enormous.

CONCLUSION

The late Victorians' intense awareness of mobility and change paralleled alterations in the cultural significance of domesticity. Woman's "separate sphere" put down roots in the public world, particularly to the extent that she became a consumer. In the years after the Civil War, attitudes toward home life played a part in America's attempt to define itself as a nation, and the appearance of national meanings for domesticity pointed to the increased public importance of the part played by women in the national consciousness. The late 19th century definition of home broadened women's participation in American society by expanding the significance of domesticity to adapt it to the awareness of mobility.

For late Victorians, the middle-class dream house represented tradition and stability while concurrently emphasizing the striving for fluidity and adaptability within American society. Changes in Kansas housing from the frontier sod house or dugout to the frame house reflected the 19th century emphasis on the possibility of altering one's status. By glorifying the Kansas frontier experience as "hardship overcome," writers at the turn of the 20th century constructed an emotional metaphor based on fact but extended to cover the changing experience of economic and physical instability. The frontier settlers expressed directly in their housing, and prescriptive writers tried to explain, a belief in the importance of the symbol of home over practical economic or physical considerations. The emphasis on the home as an expression of upward mobility seems at bottom to contradict the concurrent cultural meaning of home as an unchanging family arena. However, the emphasis on the necessity for a particular type of home reveals the under-

lying importance of home as an idea that could be transported and reconstructed by the creation of certain accepted symbols. In the same way that Victorians could purchase pre-fabricated houses, and have them shipped anywhere for assembly, so too the idea of what constituted a home could be transported by individuals. In addition, the essential notion of home as a domestic ambiance created by women could be physically moved in the form of household articles or interior arrangements. In this sense, the homemaker provided stability within the family not by her person but by her ability to manipulate the arrangement of objects.

The expanding market of the late 19th century flooded the American scene with thousands of similar, mass-produced articles, putting a strain on woman's ability to create a unique, personally-meaningful and tasteful home. At issue, however, was not the similarity of mass-produced articles. The antimacassars, acorn-adorned picture frames, and needle-point pillows of the Victorian home were hand-made yet remarkably similar. Pattern books were available for the homemaker to use in creating decorative objects. Partially constructed objects which she could purchase and finish as she desired could be ordered from pyrographic catalogues.¹ The distinction lay in the difference between hand-made and machine-made. In "The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1968), Walter Benjamin noted that so long as the authenticity of a work of art justified its presence, it served a largely ritual function. As a cult object, the article made by human hands acted as a significant, personally-meaningful link between members of a group.² This distinction is particularly pertinent to understanding how women coped with machine-made objects.

Bonnie G. Smith, in her work on French bourgeois women of the late 19th century, claims that women's fancy needlework performed a ritual function as a cult object.³ During the age of industrialization in the United States,

middle-class women continued to make many of the decorative objects of the home by hand. This was partly economic, in the sense that it contributed beauty to the home without costing vast sums of money. But the fact that fancy hand-work remained one of woman's tasks attests to its symbolic function as a reinforcement of feminine values. By adding hand-made details to machine-made goods, women admitted such articles into the home on terms which had meaning to themselves. We need not see this as a conscious, almost political, affirmation of "sisterhood," although that is one way of looking at it. At another level, the act of sewing told other women that one understood the language of femininity, and that one was "playing the game" by rules comprehensible to male and female alike. Women, then, invested themselves in home-made or hand-decorated articles. They defined their femininity and kept in touch with traditional feminine values, by using their own ingenuity to create decorative articles. Fancy needlework connected them with other females, maintaining their ties to a biological and social group. Unaltered or non-decorative machine-made goods, in contrast, could only bind women together vicariously, either through the act of shopping or through the display of machine-made articles selected for their hand-made qualities or evidence of refinement. As Walter Benjamin put it, without "authenticity," the function of an object becomes politics—that is, display divorced from its ritual function. Hence, we find the purveyors of domestic decoration utilizing the aesthetic of usefulness or representative beauty to explain the presence of curtains made of factory cloth, or commercial wallpaper, in much the same way that the statues in the Metropolitan Museum were to serve as models for an ideal.⁴

The lack of individuality and the imitative historicism and eclecticism of most machine-made goods prompted several critiques of industrial design. In England, the Arts and Crafts movement of William Morris and the furniture

design of Charles Eastlake attempted to reorient the values of industrial design so that decoration would more closely reveal the function an object was intended to serve. Eastlake's rough, simple furniture was extremely popular in the United States with the difference that American manufacturers added extra ornament, effectively quashing the intent of functional design. Eastlake, in fact, denied any connection between his furniture and that produced in the United States under his name.⁵ The late 19th century vernacular definition of beauty clearly pointed to the acceptability of additive decoration. Underlying substance meant simply a frame on which to hang the accepted emblems of beauty—a fancy scrollwork or machine-carved leaves. The middle-class woman, as consumer, may have hesitated to give up the intricate quality of applied decoration because it spoke to her of refinement as well as her ties to femaleness. In fact, there was an exuberant love of the aesthetic possibilities of industrial objects evident in the explosion of patterned wallpaper and carpet purchased by the middle class. Women of the late 19th century apparently were willing to transfer the significance of home-made to the objects of an industrial society. The discrepancy between form and function in industrial design which so bothered Morris and Eastlake seems not to have disturbed middle-class consumers. In fact, it may have made their transition to consumption easier by identifying industrial products with more familiar home-made items.

Women's role in defining a standardized perception of home paralleled her participation in the national market economy as a consumer. Middle-class women were at the forefront of accepting machine-made goods as part of practical, efficient, inexpensive home surroundings. At the same time, the marketplace reflected the importance of female customers, and accommodated their physical plants and sales methods to invite female participation at two levels: their need to make rational decisions regarding economy, and

their desire to unite their home surroundings with personal values. Women of the late 19th century did not perceive consumption as a passive task, but as one which drew on their vital creative energies as financial managers within the household. Unlike Veblen's discussion of upper-class women in The Theory of the Leisure Class, middle-class women's attitudes and approach to homemaking reveal the integration of consumption into their sense of themselves as homemakers. Women's participation as consumers, and their need to make choices in the marketplace, only became relatively less important when economic realities brought a negative value to frugality and objects were designed to be literally consumed—that is, used up and discarded. Women of the 19th century did not abruptly lose autonomy within the home because of the shift to consumption. Rather, they moved gradually from being predominately producers in the late 18th century, to a mixture of producers and consumers by 1900, especially in rural areas. The shift was not one of quality but of quantity. As the market expanded and moved toward national similarities, and the range of goods offered increased, the role of women as consumers increased as well. This gave women's role a national significance that private home production had lacked. It was not the chimerical political role of female consumers outlined by Florence Kelly, but a concrete economic one.

The other-directed mentality expected of middle-class women was challenged by their increased participation in the marketplace. Women seemed to enjoy shopping so much that some cultural critics perceived this as evidence that women had lost an important aspect of their femininity—their selflessness—to the frivolities of fashion, to the conspicuous consumption so maligned by Veblen. An increasingly wealthy middle class could enjoy a standard of living approaching that of the upper class, thanks to the products of an industrial society. Women benefitted directly in the altered use of time provided by labor-saving devices and commodities. But here, too,

fears of the decadent potential of leisured living came home to roost in the perception that such things as factory-canned vegetables led to wasted, selfish, non-productive time for women. In order to accommodate the wall-papered, upholstered interiors of middle-class homes to both the dictates of traditional feminine selflessness and the aristocratic strivings the new interiors evidenced, popular magazines and books poured forth an explanation of women's attention to domestic interiors based on her identification with the moral power of objects. The "ideal of domestic decoration" urged the homemaker to create a home which would, in itself and as an environment, become an education for its inhabitants, as a replacement for or in addition to the homemaker's own example. The early and mid-19th century "cult of domesticity" had elevated the moral power and importance of woman's character, based on her essential economic and social importance within the home. During the last thirty years of the century, the emphasis changed to one of selfless identification with the physical world solely for the sake of her family. Women's custody of the physical details of the home environment, heretofore a largely unconscious part of motherhood, became a conscious, deliberate cultural imperative.

The ideal of domestic decoration pervaded the literature concerning woman's role as homemaker, and to a large extent framed discussions in contemporary writing about the function of home spaces in family life. The women of Kansas reflected their belief in the importance of cultural emblems in their interactions with the physical environment as homemakers. Evidence of taste and refinement meant more to them than just upward mobility, the exhibition of their mate's financial status, or moral examples for their families. The home had a special meaning for women both as their work place and as their personal space, whether they lived in a sod house or a frame house, in town or in the country. Women's concept of domesticity was not as other-directed, nor as closely defined by family and a physical home,

as the ideal would indicate. Women's behavior—in the way they paid special attention to domestic interiors and the arrangement of objects, their attitude toward seasonal chores, and their acceptance of (or complicity in) extending domestic values into the marketplace—illustrates that many not only accepted the domestic sphere as proper to women but even accommodated seemingly non-domestic areas such as the marketplace to the purview of their "separate" realm. The primary sources do not indicate whether women envisioned these domestic spaces as educational, or whether they transferred the teaching function of motherhood from their direct action to the influence of objects, as domestic decoration tried to suggest. They were, however, aware that their femininity had close ties to cultured symbols. Julia Hand, who gave her husband a volume of Shakespeare for his birthday, never recorded whether or not he read it. She herself read whenever she could, and complained that her husband's sensibilities left something to be desired. Martha Farnsworth expressed the hope that her first husband would take her "example" to heart as a model for correct behavior, and never attempted to change his habits by direct confrontation.⁶ It is clear that the objects of the domestic environment did have cultural significance for women, as expressions of their self-esteem, degree of education and refinement, and as public emblems with meaning to the larger society. Evan Jenkins' assertion that women provided the cultural milieu for the frontier is borne out by women's attention to the presence of personal and cultural symbols such as pictures, napkins, papered walls, and caged birds. The difference between male frontier dwellings and female frontier dwellings was more than a figment of Jenkins' imagination. The crossed guns and rough, temporary furniture of Figure 38 contrast forcefully with the table cloth, the machine-tooled wardrobe, and curtained window of Figure 39.

Between 1870 and 1900, the cultural emphasis on home spaces changed from frugality for its own sake, to how to follow fashion cheaply. In rural

areas, where the necessity that women be producers continued in force longer, the aesthetic meaning of middle-class virtues such as thrift, adaptability, and practicality held on longer than in urban areas. Contrasting uses of space point to the encroachment of urban values into the rural home; and the gradual change in rural areas in domestic style points graphically to the lessening of the importance of economy as one of the values of domesticity, as well as the standardization of style in domestic interiors in all areas of the nation. In the 1870s, the fashionable, urban style of home arrangement was based on the economical, or frugal, use of space. Rooms were full of objects, but to give a sense of orderly, practical use and comfort objects were clumped together in what William Seale terms "instructive units."⁷ "Lady" Mann, a music instructor in Boise, Idaho in the 1890s [Fig. 40] grouped an instructive unit of artistic objects and a photograph over the table in her rented room. Figure 41 provides another example of a similar decorative unit. Although this style was no longer fashionable in urban or upper-class homes by the 1890s, it maintained its sway in rural areas until about 1900. The urban style of 1880 essentially "wasted" space—that is, objects were arranged about the edges of the room, without any attempt to group them in orderly or meaningful arrangements, or to provide a focus for thought or contemplation. This style was not evident on the frontier until about 1900, twenty years after it had gone out of fashion in urban centers. Figure 42 is the interior of a log cabin in Alaska Territory in 1903, and illustrates the scattered style which leaves large areas of floor space open and unused. Here the homemaker sits quietly reading surrounded by her handiwork (an echo of Figure 32 from The House Beautiful). The presence of fashionable ideas or ways of arranging room spaces in the rural home lagged about twenty years behind the urban ideal. This was not so much because women in rural areas were unfamiliar with so-called fashionable taste, but because they

justified their attempts at domestic decoration by slowly eroding economic values.

To return to an earlier metaphor, Veblen's ornamental woman was, to a certain extent, a fiction based on the perspective of an expanding, changing culture which, by its nature, called into question the continuance of the pre-industrial household rhythm. Often, when social values change, we have a tendency to explain the continuance of certain actions by reference to meanings that have little to do with their real function. We observed this in the fact that the functional significance of machines was for so long disguised by aesthetic justifications for additive ornamentation. We can also observe it in the attempt by prescriptive writers to describe consumerism as other-directed, selfless activity despite the fact that women enjoyed aspects of consumption such as shopping for purely personal reasons. In the case of women, this insistence on the continuance of a self-referential, separate domestic world masked the reality of changes in the cultural significance of domesticity and obscured the functional meaning that consumption had for many late 19th century middle-class women.

FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION

¹Eva Moll to Hattie Parkerson, 18 February 1898, Domestic Science Club Papers, Kansas State University Archives; and [Isabelle] W. Litchfield to Hattie Parkerson, 27 February 1899, Domestic Science Club Papers, Kansas State University Archives. The problems of defining an American middle class are made apparent in Burton Bledstein, The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1976), pp. 1-45; and, Robert H. Wiebe, The Search for Order, 1877-1920 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), pp. 111-32. Both authors see the American middle class of the 19th century as a social group linked by *common* attitudes. According to Bledstein, the American middle class has defined itself in terms of "acquired ability, social prestige, and a life style approaching an individual's aspirations." (p. 5) The middle class individual saw himself or herself as moral, religious, industrious, frugal and efficient.

