

# — Chapter 3

# HOME, HEARTH, AND HOUSEKEEPING

Marketing new ideas and new ways of homemaking • The evolution of consumerism and technology in the kitchen • Easing the labor of laundry and housework • Cooking, canned goods and processed foods • Consumption and housecleaning

American women of all classes historically have shared one particular common denominator: cooking. Prior to the second quarter of the nineteenth century when mass-produced cast iron and steel stoves were more available nationwide, cooking was a labor-intensive chore done on an open fire in a fireplace. Wood or coal had to be hauled into the house, and ashes removed daily. Worse was the limited variety of food that could be cooked by this method. Kettles of stews or soups were easy enough, but the art of banking fires over Dutch ovens or piles of bricks or stones for baking took considerable experience. Likewise, choosing the types of wood that burned hotter or longer and then arranging the fuels for consistent fires required great skill. Even when successful, though, early American cooking was regarded with disdain both at home and abroad. English novelist Frederick Marryat wrote in the early nineteenth century that there were “plenty of good things for the table in America; but ‘God sends meat, and the devil sends cooks.’”<sup>1</sup>

Figure 3-1. Selling for as little as five dollars—freight paid—the freestanding cast iron stove provided greater control and versatility in cooking than did the open hearth. Majestic ad 1900, Magee ad 1901.

THE illustrations above show 3 our Double Iron  
 gas burners with 2000 B.T.U. — clearance of gas  
 circulation giving double cooking surface —  
 better, double capacity. This water heater  
 forms the left-hand wing of all water fronts.

**Majestic Malleable  
 Iron and  
 Steel Ranges**

Does not interfere with oven or distract from  
 the fire box. Holds water for soups, ketchup  
 and coffee longer while the range is cooking.  
 Frying, roasting, baking or broiling.

This range is made of Malleable Iron and  
 Steel, enamel finish or brass, or adjust you to  
 the expense and appearance of every other range.  
 Riveted air tight and asbestos lined — insulate,  
 does the work in half the time, and with half  
 the fuel. A full top of the oven — double  
 grate, with the cook, sets off the charcoal and  
 saves without dropping the fire, rolling the  
 inside of floor, and without the aid of violent  
 explosions. Other improvements, originated by us, also still in making the cooking perfect and  
 preserving the security of temper of the spotless.

Are made to fit every condition — with reservoir, with water front,  
 in combination for coal or gas, and for hotels and institutions — and  
 at prices commensurate with quality.

“A Model Kitchen” tells how the kitchen, water supply and floor should be  
 arranged to get best results from any range. Download in these interesting  
 no cost; tell all about available low cost Majestic Ranges. Shall we send it?

**Majestic Manufacturing Company**  
 New York Saleroom, 45 CLIFF STREET 3228 Morgan Street, ST. LOUIS, MO.

**MAGEE GRAND RANGE** A HAPPY UNION

COAL SAVER A PERFECT BAKER

The cook who engages her genius with the cooking ability of the MAGEE knows cooking bliss. She's happy. For the MAGEE reinforces her skill. Built to out cook all other cookers.

GIRCELIARS FIRE

**MAGEE FURNACE COMPANY**  
 MAKERS OF THE  
 FAMOUS MAGEE HEATERS AND RANGES  
 32-38 UNION ST. BOSTON.

**50 YEARS THE LEADER**

Awarded Gold Medal Paris Exposition, 1900

Echoing Marryat's assessment of American cuisine, Count de Volney wrote in 1804: "In the morning at breakfast they deluge their stomachs with a quart of hot water, impregnated with tea, or so slightly with coffee that it is more colored water; and they swallow, almost without chewing, hot bread, half baked, toast soaked in butter, cheese of the fattest kind, slices of salt or hung beef, ham, etc. . . . at dinner they have boiled pastes under the name of puddings, and their sauces, even for roast beef, are melted butter; their turnips and potatoes swim in hog's lard, butter, or fat; under the name of pie or pumpkin, their pastry is nothing but a greasy paste, never sufficiently baked."<sup>2</sup>

### New Appliances in the Kitchen

The mass production of the freestanding cast iron stove in the 1830s made greater control and versatility in cooking possible. Still, the work was as laborious and time-consuming as on the open hearth, if not more so. "The stove . . . augured the death of one-pot cooking or, rather, of one-dish meals—and, in so doing, probably increased the amount of time women spent in preparing foodstuffs," wrote Ruth Cowan in *More Work for Mother*. "The diet of average Americans may well have been more varied during the nineteenth century, but in the process women's activities became less varied as their cooking chores became more complex."<sup>3</sup> Just as the colonial housewife had to know how to build and bank open-hearth fires for cooking, the nineteenth-century housewife had to know how to regulate the dampers of her stove and how to position cookware in and around the firebox to simmer, boil, and bake simultaneously.