²Two works on domestic history which deal with material culture have informed this study. See generally, Bonnie G. Smith, Ladies of the Leisure Class: The Bourgeoises of Northern France in the Nineteenth Century (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981); and, Elizabeth A. Cohen, "Embellishing a Life of Labor: An Interpretation of the Material Culture of American Working-Class Homes, 1885-1915," Journal of American Culture 3 (Winter 1980), pp. 752-75. For ease of communication, the term "American" will be used in this study to refer to an inhabitant of the United States. It does not include any other resident of the Western hemisphere, although they, too, are Americans.

³Statistics of the Population of the United States (Tenth Census of the United States, 1880), vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1883).

⁴During the late years of the 19th century, tasteful home interiors became a concern of the middle class, an apparent degradation of taste that decorators for upper-class clients felt threatened their position. This is one probable reason for the professionalization of interior decoration.

⁵The term "domestic decoration" is used to distinguish this prescriptive role for women from the profession of interior decoration. See, A.F. Oakley, "Hints on Domestic Decoration," Harper's Magazine 68 (December 1883-May 1884), pp. 579-87.

⁶The insistence on the selfless or "other-directed" nature of womanhood was an essential component of late 19th century definitions of femininity. However, the importance of individuality was gaining ground in American

society by the end of the century. Domestic decoration tried to spread a definition of selfless behavior over what appeared to be a decidedly self-directed indulgence in fashion. For a discussion of the relationship between cultural prescriptions of self-hood and other-hood for women, see Sue Zschoche, "Progressive Feminism and the Evolution of the Emancipated Woman, 1890-1930," unpub. ms., 1982, Manhattan, Kansas.

⁷Although women are often referred to loosely as "producers" or "consumers," the actuality of these roles and when they changed has not been described in any complete way. I will not treat the change as a time table either. Instead, I hope to describe women's behavior in order to shed some light on the meaning of those two experiences.

⁸David P. Handlin, The American Home: Architecture and Society, 1815-1915 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), pp. 425-30.

⁹For the now classic discussion of "Eastern" women, see generally, Nancy F. Cott, The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

¹⁰Harry Braverman, Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degredation of Work in the Twentieth Century (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), p. 293.

¹¹The two most useful books on the history of women on the frontier are Glenda Riley, Frontierswomen, the Iowa Experience (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981); and, Julie Roy Jeffrey, Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979).

¹²Isabelle Litchfield to Hattie Parkerson, 27 February 1899, Domestic Science Club Papers, Kansas State University Archives.

CHAPTER I

¹Lawrence Larsen points out that the late 19th century American west held the potential for a new society, one which could exploit the reform movements and progressive thrust of much late 19th century social and economic criticism. He notes that faced with the possibility of a new society, frontier immigrants instead reproduced their old values and social and economic institutions. Lawrence E. Larsen, The Urban West at the End of the Frontier (Lawrence: Regents of Kansas Press, 1978).

²Gwendolyn Wright, Moralism and the Model Home: Domestic Architecture and Cultural Conflict in Chicago, 1873-1913 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 9. This work is a review and summation of popular literature on the subject of domestic architecture and the late Victorian view of home, as well as an analysis of the professionalization of architecture and interior decoration.

³Dr. William F. Channing, "Organized Homesteads and Households," Popular Science Monthly 9 (May-October 1876), p. 733, author's emphasis.

⁴"Editor's Portfolio," Good Housekeeping 1 (2 May 1885-31 October 1885), p. 23.

⁵Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), traces the transference of cultural prescriptions about the spiritual nature of American womanhood from organized religion to the popular culture via women's novels of the 19th century. Douglas believed that this "sentimentalizing," or trivializing, of American Protestantism weakened the intellectual content of religion and served to entrap women in stereotyped roles. Amanda Porterfield argues that while the power of organized religion to interact with society did suffer in the 19th century, feminine religious values were not subsumed entirely into sentimental fiction. Instead, they became a part of woman's domestic role; hence, "domestic pietism." Amanda Porterfield, Feminine Spirituality in America: From Sarah Edwards to Martha Graham (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), p. 141. Henry Ward Beecher, quoted in Porterfield, Feminine Spirituality, p. 68. In the 1850s, Beecher's main audience was the middle class. In the 1880s and 1890s his ideas on mother's love as God's love were reaching the lower classes via the popular revivals of Dwight L. Moody. Bushnell's concepts of motherhood are succinctly treated in Porterfield, Feminine Spirituality, pp. 68-73; and, Kathryn Kish Sklar, Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1976), p. 162. Porterfield focuses on the theological aspects of Bushnell's ideas, while Sklar concentrates on Bushnell's description of the tension between domestic values and the demands of the rest of American society.

⁶Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-Paper," reprinted in Gail Parker, ed., The Oven Birds (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1972), pp. 317-34.

⁷ "Imprisonment in the values and spaces of home life is a central theme in the fiction written by [late 19th century American women]. Porterfield, Feminine Spirituality, p. 180. For a detailed analysis of images of enclosure and confinement in 19th century women's fiction, see generally, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

⁸ For a discussion of Gilman's views regarding woman's sphere, see generally, Porterfield, Feminine Spirituality. An inciteful analysis of Gilman's stand on the home economics movement, as well as a discussion of the ideas of Christine Frederick, is contained in Susan Strasser, "The Business of Housekeeping: The Ideology of the Household at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," Insurgent Sociologist 8 (Fall 1978), pp. 147-63. For the W.C.T.U., see Judith Papachristou, Women Together (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), pp. 88-97.

⁹ For the social implications of this emphasis on the home, see generally, John Modell and Tamara Hareven, "Urbanization and the Malleable Household: An Examination of Boarding and Lodging in American Families," Tamara K. Hareven, ed., Family and Kin in Urban Communities, 1700-1930 (New York: New Viewpoints, 1977), pp. 164-86. Turner's pronouncement has been challenged repeatedly by historians and others who point out that much of the land he referred to was still sparsely settled. However, that does not invalidate the late 19th century perception that an important American catalyst had disappeared. For a discussion of the Turner hypothesis, see, Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (New York: Vintage Books, 1950), pp. 291-305.

¹⁰ [Kansas Immigration Bureau], Kansas: Its History, Resources and Prospects (Wichita, Kansas: Eagle Printing House, 1890), p. 8.

¹¹ Carrie Strong Kay Robbins, Journal, 9 September 1887, Manuscript Department, Kansas State Historical Society.

¹² United States Department of Interior, A Compendium of the Ninth Census (1 June 1870), Table XI (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office 1872), pp. 378-82; and, United States Bureau of Census, Report on Farms and Homes: Proprietorship and Indebtedness in the United States at the Eleventh Census, vol. 13 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1896), p. 53.

¹³ Martha O. Farnsworth, Diaries, 1882-1897, Manuscript Department, Kansas State Historical Society.

¹⁴ Susan B. Dimond, Diaries, 1 January 1870-February 1872, Manuscript Department, Kansas State Historical Society; Emily Butcher, Diary, 1896-1897, Manuscript Department, Kansas State Historical Society; and, Julia Hand, Diary, 1872-1875, Manuscript Department, Kansas State Historical Society.

¹⁵ Statistics of the Population of the United States (Tenth Census of the United States, 1880), vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1883), p. 476.

¹⁶ Charles Eliot Norton, "The Lack of Old Homes in America," Scribner's Magazine 8 (May 1889), p. 638. In his book on the history of America's national parks, Alfred Runte demonstrated that the nation's awareness of its lack of man-made monuments provided the impetus for viewing "natural wonders" such as Yosemite and Yellowstone as nature-built monuments comparable to castles and cathedrals in their moral and psychological impact. Alfred Runte, National Parks: The American Experience (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979).

¹⁷ A.F. Oakley, "A Trial Balance of Decoration," Harper's Magazine 64 (December 1881-May 1882), p. 735; and, John R. Spears, "Odd American Homes," Scribner's Magazine 10 (1887), pp. 311, 315-16. "Igdlus" is Mr. Spear's spelling.

¹⁸ Evan J. Jenkins, The Northern Tier: or, Life Among the Homestead Settlers (Topeka, Kansas: G.W. Martin, 1880), p. 151.

¹⁹ Hand, Diary, 2 October and 17 October 1872. This town is now spelled "Glasco."

²⁰ [Kansas Immigration Bureau], Kansas: Its History, p. 19.

²¹ See generally, Jenkins, The Northern Tier; [Kansas Immigration Bureau], Kansas: Its History; and, Gazetteer and Directory of the State of Kansas (Lawrence, Kansas: Blackburn & Company, 1870).

²² Roderick Cameron, Pioneer Days in Kansas (Belleville, Kansas: Cameron Book Company, 1951), p. 65.

²³ "Ironquill," "The Kansas Dugout," F.H. Barrington, ed., Kansas Day, containing a Brief History of Kansas and a Collection by Kansas Authors (Topeka, Kansas: George W. Crane & Company, 1892), pp. 21-92.

²⁴ Solomon Miller, "The Homes of Kansas," F.H. Barrington, ed., Kansas Day, pp. 206-08.

²⁵ Anne E. Bingham, "Sixteen Years on a Kansas Farm, 1870-1886," (Topeka, 1921), Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, pp. 6-11, 18.

²⁶ Jenkins, The Northern Tier, p. 149.

²⁷ The Haumont family was of Belgian extraction, and their home replicates the post-medieval manor house of northern Europe in its high-pitched roof and corner towers. For information on the construction of sod houses and dugouts, see generally, Roger L. Welsch, Sod Walls: The Story of the Nebraska Sod House (Broken Bow, Nebraska: Purcells, Inc., 1968); and, Barbara Orringderff, True Sod: Sod Houses of Kansas (North Newton, Kansas: Mennonite Press, Inc., 1976).

²⁸ Emily Combes to her fiance, 25 May 1871, Manuscript Department, Kansas State Historical Society. The thesis is advanced in Welsch, Sod Walls, pp. 22-26.

²⁹ Welsch, Sod Walls, p. 98.

³⁰Helen Fritchie Kwolek, personal conversation with this author, 15 May 1982, Baxter Springs, Kansas.

³¹These are observations made by this author in April and May 1982 in Baxter Springs, Columbus, Yates Center, Parsons, Galena, Independence, and Abilene, Kansas.

³²Observations made by this author in April and May 1982 in Baxter Springs, Galena, Pittsburg, Columbus, and Parsons, Kansas.

³³For a discussion of Andrew Jackson Downing's place in American domestic architecture, see generally, Handlin, The American Home. John Kouwenhoven, Made in America: The Arts in Modern Civilization (Newton Centre, Massachusetts: Charles T. Branford Co., 1949), pp. 61-78. The change from sod houses to frame houses on the prairie perhaps illustrates an instance where the American vernacular style, based on the availability of vast amounts of wood, acquired an authority of its own out of keeping with the dictates of practicality.

³⁴Dimond, Diaries, 25 and 28 November 1872.

³⁵Orringderff, True Sod, pp. 130-32. As of 1976, five sod houses in Kansas still were in use as dwellings.

³⁶Kouwenhoven, Made in America, p. 13.

CHAPTER II

¹Jenkins, The Northern Tier, p. 150.

²Hand, Diary, 10 October 1872; and, Robbins, Journal, 4 March 1887.

³Jenkins, The Northern Tier, p. 154.

⁴Hand, Diary, 24 November 1872.

⁵Jenkins, The Northern Tier, p. 150.

⁶Mrs. Jennie F. Willing, "Helpmeets," The Ladies' Repository 31 (January 1871), p. 2.

⁷For a history of photography, see generally, Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1964). Because of the difficulty of taking interior photographs, very few examples of domestic interiors have been located. An excellent collection can be found in William Seale, The Tasteful Interlude: American Interiors through the Camera's Eye, 1860-1917 (New York: Praeger, 1971). Combes, letter to her fiance, 27 August 1881. See, Smith, Ladies of the Leisure Class, p. 67, for her analysis of the symbolic meaning of table arrangements.

⁸Mrs. Sweet, Diary, 5 and 12 May 1891, Manuscript Department, Kansas State Historical Society.

⁹This quality is analyzed by Karl Menninger in "Bleeding Kansas," Bernard H. Hall, ed., A Psychiatrist's World: The Selected Papers of Karl Menninger, M.D. (New York: The Viking Press, 1959), pp. 16-22.

¹⁰Annie L. Jack, "A Country Housekeeper's Ideal," The Rural New Yorker 22 March 1884, p. 190. Combes, letter of 25 May 1871.

¹¹Manhattan (Kansas) Nationalist, 18 January 1871, p. 1.

¹²The presence of the Populists on the national political scene represents probably the best example of this phenomenon. Howard Mumford Jones outlines the problems of cultural definition which afflicted Americans in The Age of Energy (New York: The Viking Press, 1971).

¹³This information was gleaned from a general survey conducted by this author in April 1982 of thirty years of issues of The Rural New Yorker. Sophia Bennett Crowe mentioned subscribing to the newspaper in her Diary on 14 April 1874, Manuscript Department, Kansas State Historical Society.

¹⁴Hattie Parkerson, "How to Improve the Home," ms. of lecture delivered to the Domestic Science Club on 23 April 1887, Domestic Science Club Papers, Kansas State University Archives.

¹⁵See generally, Domestic Science Club Papers, Kansas State University Archives. For an interesting discussion of Christine Frederick's efforts in domestic science, and the late 19th century attitudes toward this subject, see, Strasser, "The Business of Housekeeping," Insurgent Sociologist, pp. 147-63.

¹⁶Hattie Parkerson, "How to Improve the Home." Sample titles in the Club papers include, Ellen D. Goodnow, "Shells and Corals," 18 May 1899; "Some Insects of Interest," circa 1890; and, Hattie Parkerson, "Monchonaka The Island of Romance," undated.

¹⁷"Lydia Marie Francis Child," Domestic Science Club Papers, Kansas State University Archives, circa 1899. Ellen Goodnow, "Health of Women," 5 December 1885; and, Hattie Parkerson, outline for a lecture on health, circa April 1890, Domestic Science Club Papers, Kansas State University Archives.

¹⁸Handlin, The American Home, p. 429. Mrs. French to her brother, 5 April 1891, Domestic Science Club Papers, Kansas State University Archives.

¹⁹Bingham, "Sixteen Years on a Kansas Farm," pp. 9-10.

²⁰Sweet, Diary, March 1890.

²¹Ella J. Whitney to Hattie Parkerson, 28 July 1872, Domestic Science Club Papers, Kansas State University Archives. Bingham, "Sixteen Years on a Kansas Farm," pp. 9-10. "Belle" [Isabelle W. Litchfield] to Hattie Parkerson, 19 March 1898 and 27 February 1899, Domestic Science Club Papers, Kansas State University Archives.

²²For a discussion of the impact of frontier conditions on women's work place in the home, see, Riley, Frontierswomen, the Iowa Experience, pp. 29-54. Robbins, Diary, 4 March 1887.

²³Emma Denison to Hattie Parkerson, 5 January 1873, Domestic Science Club Papers, Kansas State University Archives.

²⁴This was somewhat lower than the national averages of 34.08 per cent for farms and 63.10 per cent for homes. United States Bureau of Census, Report on Farms, vol. 13, Table 16, p. 42.

²⁵Lizzie H. Brown to "Nancy," 20 March 1877, Lizzie and Lottie Hayes Correspondence, Manuscript Department, Kansas State Historical Society. Crowe, Diary, 15 September 1874.

²⁶United States Bureau of Census, Report on Farms, vol. 13, Table 88, p. 88.

²⁷Farnsworth, Diaries, 20 November 1895. Lizzie Brown to "Nancy," 20 March 1877.

²⁸Hand, Diary, 20 April 1873. For an analysis of the growing distrust of boarders, which went along with the increasing trend towards the importance of privacy in family dwellings, see Modell and Haraven, "Malleable Households," Family and Kin in Urban Communities, pp. 164-86.

²⁹Dimond, Diaries, March and April 1872.

³⁰Mrs. James Horton, Diary, April 1874, Manuscript Department, Kansas State Historical Society.

³¹Emma Denison to Hattie Parkerson, 5 February 1873, Domestic Science Club Papers, Kansas State University Archives.

³²Farnsworth, Diaries, 18 November 1893; 16 May 1894; 6 March 1890; 2 December 1890; and, 9 May and 28 July 1896.

³³Dimond, Diaries, 25 and 28 November 1872.

³⁴Hand, Diary, 7 November 1872.

CHAPTER III

¹For a discussion of the purposes behind home decoration, see generally, Seale, Tasteful Interlude; and, Clifford E. Clark, Jr., "Domestic Architecture as an Index to Social History: The Romantic Revival and the Cult of Domesticity in America, 1840-1890," Journal of Interdisciplinary History 7 (Summer 1976), pp. 33-56.

²Mark Twain, Life on the Mississippi (New York: H.O. Houghton and Company, 1874; reprint ed., New York: Harper & Brothers, 1902), pp. 280-81.

³For an analysis of the part played by objects in working class homes, see generally, Cohen, "Embellishing a Life of Labor," Journal of American Culture, pp. 752-75.

⁴For reference to the continuing interest in the "decorative art craze," see, A.F. Oakley, "A Trial Balance of Decoration," Harper's Magazine, pp. 734-40; and, Mrs. M.E.W. Sherwood, "Certain New York Houses," Harper's Magazine 65 (June-November 1882), pp. 680-90. It is entirely possible that the ideal role described here also existed in England, especially since some magazine articles on domestic decoration were reprinted from English periodicals. However, a major component would be lacking in England. Clifford Clark has pointed out that, while the association of architectural forms and spiritual ideals can be traced to England, America contributed the ethical dimension that empowered the home environment to act on the moral development of individuals. (Clark, "Domestic Architecture," Journal of Interdisciplinary History, pp. 33-56.) In addition, major dissimilarities do seem to have existed between the American and English 19th century middle classes which would have a bearing on the purpose of prescriptions about domestic decoration. See, for example, Leonore Davidoff, The Best Circles: Women and Society in Victorian England (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973), pp. 34-36.

⁵For information on Catharine Beecher's domestic arrangements, see, Siegfried Giedion, Mechanization Takes Command: A Contribution to Anonymous History (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1975), pp. 514-16; Robert Bishop and Patricia Coblentz, The World of Antiques, Art and Architecture in Victorian America (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1979), pp. 306-46; and, Sklar, Catharine Beecher, pp. 151-67. For woman's sphere in the 19th century, see generally, Cott, The Bonds of Womanhood; and, Sheila M. Rothman, Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1978).

⁶Giedion, Mechanization, p. 396. Giedion's discussion here focuses on posture and the reclining pose which office furniture encouraged, in direct contravention to the "ruling taste." According to Giedion's interpretation, formal home spaces were dominated in the 19th century by fashion imposed from above. John A. Kouwenhoven, on the other hand, postulates that the vernacular played a stronger role in middle-class taste than high style; at least until middle-class taste altered around the turn of the century to embrace upper-

class styles. See generally, Kouwenhoven, Made in America.

⁷Dr. William F. Channing, "Organized Homesteads and Households," Popular Science Monthly 9 (May-October 1876), p. 733. A Grandmother, "Hints on Housekeeping," Catholic World 10 (October 1869-March 1870), pp. 610-14. "The Religion of the Family," The Ladies' Repository 31 (January 1871), p. 52. For the most complete treatment to date on 19th century housing reform, see generally, Dolores Hayden, The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Design for American Homes, Neighborhoods and Cities (Boston: M.I.T. Press, 1981).

⁸For a discussion of the changing status of families in the late 19th century, see Rothman, Woman's Proper Place, pp. 14-18. Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973). Marian H. Ford, "Attractive Homes," Potter's American Monthly 16 (1881), p. 55. "Mothers and Culture," The Ladies' Repository 31 (January 1871), p. 63. Willing, "Helpmeets," The Ladies' Repository, p. 4.

⁹Henry T. Williams and Mrs. C.S. Jones, Beautiful Homes, or Hints in House Furnishing (New York: Henry T. Williams, Publisher, 1878), p. 4.

¹⁰Clarence Cook, The House Beautiful: Essays on Beds and Tables and Stools and Candlesticks (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1877; reprint ed., New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1881), pp. 28-9.

¹¹Benjamin Estes, "Commonplace Originality in House-Furnishing," House Beautiful 11 (December 1901-May 1902), p. 172.

¹²Ev. B. M., "On Lace Collecting," House Beautiful 11 (December 1901-May 1902), p. 48.

¹³Bishop and Coblenz, World of Antiques, p. 132.

¹⁴Helen Raymond Wells, "Expression," Trained Motherhood 6 (1900), p. 9.

¹⁵Jones, The Age of Energy, p. 17. Colonel Francis W. Parker, "An Ideal Education," Trained Motherhood 7 (1900), p. 11. Mrs. M.E.W. Sherwood, "The Mission of Household Art," Appleton's Journal 15 (15 February 1876), p. 179. Commenting on the use of words and physical space in late 19th century America, Burton Bledstein noted: "Describing the outer structure of the visible universe, Mid-Victorians believed that they also described the inner structure of the invisible one." Bledstein, Culture, p. 55. The theoretical relationship between the physical world and the spiritual one, and the way the former acted as a channel through which to achieve salvation, is outlined in Donald J. Mrozek, "American Sports and American Mentality: Action, Renewal, and Respectability, 1880-1910," unpub. ms., chap. 2, 1982, Manhattan, Kansas. Middle-class women generally believed that the task of passing on an appreciation for beauty and good taste essentially belonged to women. As well as these judgmental traits, Rose Hartwick Thorpe went so far as to assign biological characteristics to the female ability to impart values and knowledge. According to her, children received their physical and moral inheritance only from their mother. They acquired their mother's intelligence even if their father was a "brute." In addition, Thorpe believed women could biologically pass on learned behavior, a feeling for beauty, and a

general "cultivated" sensibility. Rose Hartwick Thorpe, As Others See Us, or the Rules and Customs of Refined Homes and Polite Society (Detroit: F.B. Dickerson Company, 1896), p. 5.

- 16 Williams and Jones, Beautiful Homes, p. 5.
- 17 Joseph C. Choate, quoted in Calvin Tomkins, Merchants and Masterpieces: The Story of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York: E.P. Dutton Co., Inc., 1970), p. 21. In fact, it could be said that imitations were superior to the genuine articles because the former had beauty without the monetary value which society placed on the latter. This was the argument used in "Beauty versus Bric-a-Brac," Lippincott's Monthly Magazine 31 (1882-1883), pp. 202-06.
- 18 Oakley, "Hints on Domestic Decoration," Harper's, p. 585.
- 19 Williams and Jones, Beautiful Homes, p. 5. Sherwood, "Certain New York Houses," Harper's, pp. 687-88.
- 20 Cook, The House Beautiful, pp. 101-02.
- 21 Dr. Jacob von Falke, Art in the House: Historical, Critical, and Aesthetical Studies on the Decoration and Furnishing of the Dwelling (Boston: L. Prang and Company, 1879), pp. 316-17.
- 22 Madeline Yale Wynne, "What to Give, Some Christmas-tide Suggestions," House Beautiful 11 (December 1901-May 1902), p. 20.
- 23 Williams and Jones, Beautiful Homes, p. 3.
- 24 Alice Morse Earle, China Collecting in America (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892; reprint ed., Detroit: Singing Tree Press, 1970), pp. 164-65.
- 25 Clare de Graffenreid, "Need of Better Homes for Wage-Earners," The Forum 21 (May 1896), p. 301.
- 26 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, The Home, quoted in William L. O'Neill, The Woman Movement: Feminism in the United States and England (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1969), pp. 129-32.
- 27 Dr. Oscar Chrisman, "Man Reasons, Woman Loves," Trained Motherhood 7 (1900), p. 20.
- 28 Williams and Jones, Beautiful Homes, p. 45.

CHAPTER IV

¹The term "purchasing agent" was taken from an article written for Cosmopolitan magazine in 1899. The authors, fifty young working women, described the home using business terminology and suggested that the household should be organized into specialized departments as if it were a large corporation. Fifty Young Women, "Ideal and Practical Organization of the Home," Cosmopolitan 27 (1899), pp. 167-71. Their description of this "business" environment, however, still contained suggestions that the homemaker pay special attention to the educative value of sculpture and paintings for the home (p. 170).

²Bonnie Smith believes that women continued to create hand-made decorative articles in order to assert the fact of their femininity through delicate fancy-work. Needlework performed the function of reinforcing "sisterhood" in the sense that it identified women with a female group-consciousness. Smith, Ladies of the Leisure Class, p. 68. All of the diaries used in this study (except Mrs. Horton's) mention raising chickens in order to sell the eggs or making butter which they then sold.

³Quoted in Allis Rosenberg Wolfe, "Women, Consumerism, and the National Consumers' League in the Progressive Era, 1900-1923," Labor History 16 (1976), p. 379.

⁴Charles Austin Bates, The Art and Literature of Business, vol. 3 of 6 (New York: Bates Publishing Company, 1902), pp. 3, 111-12. Bates' comments provide an interesting contrast to those of William Leach, True Love and Perfect Union: The Feminist Reform of Sex and Society (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1980), pp. 213-60. Leach focuses on the dress reformers' attempts to undermine the tyranny of fashion, and charts the change in men's clothing styles to show that by 1890 a man who was interested in fashion was considered by society to be unmanly. Bates implies, in contradiction to Leach, that male shoppers could be snared by decoration while female shoppers required rational reasons for making purchases.

⁵Falke, Art in the House, pp. 312-15.

⁶Kansas between 1870 and 1900 found itself at the end of the transition from open frontier to a combination of urban encroachment and agricultural orientation. In the 1870s, there were great discrepancies between the eastern and western portions of the state; but by 1900, some of these differences in character of settlement had disappeared. The area of settlement in Kansas in 1900 (where two or more people lived per square mile) extended north and south along the boundary of the Arkansas River. The remaining one-sixth of the state had been organized into counties by 1890, but in 1900 this land remained relatively empty of inhabitants in extreme western Kansas and eastern Colorado. The land which was settled contained at least one urban area in the form of a county seat. In 1870, the urban population of the state had been about 7 per cent; by 1900 it had risen to about 14.5 per cent, but most of the urban areas were found in the eastern half of the state.

U. S. Department of Interior, A Compendium of the Ninth Census (1 June 1870), vol. 1, Table XLVI (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1872), pp. 540-41. "Population," Census Reports (12th Census, 1900), Part 1, Plates 5, 8, 9, and 11 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Office, 1901), n.p.