In addition, the affordability and availability of mass-produced cast iron stoves made it possible for families even on remote farms and in poor city tenements to have reliable kitchen stoves. Many models sold for as little as five dollars, freight paid. (Figure 3-1.)

For all its benefits, the cast iron stove required constant maintenance. Untended fires cooled or went out. Coal or wood still had to be hauled in and ashes had to be hauled out. In addition, blacking had to be applied weekly to prevent rusting—an exceptional chore for those women who had chosen a stove model with all-over high relief or open fretwork ornamentation.

Another problem with cast iron stoves was inflexibility. During the summer, stoves were not usually kept burning. That meant either eating cold meals or suffering from the heat to build a fire. The solution came easily enough with oil- and gas-burning stoves. (Figure 3-2.) In a 1909 ad for the New Perfection Cook-Stove, the next great leap

Figure 3-2. The next great leap in cooking convenience was the on/off stove switch. Oil and gas ranges reduced the labor of cooking by eliminating the need to haul coal or wood, build and maintain fires, and remove ashes. Ad 1909.

**A "Home Comfort" Stove**

Have you solved the "Home Comfort" problem for this coming summer?

Are you planning to put the coal range out of commission?

Will you do the family boiling, stewing and frying in a sane and restful manner over a stove that does not overheat the kitchen?

You can do all this with the

**NEW PERFECTION**

**Wick Blue Flame Oil Cook-Stove**

The "New Perfection" is different from all other oil stoves. It has a substantial CABINET TOP like the modern coal range, with a commodious shelf for warming plates and keeping food hot after cooked—also drop shelves on which the coffee pot or teapot may be placed after removing from burner—every convenience, even to bars for holding towels.





Figure 3-3. Although electric ranges were widely advertised before World War I, the limited availability and high cost of electricity prior to the 1930s deterred sales. GE ad 1915, Florence ad 1923.

in cooking convenience is illustrated: the on/off switch, providing a cook-fire instantly, anytime. Ironically, the convenient, clean-burning gas/oil stove was not new to the twentieth century. It had been demonstrated at industrial expositions in the 1850s and advertised extensively throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Yet, of fifteen pages listing cookstoves in the massive Sears catalog of 1902, only eight models were for oil or gas; all others were wood- or coal-burning stoves. In his book on household technology, Daniel Cohen cited two reasons for consumers' resistance to the gas/oil stove for so long. Wood and coal were much cheaper fuels than gas or oil; in addition, the manufacturers of oil/gas stoves did not understand the psychology of the human experience with food. "People who had grown up with food cooked with wood or coal fuel felt that gas-cooked food somehow 'tasted different,' or they worried obscurely that the food would not be properly cooked and would therefore be unhealthy."<sup>4</sup> Eventually, persistent advertising helped the message get through to the masses, and depending on where one lived, oil- or gas-burning ranges were the best choice available even long after the first electric ranges were made.

Although electric ranges were widely advertised as early as the 1910s, electricity was unavailable to huge sections of the country until the late 1930s when the New Deal Rural Electrification program was implemented. (Figure 3-3.) As Christine Frederick wrote in her 1913 book *The New Housekeeping*: "I am enthusiastic in favor of electric equipment, but from observation I have found it is, as yet, too expensive to supplant hand power in the operations of devices in the home. It is also true that while city dwellers have come to believe in the prevalence of the electric button, electricity is in use by only a fraction of our population."<sup>5</sup>