⁷The changing social role of women as consumers is outlined in Rothman, Woman's Proper Place, pp. 14-21. In her discussion of department stores, she emphasizes the interpretation that such stores provided a public sphere for women that helped them escape from the home environment.

⁸For an analysis of late 19th century business methods, see Thomas C. Cochran, Business in American Life: A History (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1972), pp. 145-59. For the development of department stores and their merchandising techniques, see Paul H. Nystrom, Economics of Retailing, 3rd ed. (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1930), pp. 134-41. A useful discussion of the economics of catalogue sales and the growth of retailing throughout the country can be found in Boris Emmet and John E. Jeuck, Catalogues and Counters: A History of Sears, Roebuck and Company (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950), pp. 9-22. Philip W. Whitcomb, "Reminiscences of Working for the Kitchell & Marburg Hardware Store," (Topeka, 1882-1940), Manuscript Department, Kansas State Historical Society.

⁹Advertisement, quoted in Lloyd Wendt and Herman Kogan, Give the Lady What She Wants! (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1952), p. 170.

¹⁰Bates, The Art and Literature of Business, pp. 3-4.

¹¹Advertisement, date unknown (circa 1890), quoted in Robert Hendrickson, The Grand Emporiums: The Illustrated History of America's Great Department Stores (New York: Stein and Day, 1979), pp. 248-49.

¹²"Publisher's Note," House Beautiful 11 (December 1901-May 1902), pp. 422-23.

¹³Rothman, Woman's Proper Place, p. 21; and, Wendt and Kogan, Give the Lady, p. 212.

¹⁴This concept is mentioned in Leach, True Love, pp. 234-35; however, he does not draw out the implications of this effect on woman's position as homemaker. Basically, he takes the same view as Rothman—that department stores provided an outlet for women's leisure energies that was qualitatively distinct from the household.

¹⁵Rothman, Woman's Proper Place, pp. 19-20; Hendrickson, The Grand Emporiums, pp. 110-11 (Wanamaker's Grand Depot opened in Philadelphia in 1876); and, Wendt and Kogan, Give the Lady, pp. 206-13.

¹⁶Manhattan (Kansas) Nationalist, 18 May 1900, n.p.

¹⁷Leach, True Love, p. 233.

¹⁸Manhattan (Kansas) Nationalist, 12 January 1900, n.p.

¹⁹An analysis of this novel can be found in Douglas, Feminization, p. 63.

²⁰New York World, quoted in Rothman, Woman's Proper Place, p. 19. Nell E. Chaffee to Hattie Parkerson, 3 November 1892, Domestic Science Club Papers, Kansas State University Archives.

²¹"Frank" to Hattie Parkerson, 2 August and 28 July 1877, Domestic Science Club Papers, Kansas State University Archives.

²²Hand, Diary, 8 June 1873. For a lively reminiscence about peddlers in rural Kansas, see Clifton J. Oldham, "Prairie Lad," undated (late 1880s), Manuscript Department, Kansas State Historical Society, pp. 58-60.

²³Farnsworth, Diaries, 1 October 1890.

²⁴There is evidence that shopping as pleasure or leisure activity changed from an upper-class prerogative to a middle-class activity by the end of the 19th century. The definition of "shopping" in the Oxford English Dictionary notes something of the class distinction which was attached to the word in the early 19th century. It lists Thacker's Vanity Fair of 1848 which referred to the "delightful round of visits and shopping which forms the amusement. . . of the rich London lady." Oxford English Dictionary, vol. 9 of 19 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1933), p. 738.

²⁵Farnsworth, Diaries, 12 May and 20 August 1890.

²⁶Horton, Diary, 11 and 29 April 1874.

²⁷An amusing and revealing history of the social queens of Newport, Rhode Island can be found in Richard O'Connor, The Golden Summers: An Antic History of Newport (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1974). The meaning of society for upper-class women in England and middle-class women in France in the 19th century is outlined from the perspective of woman's sphere in Davidoff, The Best Circles; and, Smith, Ladies of the Leisure Class. Davidoff believes that the constructs of English Victorian society provided links between the family and the political and economic world. Smith separates men's and women's spheres completely, as antagonistic poles within late 19th century French middle-class life. Both authors, however, focus on the importance of social values within a context of domesticity as central to women's autonomy.

²⁸Bonnie G. Smith analyses the differences between the male and female worlds based on education and their different set of cultural symbols. See generally, Smith, Ladies of the Leisure Class.

²⁹Nell Chaffee to Hattie Parkerson, 3 November 1892, Domestic Science Club Papers, Kansas State University Archives.

CONCLUSION

¹On the use of patterns for decorative objects, see Annie M. Harper, "Art Needlework," Potter's Monthly Magazine 16 (1881), pp. 41-48. New Ideas in Pyrography and Material Price List (Rochester, New York: George W. Davis & Co., Fall 1904-Spring 1905). This catalogue contains such items as furniture, frames, trays, shelves, and vases.

²Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Illuminations (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968), p. 226.

³Smith, Ladies of the Leisure Class, pp. 68-69.

⁴Benjamin, "The Work of Art," Illuminations, p. 226.

⁵Handlin, The American Home, p. 442; and, Wright, Moralism and the Model Home, pp. 60-61.

⁶Hand, Diary, 8 September 1872. Farnsworth, Diaries, 5 September 1890.

⁷Seale, The Tasteful Interlude, p. 19.

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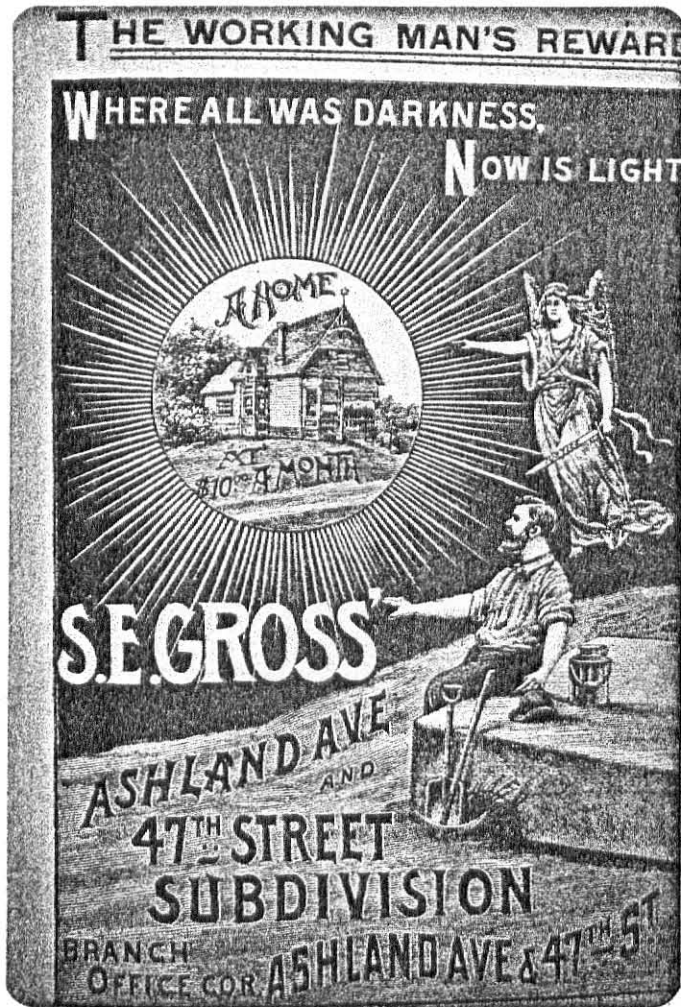


Figure 1. This advertising broadside was widely circulated in the Chicago area in the late 1880s in order to promote the fortunes of S.E. Gross and Company. (Chicago Historical Society)

Figure 2. Sod house in Finney County, Kansas, 1890s. (Kansas State Historical Society)

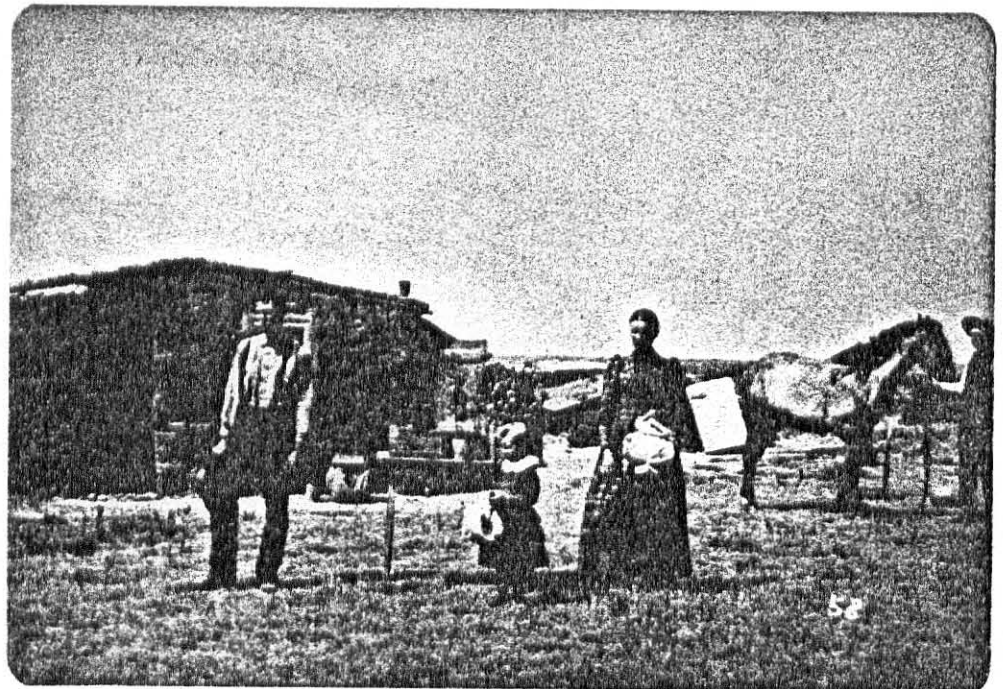




Figure 3. Exterior view of a Ford County, Kansas, dugout, ca. 1880. (Kansas State Historical Society)

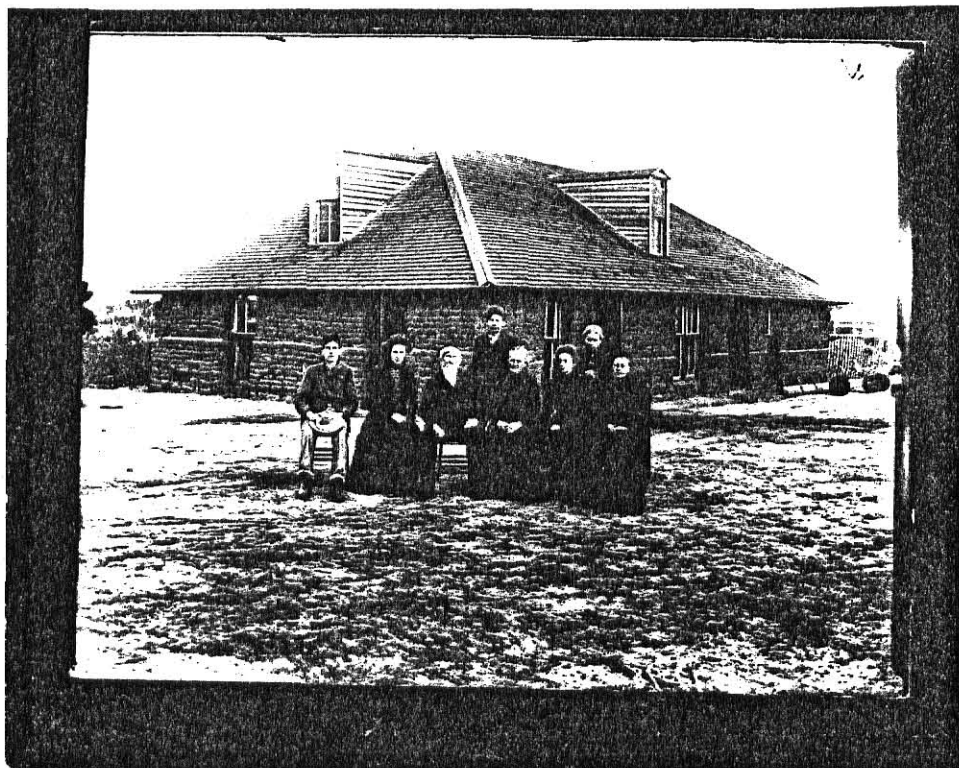


Figure 4. New sod house in Rose Valley, Custer County, Nebraska, 1887. (Solomon D. Butcher Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society)

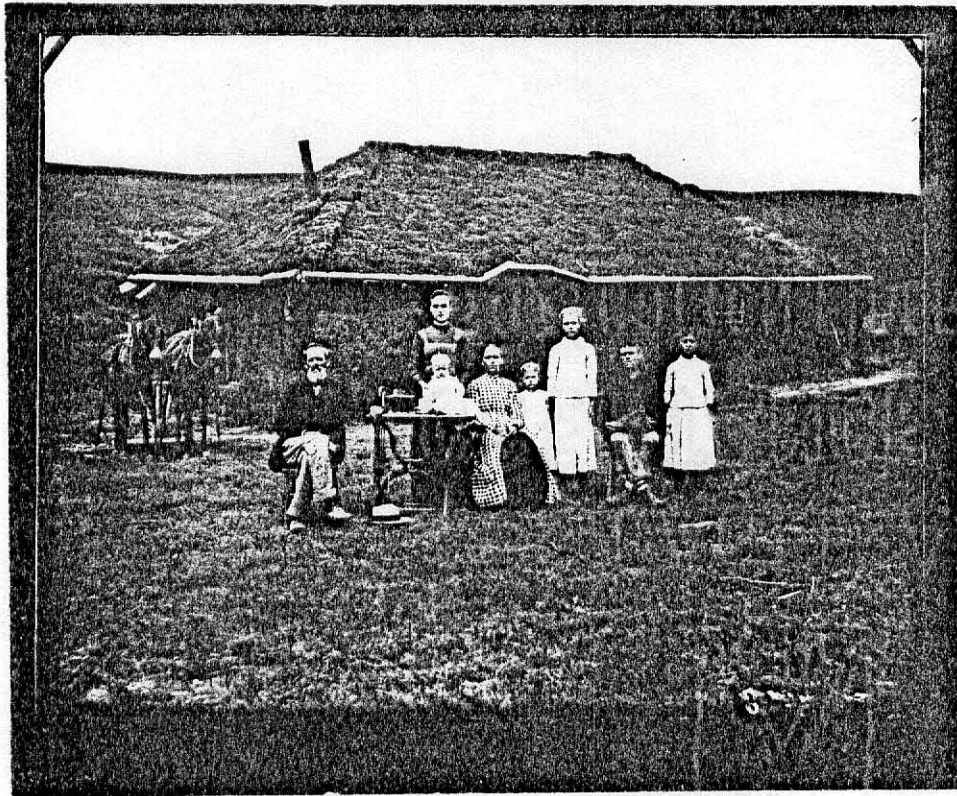


Figure 5. Sod house of W.H. Blair, near Broken Bow, Nebraska, 1888. Note the presence of the family's two most valuable possessions—a mule team and a sewing machine. (Solomon D. Butcher Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society)



Figure 6. Home of Isadore Haumont, near Broken Bow, Nebraska. Photograph taken 1886 or 1887. Home built in 1884-1885. (Solomon D. Butcher Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society)

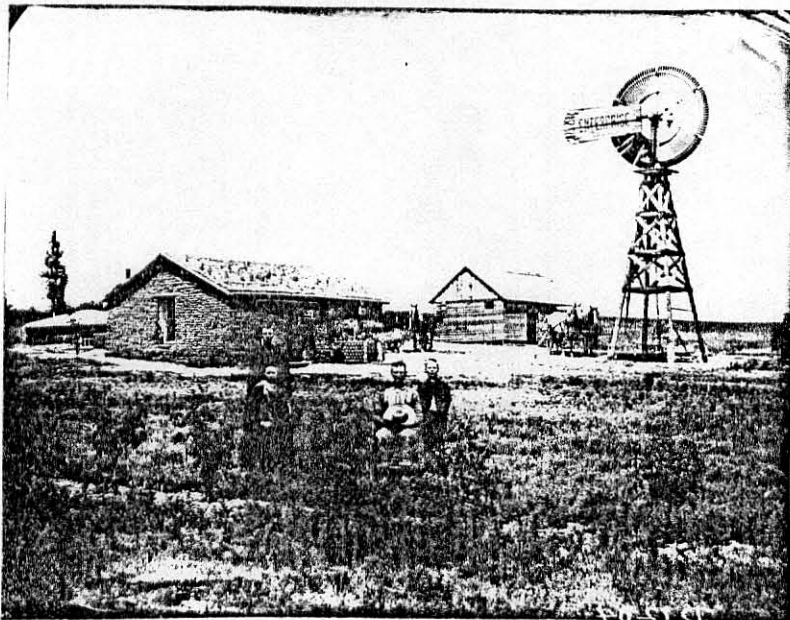
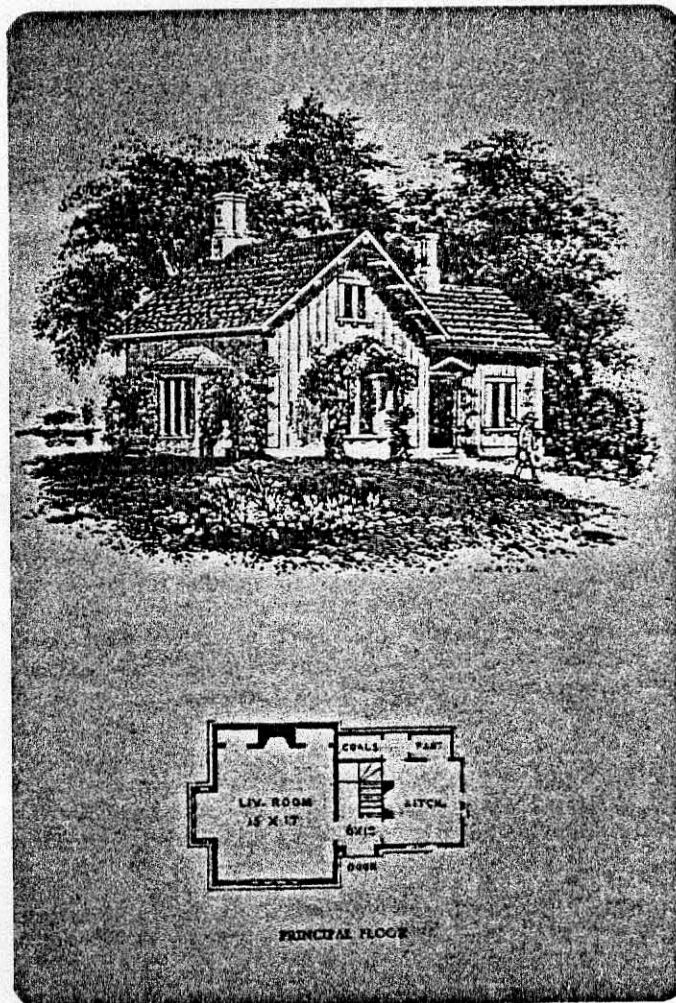


Figure 7. Sod house in Custer County, Nebraska, 1887.
 (Solomon D. Butcher Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society)

Figure 8. Model for pattern-book cottage, from Andrew Jackson Downing, The Architecture of Country Houses, p. 79.
 (Reproduced in Clifford E. Clark, Jr., "Domestic Architecture," Journal of Interdisciplinary History, p. 39)



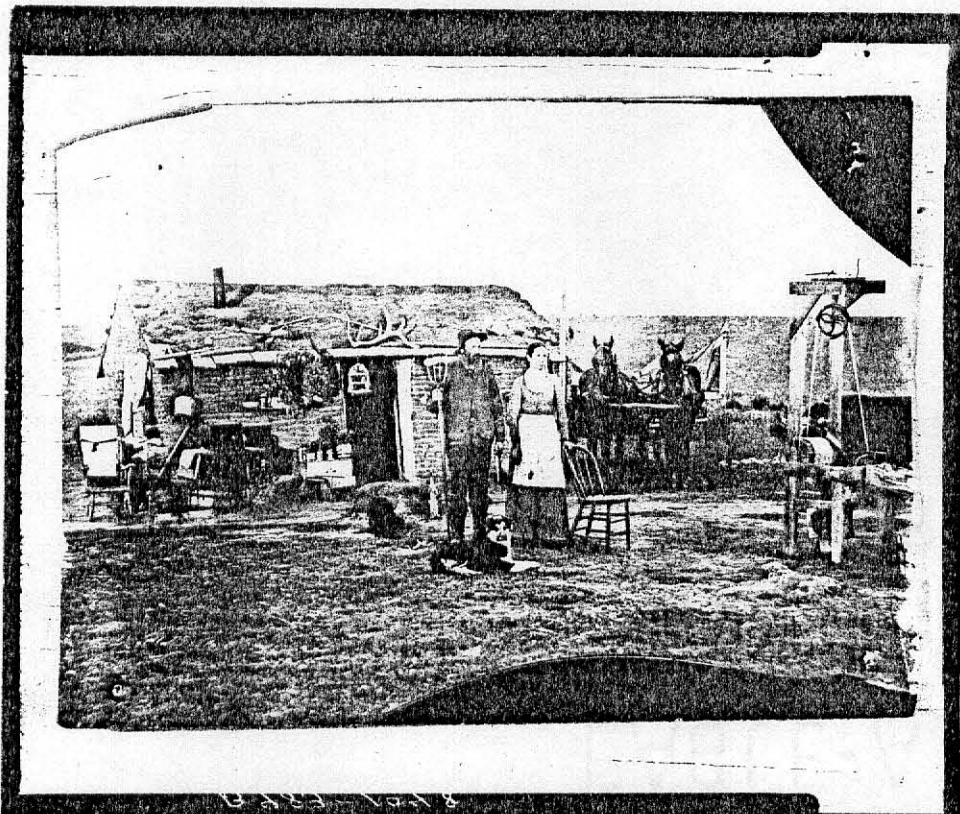


Figure 9. John Curry sod house near West Union, Nebraska in Custer County, ca. 1886. (Solomon D. Butcher Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society)

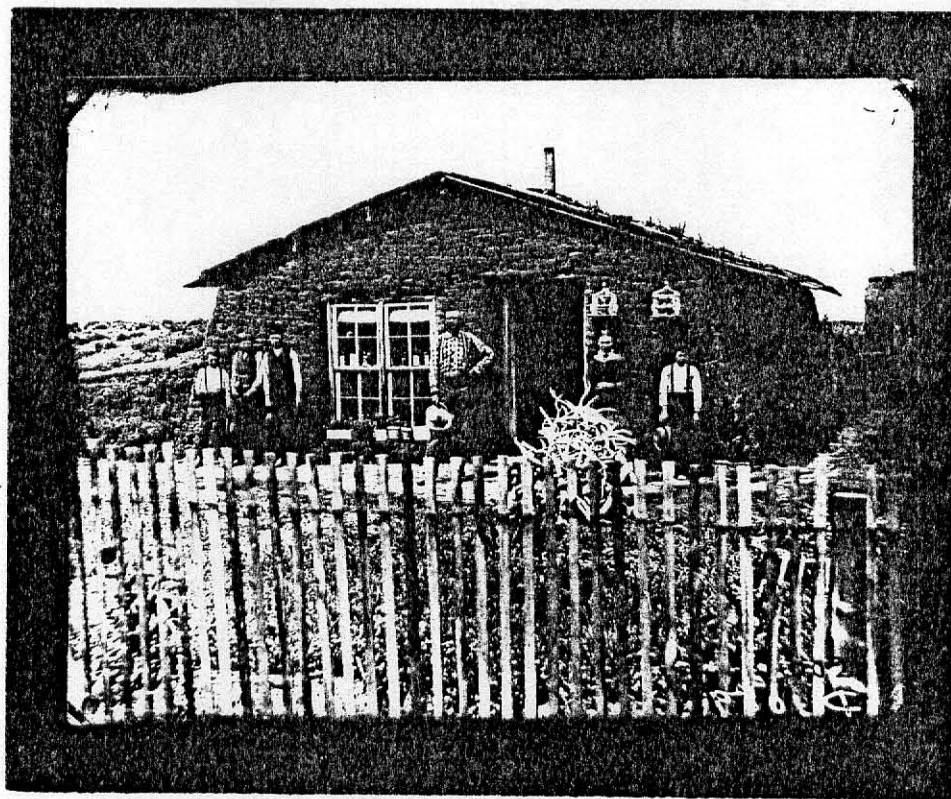


Figure 10. J.C. Cram family sod house, Loup County, Nebraska, 1886. (Solomon D. Butcher Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society)



Figure 11a. Richard and Josephine Hoagland inside their sod house in Gandy, Logan County, Nebraska, ca. 1890. (Nebraska State Historical Society)



Figure 11b. Left to right, Dale, Floyd and Beulah Hoagland inside sod house in Gandy, Logan County, Nebraska, ca. 1890. (Nebraska State Historical Society)

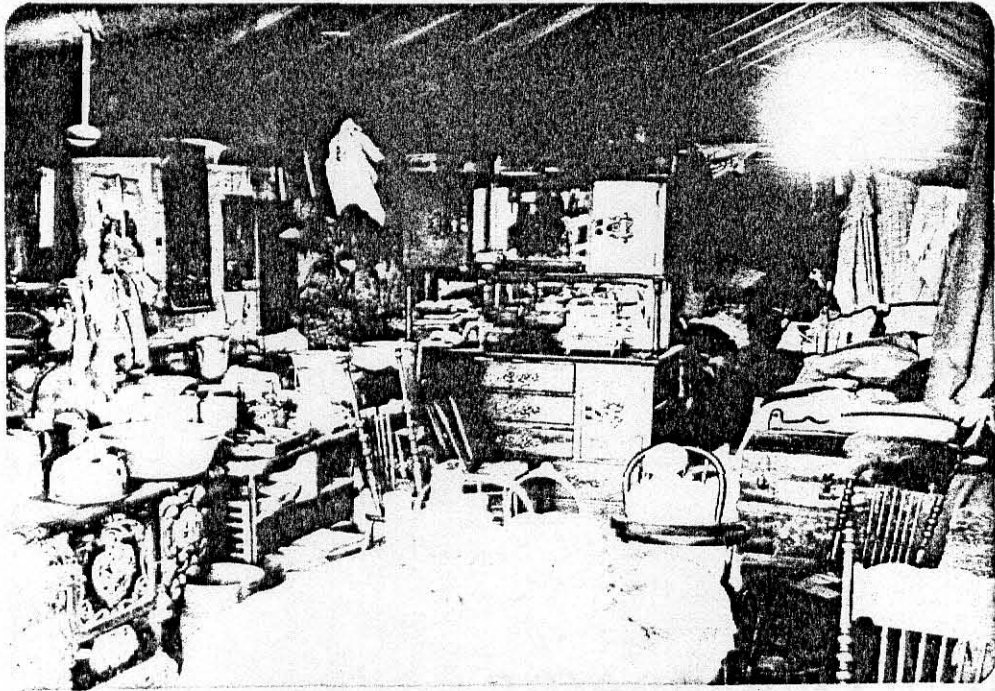


Figure 12. Interior of dugout in Ford County, Kansas. (Kansas State Historical Society)