For decades, gas and oil range manufacturers continued to drive home the comparative cost issue in their advertising. Oil was "the most inexpensive fuel," a 1924 Florence oil range ad stated succinctly. A list of electric

appliances sold by the New York Edison Company in 1925, with the cost of operation per hour, included:

vacuum cleaner . . . . .	1¢
washing machine . . . . .	2¢
sewing machine . . . . .	1/2¢
stove . . . . .	5¢
toaster . . . . .	3¢
waffle iron . . . . .	5¢ <sup>6</sup>

Added together, operating an electric home could be an expensive undertaking, so it was hardly surprising that many Americans were wary of electricity, despite the labor-saving advantages. In their Middletown study, Robert and Helen Lynd noted that though 99 percent of the homes in their survey were wired for electricity, two-thirds cooked with gas, and most of the rest used coal and other fuels, but only “a very few electricity.”<sup>7</sup>

Stoves such as the Florence Oil Range also were meant to be beautiful pieces of furniture—styled with cabriole legs, painted in color enamels, and accented with the sparkle of contrast metal trims. But with all the open spaces beneath and around the burners, cleaning the stove remained a considerable task. In the 1930s, the redesigned New Perfection Range minimized the cleaning chore with a cabinet style that enclosed all the components of the stove. (Figure 3-4.) Airborne grease particles and drips or splatters from cooking could easily be cleaned off the smooth, flat surfaces of porcelain enamel. By the 1940s, this concept of the enclosed range became the production model for both gas and electric ranges. With minor design enhancements over the decades, the closed box style has remained the standard ever since.

The next technological advancement in the all-purpose cookfire came with the microwave oven. (Figure 3-5.) Speed was the benefit of this new type of electric cookfire. Although developed at the end of World War II, due to the cost and size of early models only about ten thousand microwaves were sold in the United States through the 1960s, mostly to restaurants and airlines.<sup>8</sup> By the 1970s, manufacturers had solved the size and cost problems of microwave ovens and began mass-marketing efforts. However, sales were not brisk due to a number of reasons: microwaves needed specialized cookware, consumers had to learn new methods of preparing food for microwaving, and numerous public safety warnings kept circulating. Amana chairman Alex Meyer recalled: “The housewife didn’t understand it. It was too technical for her. She didn’t understand that we were stirring these molecules 2,450 times per second. She didn’t understand that the friction of the molecules was the source of the heat. There are no flames. There is no calrod heater . . . it was a little scary.”<sup>9</sup>

Figure 3-4. The closed-cabinet style of later stoves minimized the chore of cleaning components, which on earlier models were exposed to airborne grease particles and splatters from cooking. New Perfection ad 1938, General Electric ad 1948.





Figure 3-5. The first microwave ads depicted the hi-tech computerized look of the ovens that inhibited many consumers. Radarange ad 1976.

If all this were not enough to deter sales, early ads for microwaves depicted a product that looked disturbingly like a computer. By the 1980s, though, people were comfortable enough with so much push-button technology in the home that ads could show the Happy Homemaker at ease using her new microwave. Instead of devoting so much ad space to techno-ese copy—as was necessary with earlier versions—advertisers focused on the product’s benefits in everyday language. Additionally, the microwave especially suited the fast-paced life style of many American women of the 1970s and 1980s who used the microwave to quickly heat leftovers, frozen foods, soups, beverages, and snacks.

As electricity became more widely available after World War I, manufacturers of electric appliances found ways of broadening their product lines by making the home cookfire more specialized. Implements for cooking specific foods evolved from stone, ceramic, and cast iron gadgets for the fireplace or stove into customized appliances. Simple toasted bread no longer had to be prepared on a skewer by hand and tended every second to prevent scorching. Instead, a miraculous new electric contraption held the slice of bread near a heated coil to toast it any way desired. Indeed, by the late teens, the electrified cookfire could be contained in specialized devices to brew coffee, bake waffles, or grill a beefsteak, all without ever going near a stove. (Figure 3-6.) The eager consumption of such appliances, the Lynds observed in their Middletown study, led to an average increase of 25 percent in kilowatt hours of electricity used between 1920 and 1924.<sup>10</sup>

Not all food had to be cooked. From the earliest times, hunters and gatherers knew that certain fruits, vegetables, roots, and other assorted plants



Figure 3-6. By the end of World War I, manufacturers broadened their product lines with a wide variety of specialized kitchen appliances. Universal ad 1917, General Electric ad 1919.