Figure 13. "The Letter," by J. Wells Champney, ca. 1876. Represented are Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Colgate, Narragansett Pier, Rhode Island. (Reproduced in Maass, The Victorian Home in America, p. 150)

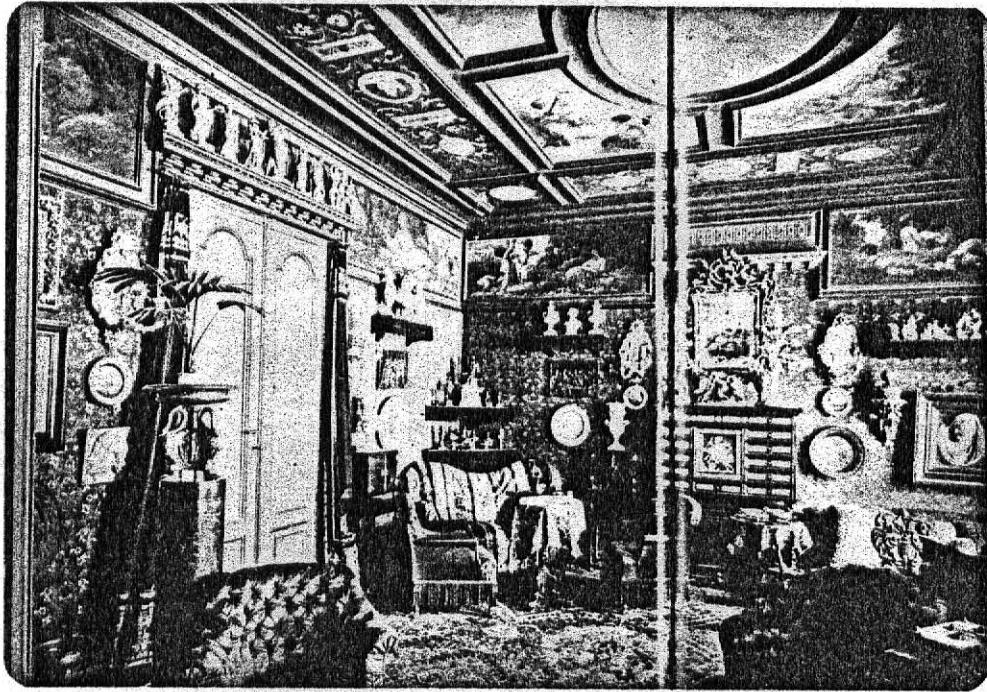


Figure 14. Parlor in home in Boston, Massachusetts, 1885.
(The Boston Athenaeum, reproduced in Seale, The Tasteful Interlude,
p. 89)



Figure 15. Interior of home in Wolfville, Kansas, ca. 1880s.
(Kansas State University Archives)

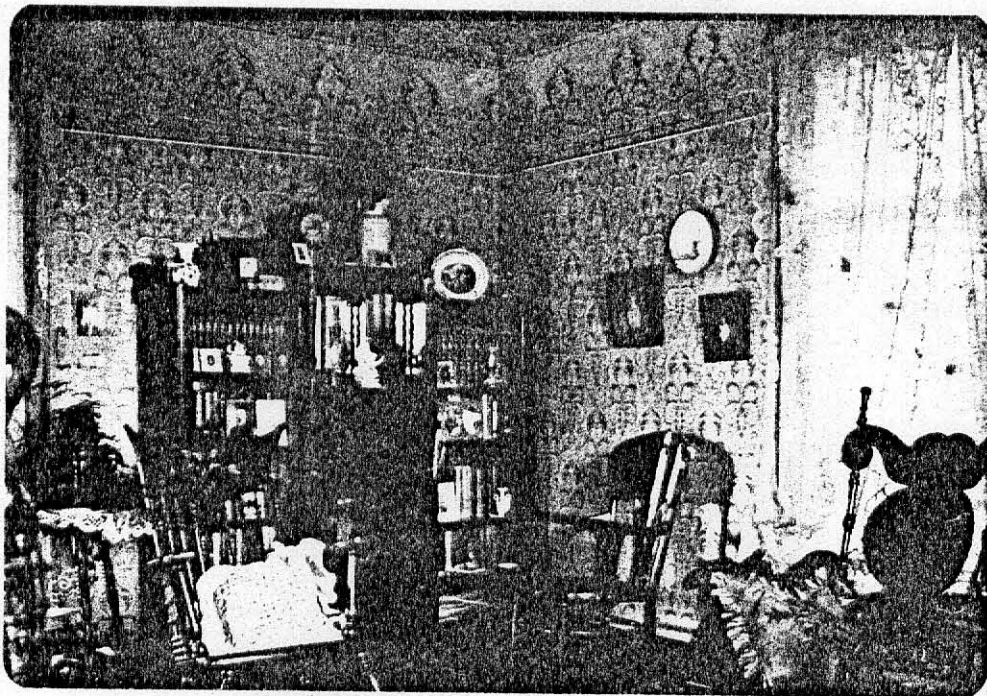


Figure 16. Interior of a Kansas residence, location and date unknown. (Kansas State Historical Society)



Figure 17. View of kitchen in unidentified residence. (Kansas State Historical Society)

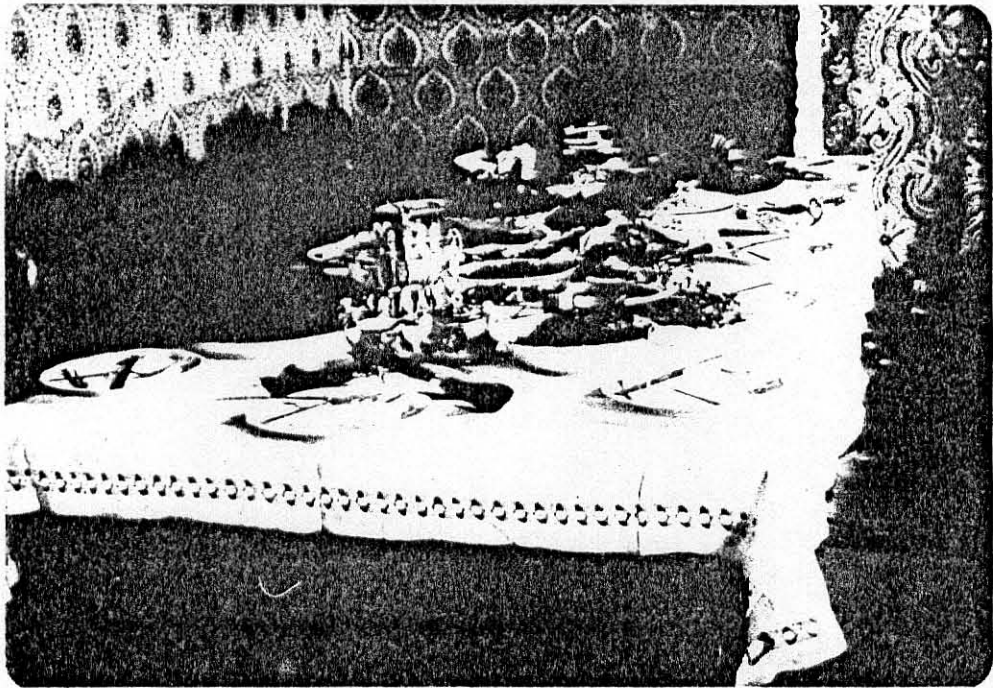


Figure 18. Mrs. Holland's table, ca. 1907. (Kansas State Historical Society)



Figure 19. House of John T. Little, Pacific and Buchanan Streets, San Francisco, California, ca. 1875. (The Society of California Pioneers, San Francisco, California, reproduced in Seale, The Tasteful Interlude, p. 59)



Figure 20. Mrs. Vaughn's drawing room, Montreal, Canada, 1893.
(Notman Photo Archives, McCord Museum, McGill University, reproduced
Maass, The Victorian Home in America, p. 175)



Figure 21. S. H. Fairfield residence, Topeka, Kansas, ca. 1885.
(Kansas State Historical Society)



Figure 22. Mrs. Bishop's room, Junction City, Kansas, ca. 1900.
(Kansas Collection, Pennell Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research
Library, University of Kansas)



Figure 23. Interior of a home in Wolfville, Kansas, ca. 1880s.
(Kansas State University Archives)

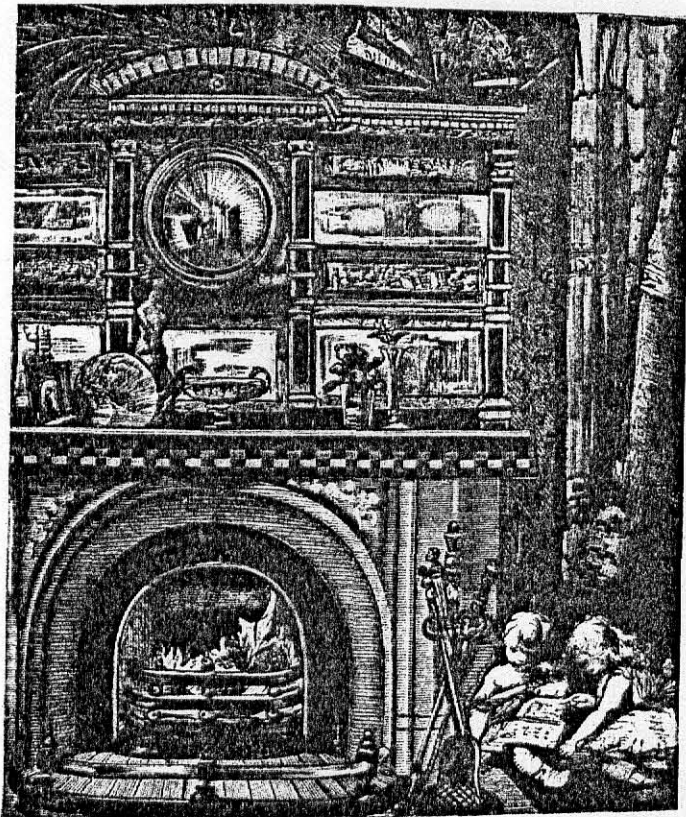


Figure 24. "The Living-Room," from Clarence Cook, The House Beautiful, p. 127.



Figure 25. Entranceway, from Clarence Cook, The House Beautiful, p. 179.

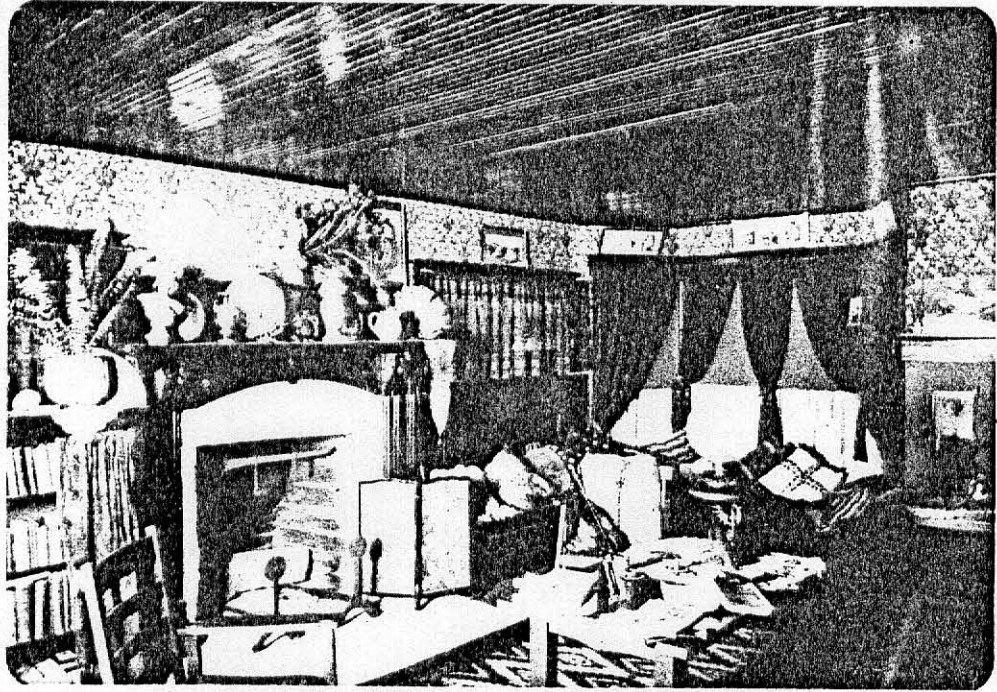


Figure 26. Living Room of the Rob Roy ranch, Kansas, ca. 1890s.
(Kansas State Historical Society)

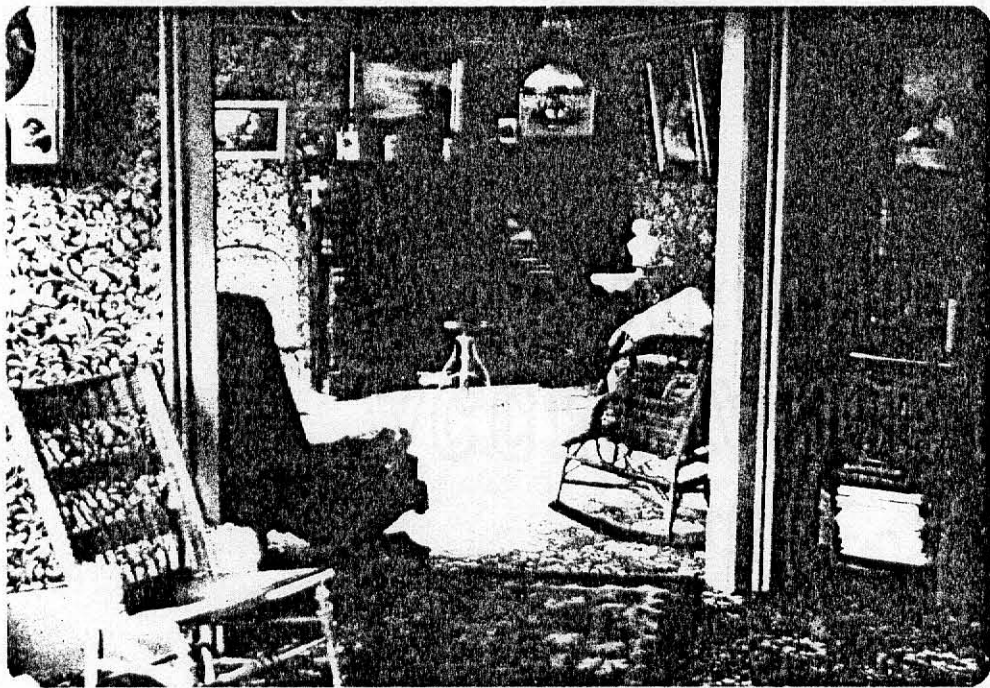


Figure 27. Unidentified residence, ca. 1880s. (Kansas State
Historical Society)



Figure 28. What-not cabinet in parlor of Benjamin Silliman house, New Haven, Connecticut, 1870. (New Haven Colony Historical Society, reproduced in Seale, The Tasteful Interlude, p. 51)



Figure 29. Bedroom, Virginia City, Nevada, ca. 1875. (Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada, reproduced in Seale, The Tasteful Interlude, p. 111.

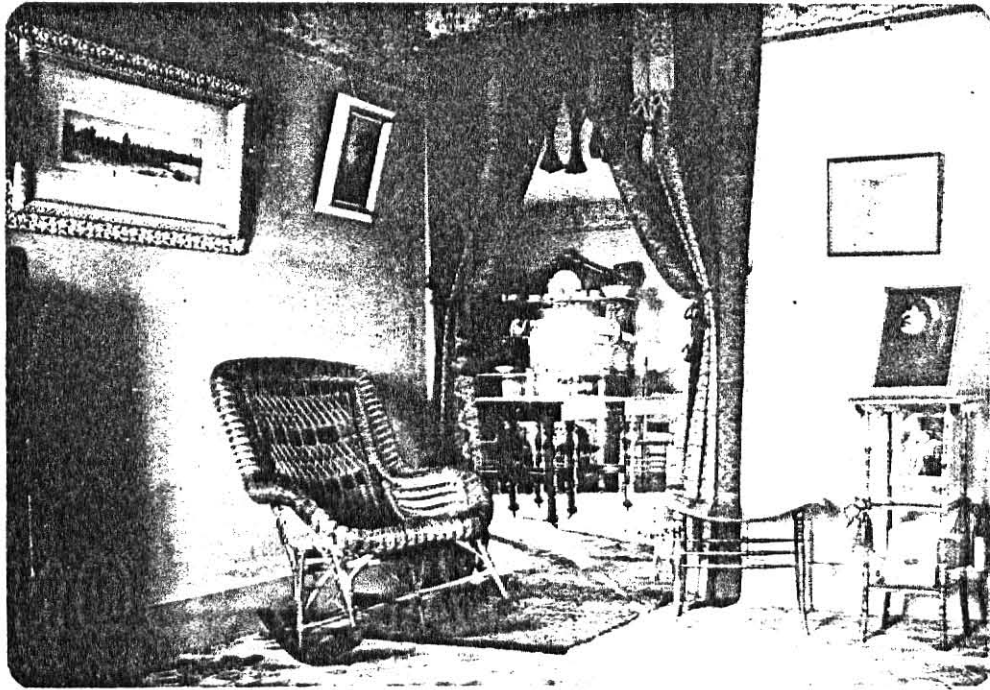


Figure 30. Unidentified Kansas residence, ca. 1880s. (Kansas State Historical Society)

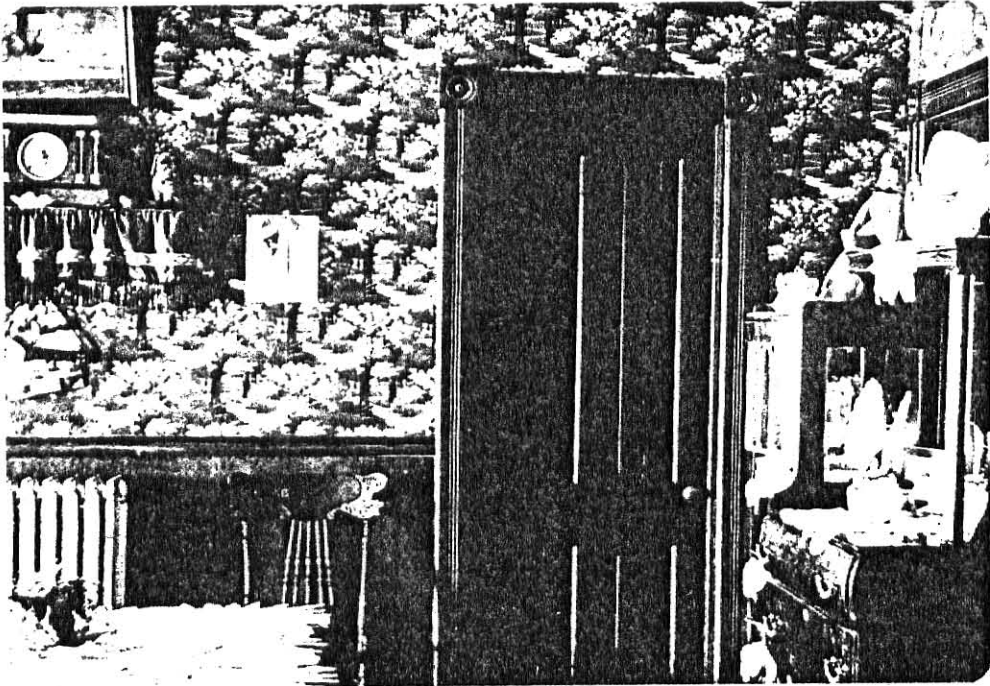


Figure 31. Dining room of Thomas Mahoney residence, Topeka, Kansas, ca. 1900. (Kansas State Historical Society)



Figure 32. Note that the prescriptive insistence on the passive nature of woman's role in the home is echoed in the posture of the woman in this photograph. After creating this intimate nook, she may relax and read and let the arrangement of the objects in the room display her attention to homemaking. From Clarence Cook, The House Beautiful, p. 108.



Figure 33. The Burt Ward Soda Fountain, Junction City, Kansas, 1901. (Kansas Collection, Pennell Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas)

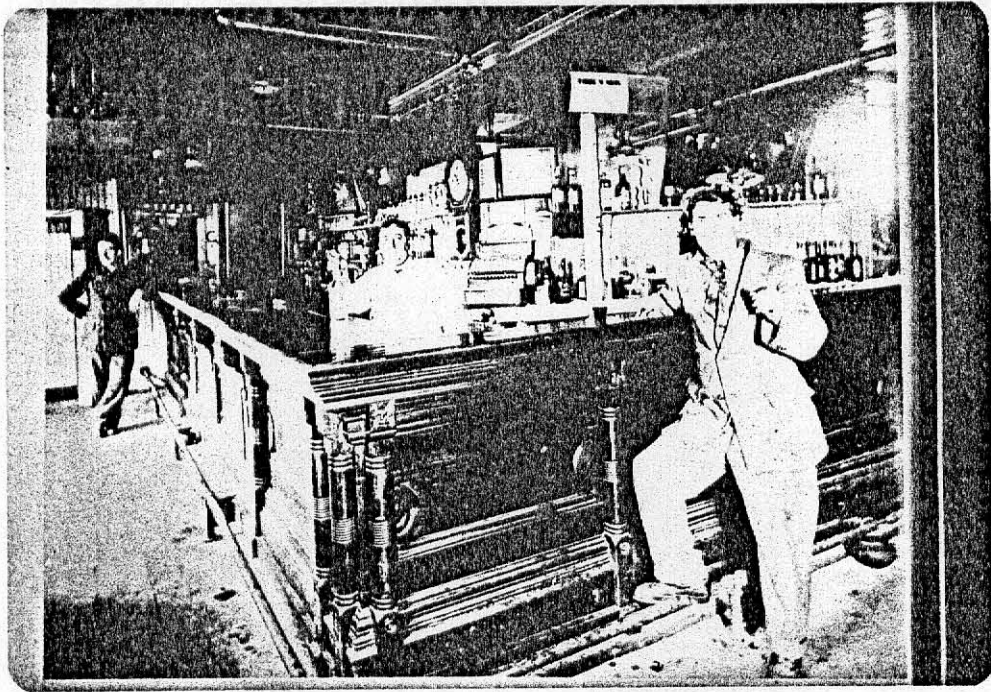


Figure 34. Bar of Nipmuck House, Southbridge, Massachusetts, 1880s or 1890s. (Roland J. Meunier, reproduced in Gillon, A New England Town, n.p.)



Figure 35. Fred's "den" in house in Wolfville, Kansas. (Kansas State University Archives)

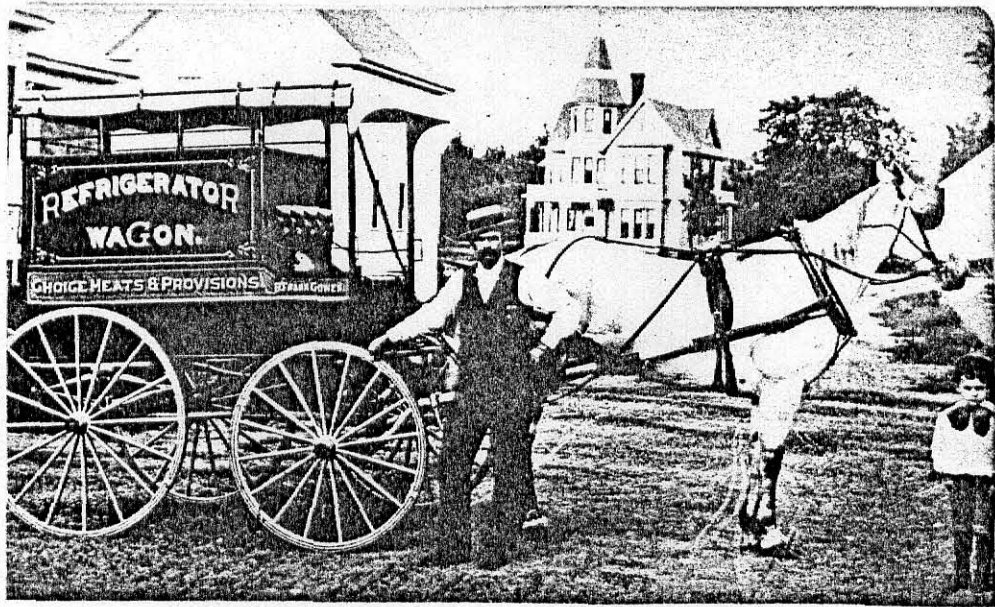


Figure 36. Deliveryman and wagon in Sanford, Maine, ca. 1880s.
(Reproduced in Sugden, New England Past, n.p.)