1895

**THE "LEONARD" CLEANABLE IS A PERFECT REFRIGERATOR**

EIGHT WALLS, MOVABLE FLUES, AIR TIGHT LOCKS, METALLIC ICE RACK—PRESERVES FOOD BEST WITH LEAST ICE—ANTIQUE ASH—GREAT VARIETY—ABOVE STYLE, 25x17x41, \$9.50—WE PAY FREIGHT—CATALOGUE FREE.

GRAND RAPIDS REFRIGERATOR CO.  
18 TO 22 OTTAWA STREET  
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN.

**50 PAGE BOOK ABOUT FREE REDUCING THE ICE BILL**

**BOHN SYPHON Refrigerators**

**Sent Freight Prepaid**

**WRITE ENAMEL REFRIGERATOR COMPANY**  
Dept. 12, ST. PAUL, MINN.

1904

**Don't put ice in your drinking water**

The picture shows a better way. Have cold water always on tap which even the children can take in the "built-in" water cooler of the

**Automatic Refrigerator**

This cooler is of one piece cast iron, lined with white porcelain—cooled by same ice that cools the food. Absolutely safeguards water from odors or impurities.

The Automatic Refrigerator cuts ice bills in half with its eight heat-resisting walls—its drain never clogs—its automatic air circulation prevents flavors mixing.

See the Automatic at your dealer's—If he hasn't it, send his name and we'll see you are supplied. Get our free catalog.

**Illinois Refrigerator Company**  
140 Wall Street, Morrison, Illinois

1914

**ALASKA CORK-INSULATED REFRIGERATOR**

*Fresher foods!*

Let the "Cork-Wall Window" show you why

OF COURSE you will demand adequate ventilation when you buy a refrigerator. You will also be anxious to have spoiled foods and high ice bills.

But will you take the vital precaution to look for the "Cork-Wall Window"? Will you be sure to demand this positive, visible proof of adequate cork insulation?

Ask an Alaska Dealer to show you the "Cork-Wall Window." Here you are getting efficient cork insulation. Your food will be kept fresh and sweet. Your ice bills will be kept as low as possible.

You will find the "Cork-Wall Window" in no other refrigerator but the Alaska. It is patented!

You will be impressed, too, with the solid construction and fine cabinet work that distinguishes the Alaska from the ordinary.

Yes with all this the Alaska costs no more! There is no type and size for every need and for every purse. If you do not know an Alaska dealer in your own town write to us.

**THE ALASKA REFRIGERATOR COMPANY**  
Dep. 84, BRIDGEVILLE, INDIANA  
Sole Office in Michigan in G. C.

1926

were edible raw. They also knew that such foodstuffs went bad, and if consumed when spoiled could result in illness or death. Some food preservation was eventually made possible by salt packing, smoking, sun baking, or, in wintertime, storing in the cold.

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, controlled refrigeration was a luxury of the wealthy. Great homes such as Thomas Jefferson's Monticello had ice-houses or ice cellars used to store huge slabs of ice harvested from rivers and lakes frozen in winter. During the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century industrial inventors began to experiment with mechanical refrigerating machines, and dozens of prototypes were patented. By the 1880s, industrial refrigerators were widely in use by breweries, meat packers, railroads, and transoceanic ships. At the same time, commercial icehouses used the huge refrigerating machines to mass produce ice year round. This made possible the affordable home icebox, which was to remain a common form of home refrigeration well into the 1940s. (Figure 3-7.)

Figure 3-7. The kitchen icebox remained a common form of home refrigeration well into the 1940s.



The technology for an electric compression motor small enough to outfit a domestic refrigerator was not developed until 1914. Even a decade later, the home electric refrigerator was still only in its developmental stages. Leaks were common; refrigerants were toxic or highly flammable; motors, compressors, or thermostats malfunctioned frequently; and the noise was considerable.<sup>11</sup> Only in the late 1920s did innovations begin to solve most of these problems, making refrigerators more efficient and affordable on a mass scale.

Electric refrigerator manufacturers then began to aggressively promote their products. In 1923, the industry's advertising expenditures totaled about forty-five thousand dollars and climbed rapidly to almost \$20 million by 1931.<sup>12</sup> During this time, ads for electric refrigerators featured health and food safety at the top of their lists of benefits. (Figure 3-8.) A "priceless treasure chest" was how Kelvinator referred to its 1927 model. First on the checklist of the treasures was health—tacitly guaranteed by the refrigerator's "constant protection of food at a scientifically determined temperature." Likewise, the banner in a 1929 General Electric ad proclaimed that its refrigerator "keeps your food safe." Even at the end of the 1930s, refrigerator manufacturers continued to emphasize health and food safety issues in ads. The header in a 1939 Kelvinator ad declared that "thousands are alive today because in 1914 man first harnessed cold!" As a competitive advantage statement, Kelvinator advised holdout owners of iceboxes that the 1939 Silver Jubilee model had the "cold-making capacity equal to more than half a ton of ice per week." This is not so surprising an argument for advertisers to use, given that more than half of all American homes still used iceboxes in 1940, even though almost 80 percent of all homes had electricity.<sup>13</sup>

As refrigeration technology progressed through the 1940s and 1950s, food safety ceased to be the focus of refrigerator ads. By then the public had been well educated on this point by home economists and advertisers. Enhancement of the quality of life became the objective of later ads. (Figure 3-9.) Larger storage capacity meant greater economy when food shopping, not only in increasing the volume of food that could be purchased but in reducing the number of trips to market. An ad for the 1948 GE Space Maker model compared the storage capacities of a 6- and an 8-cubic-foot space by illustrating piles of food at the base of open refrigerators. Manufacturers also emphasized easy maintenance in their ads. Women welcomed the advent of the frost-free freezer, as announced in the 1948 Admiral ad. The drop in cost of refrigerators was a key selling point in later ads. General Electric noted in its ads of 1941 that current models of its refrigerators cost half as much as those of ten years earlier—"so little that almost every family can afford the best in modern refrigeration."

### Doing the Laundry

After food preparation, housekeeping was the second most important concern for the American housewife. In 1911, home economist Laura Clarke Rockwood wrote for *Popular Science*: "Those who insist that a woman's place is at home by divine decree need only to study the life of primitive man to find out how very human are some of our domestic customs, for they will



Figure 3-10. Despite advertising claims, early washing machines saved little time and not much labor, and they frequently damaged clothes. Majestic ad 1904, Gravity Washer ad 1907.



Figure 3-12. Even though washers became more sophisticated with technological advances, washing clothes was still a dreaded chore. The promise of relief from washday drudgery continued to be emphasized in ads. Maytag ad 1946, Kelvinator ad 1954.



more than a washtub on a stand with a hand-cranked, flywheel-driven set of agitators. (Figure 3-10.) They often leaked, bolts rusted quickly, and worst of all, they frequently damaged clothes. These manual washers saved little time and not much labor, but until the first electric washing machines were manufactured in the teens, they were the best relief that technology had to offer women who did laundry at home.

The electric washing machine was the first truly effective aid in easing the burdens of doing the laundry. (Figure 3-11.) Easy fill and draining eliminated heavy lifting of water buckets, and automatic agitation replaced the hand cranking of manual tub washers. The Blue Bird Electric Clothes Washer “delights in dispelling the gloom of washday,” avowed the copy in its 1919 ads. Where “once she would have taken to her bed” after washday, the Easy Washer owner of 1928 could do laundry in the morning and still be “entirely

Figure 3-13. With the proliferation of synthetic fabrics used in ready-to-wear clothing and home textiles, washing machines became multicyle, multi-speed, multiagitator, and multitemperature to meet contemporary washing challenges. Whirlpool ad 1962, Hotpoint ad 1966.





Figure 3-14. Ironing with a heavy, cast iron flatiron was a grueling chore requiring hours next to a hot stove to heat the irons. Ad 1902.

fresh, ready to dance, to play bridge, or to see a show that same evening,” declared the ad copy. With the invention of an exclusive spin cycle, Whirldry promised housewives in a 1927 ad that “you can soak, wash, blue, rinse and dry a tubful of clothes without putting your hands in water.”<sup>16</sup>

Even with advances in washing machine technology, laundry remained a hated chore. The promise of relief from washday burdens continued to be a successful focus of washing machine ads. “Look . . . no work!” beamed the housewife in Maytag’s 1946 ad. “The great new Maytag is designed to set you free from washday drudgery,” continued the copy. In 1954, a Kelvinator ad announced a “new way to end washday drudgery,” this time including the automatic dryer as part of the solution. (Figure 3-12.)