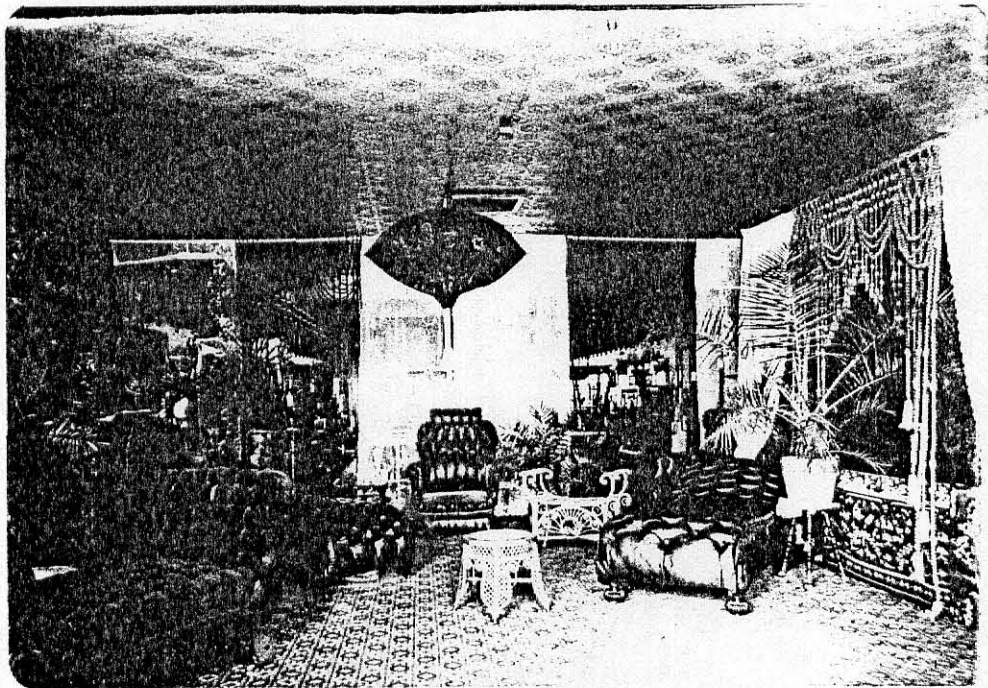


Figure 37. Dumm's Carpet Room, Junction City, Kansas, ca. 1900.
(Kansas Collection, Pennell Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas)

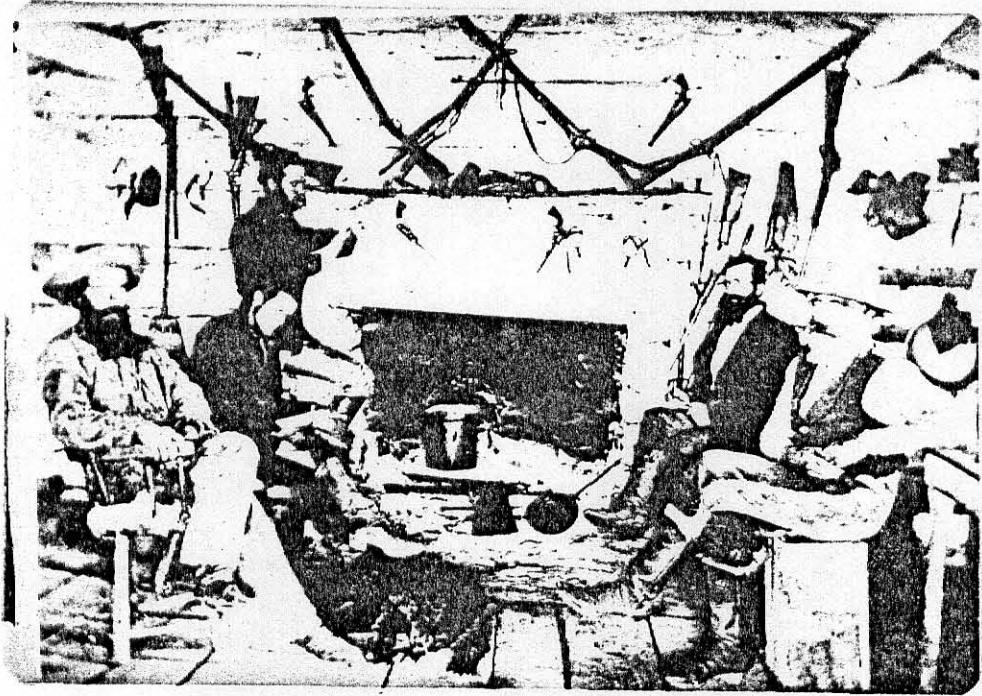


Figure 38. Sawtell's Ranch House, Fremont County, Idaho Territory, 1872. (Photo by W.H. Jackson, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana, reproduced in Seale, The Tasteful Interlude, fig. 19)



Figure 39. Homesteader's house, Dakota Territory, 1885. (South Dakota State Historical Society, Pierre, South Dakota, reproduced in Seale, The Tasteful Interlude, p. 90)

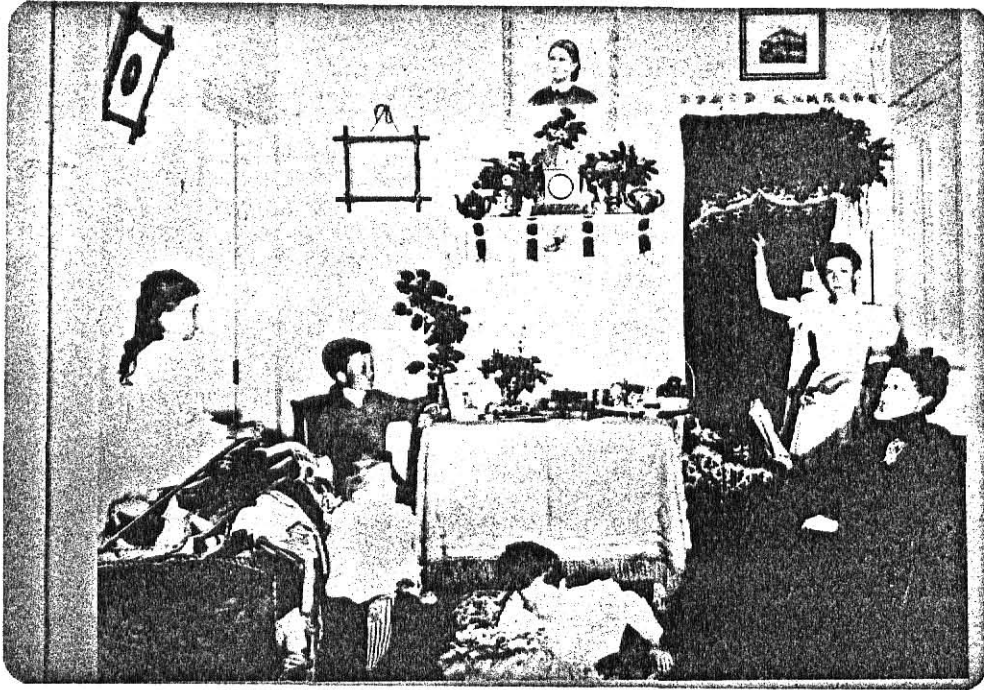


Figure 40. Parlor, house of Lady Mann, Boise, Idaho, 1890. (Idaho State Historical Society, Boise, Idaho, reproduced in Seale, The Tasteful Interlude, p. 117)

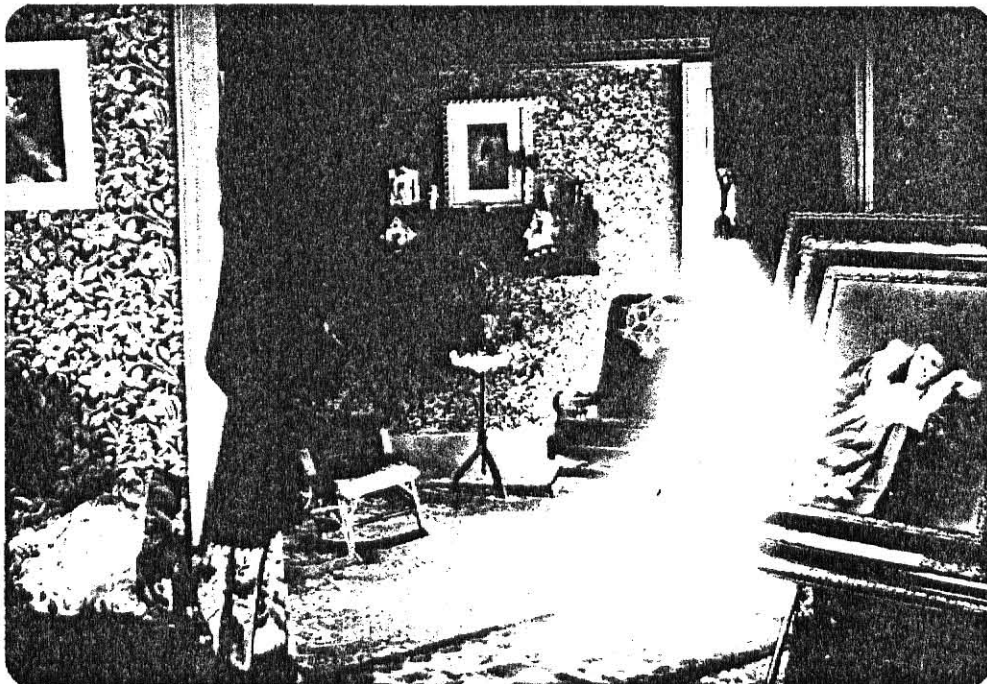


Figure 41. Unidentified Kansas residence, ca. 1880s. (Kansas State Historical Society)

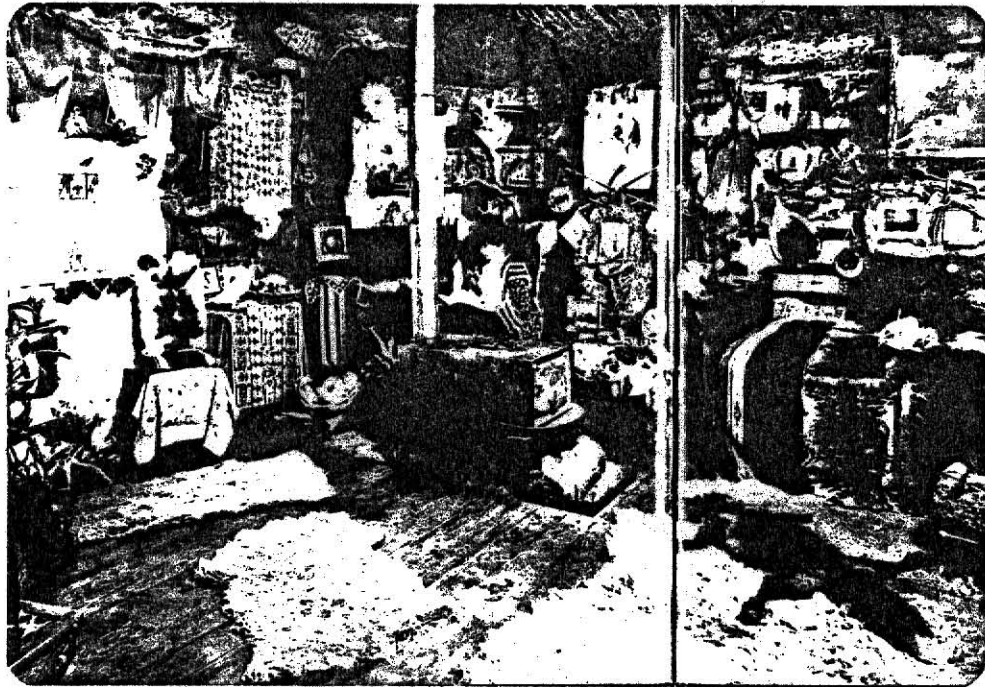


Figure 42. Interior of cabin, Alaska Territory, 1903. (Library of Congress, reproduced in Seale, The Tasteful Interlude, fig. 164)

DISCOVERIES IN THE MEANING OF DOMESTICITY:
MIDDLE-CLASS WOMEN AND CULTURAL CHANGE IN THE
UNITED STATES, 1870-1900

by

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ABSTRACT

Historians virtually have ignored the domestic world of American middle-class women of the late 19th century. Yet, most middle-class American women of that time lived out their lives within the domestic realm, in a position that seemed to be at odds with the public world of capitalism and the strivings of an upwardly-mobile population. However, the late Victorians' intense awareness of mobility and change in America paralleled alterations in the cultural significance of domesticity, and colored its attachment to the family. The stabilizing influence of home, as a social institution, transferred from interpersonal relations to physical reality.

The significance of home was easily transported, even to the frontier, by erecting particular types of dwellings. In addition, the moveables within the home could be transported to any place in the nation. These counteracted the physical mobility of the population in the years after the Civil War by reducing regional differences. Women, in their capacity as homemakers, transferred the civilizing emblems of middle-class life—books, statues, fine tableware, and pictures—to the frontier areas opened after the war. By their arrangement of space and manipulation of objects, women supported the idea that the physical home was important to their sense of themselves as purposeful beings. In this way, domesticity partially allied itself with the cultural significance of objects rather than only with the presence of women in the home.

The importance of standards for judging domestic objects thus became central to the homemaker. Prescriptive literature suggested that women transfer their educative function as mothers to the objects they selected for the home. Writers maintained that beautiful objects could transmit values directly and thereby alter an individual's character. Women were

asked to make informed choices in the marketplace by using a canon of ideal beauty based on imitation of hand-made objects.

The new department stores reinforced the links between domesticity and objects by creating homes away from home for the female consumer. Fine art goods and the products of an industrial society rubbed shoulders in the marketplace. Public spaces for women made an appearance in the form of tea rooms and ice cream parlors. Thus, domestic values extended into the world of business, and women entered a marketplace which catered to feminine values.

In conclusion, the late Victorians placed a great deal of importance on the physical world. They transferred the seat of values from ideals to objects, and looked to the material world for an explanation of character and morals. In this context, domesticity incorporated physical spaces outside the home itself and thereby expanded the presence of woman's sphere without altering its nature. At the same time, the cultural meaning of woman's role grounded itself firmly in her ability to manipulate the objects of the home environment in personally and socially significant ways.