By the 1960s, the proliferation of synthetic fabrics used in ready-to-wear clothing and home textiles presented new challenges and opportunities for manufacturers of automatic washers and dryers. (Figure 3-13.) “Because you wash all kinds of things,” a Whirlpool ad reminded women in a 1962 ad. An assortment of those kinds of things was shown in the accompanying photo—a composite of six views of a typical housewife wearing everything from a cocktail dress to a blanket. Similarly, in 1966, Hotpoint offered “an infinite number of speeds” to wash all the varieties of man-made fabrics. “Every fabric in this room can be washed by this new Hotpoint,” the ad header boasted. Beneath the photo of a woman caressing a fine-washable garment were listed the futuristic sounding fibers, including Fortrel, Dacron, Arnel, Orlon, Kodel, Chemstrand, and Celanese.

By the end of the twentieth century, the woes of washdays were further mitigated by multi-water-level, multicycle, multitemperature, multiagitator washers. As a result, the standards of cleanliness continued to rise to the point of an obsession with ring around the collar and whiter whites, problems that became the challenge of the detergent manufacturers discussed later in this chapter.

Part two of the laundry chores was ironing, which was usually done the day after washday. With the volumes of fabric used in garments, and the details of tiered ruffles, pleats, tucks, and flounces typical of women’s clothing before the First World War, ironing was truly intensive labor. Before the availability of the electric iron, numerous variations of the cast iron flatiron were used for this arduous task. (Figure 3-14.) Most homes had several flatirons since they were cheap, durable, and easily available from most any dry goods store. Ironing was usually done in the kitchen so the flatirons could be continuously heated on the stove. A series of irons could be kept on the stove and rotated to expedite the process.

Although patented in 1882 and first sold in 1893, the electric iron did not become a mainstay appliance in most American homes until the 1920s. In 1913, General Electric ads offered “comfort on ironing day” with electric irons that were not only lighter than the cast iron versions, but that produced consistent, even heat—perfect “for the family ironing, or for little pressings in your boudoir or sewing room.” (Figure 3-15.) Initially, though, the cost and limited availability of electricity deterred widespread sales of the electric



Figure 3-15. Ads for the early electronic irons assured consumers of “comfort on ironing day.” Ad 1913.

iron. Even fifteen years after its first electric iron ads, General Electric was battling competition from the ubiquitous flatiron. GE ads still used the word “comfort” in the copy, but went further by suggesting that if women were continuing to iron next to the kitchen stove with heavy flatirons, they were sacrificing their health “for a few cents’ worth of electricity.” (Figure 3-16.)

Improvements in the electric iron led to greater reliability with the adjustable thermostat in the late 1920s, greater ease of use with the steam iron of the 1960s, and greater safety with the automatic shut-off in the 1980s. (Figure 3-17.) Still, despite all the high-tech conveniences that were available on models at the end of the century, ironing remained tedious work. Just as in 1900, a hotplate had to be pushed over laundered garments to press out wrinkles and set creases.

### Easing the Labor of Other Chores

For a great part of the American population, the transition from the use of manual housekeeping devices to electric appliances was very slow. Among the numerous old-fashioned household furnishings and equipment that continued to be in widespread use up through World War II were the wood cook stove, the icebox, the washboard, and the cast iron flatiron. Truly, it was the accessibility of electricity that most aided women in easing the burdens of housework, especially since many electric appliances were so affordable. (Figure 3-18.) In observing the impact electricity had on the American housewife and her labors, Mark Sullivan wrote in 1927 that “an electric wire in a modern house excels a fairy-story.” Beyond even the most hopeful fantasies of housewives just a generation earlier, Sullivan noted that:

In any house, at the same hour, electricity might be producing heat in one room, cold in another, light in a third. To yet another it brought voices of friends from thousands of miles away. It heated water, it cooked, it froze ice in the refrigerator, it carried healing through ingenious pads that curved on aching backs; it swept, sewed, ironed—and it provided heat for the curling iron with which the housewife beautified herself for the evening’s gaiety, a housewife who in the preceding generation would have accepted old age at forty and been too much preoccupied with the work, now done for her by electricity, to give much thought to adornment or gaiety.<sup>17</sup>

As we have seen thus far, even before the First World War women’s magazines were jammed with ads for all sorts of electric household appliances. Sullivan observed that these labor-saving tools of housekeeping “did not retain the status of novel luxuries, but became familiar needs overnight.”<sup>18</sup> “Should I have to part with them, I know I would miss them sadly,” confessed home economist Clara Zillessen in a 1927 article written for the *Ladies’ Home Journal*.<sup>19</sup>

*Figure 3-17.* Greater reliability for the electric iron came in the 1920s with the adjustable thermostat. Greater ease of use came with the steam iron of the 1960s, and greater safety came with the automatic shut-off in the 1980s. Ad 1965.



*Figure 3-16.* One series of ads for electric irons suggested women who continued to use the cast iron flatirons were needlessly risking their health. Ad 1928.





Figure 3-18. Advertising helped make electric appliances “familiar needs overnight,” as one social historian wrote in 1925.

The dishwasher was another major household appliance that helped reduce a woman’s workload. (Figure 3-19.) Although it was not as high on the housewife’s wish list as a washing machine or refrigerator, any appliance that helped reduce a woman’s workload was welcomed. “It makes dish-washing a pleasant task,” stated the copy in a 1914 Whirlpool dishwasher ad. The pleasant part may have been that “hands never touch water” and drying dishes by hand could be eliminated, but early dishwashers still required

a lot of work. Dishes had to be rinsed or scraped free of most food residue, tubs had to be manually filled and drained for wash and rinse cycles, and heavily encrusted cookware might require two or more machine washings. Eventually, though, technology addressed these problems, especially with the introduction of later electric models. The worst of the chore then became simply loading the dishwasher and putting away the dishes afterward.

Perhaps just as important as the laborsaving benefit of using a dishwasher was the promise of sanitized dishes. Whirlpool had included the word “sanitary” in the header of its 1914 ad. Almost forty years later, a 1953 ad for American Kitchens emphasized that the water could be hotter and detergents stronger than human hands could endure, and that “hot-air drying eliminates dish-towel germs.” (Figure 3-20.)

Despite these bonus benefits, the dishwasher was primarily advertised as a labor saver. A long-running KitchenAid campaign during the 1950s and 1960s emphasized that women deserved a break from dishwashing and could find much better things to do with their time. Ads headlined “more time for living” showed housewives closing their KitchenAid dishwashers and heading off to enjoy leisure-time activities: an evening out with the husband, a scout gathering with junior, or a PTA meeting with fellow housewives.<sup>20</sup>

Cleaning floors, and especially rugs, also was backbreaking work for the Victorian housewife. Between the endless clouds of dust entering the house from unpaved streets and the residues of soot and ash deposited daily from fire grates and oil or gas lamps, staying ahead of dirt was a constant challenge. One of the most important aids in this household battle was the carpet



Figure 3-19. Early dishwashers, as with clothes washers, were still labor intensive despite the benefits touted in ads. Ad 1914.



Figure 3-20. Ads for automatic dishwashers noted that not only were women spared hours of labor—as well as “dishpan hands”—but dishwashers also provided health security since water could be hotter and detergents stronger than human hands could endure. American Kitchens ad 1953, General Electric ad 1961.



**Throw  
Away  
the  
Broom**

And get one of the carpet sweepers with noiseless rubber brush pellets. Brushes do not have to be replaced as with half-worn wood pellets. Rod openings are protected against lint. To damp, press lightly on the lever; no necessity to hold the pans open.

The Goshen Sweepers have strong broom action and are the most simple and durable made.

**CATALOGUE FREE.** If your dealer does not keep the Goshen Sweeper, send us your order and we will have it filled.

**GOSHEN SWEEPER CO.**  
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Figure 3-21. Invented in the 1870s, the carpet sweeper was a simple technological wonder that spared women the backbreaking labor of hauling rugs outside to be beaten. Goshen ad 1892, Bissell ad 1921.

sweeper. (Figure 3-21.) This marvel of ingenuity was created in the 1870s by the husband and wife team of Melville and Anna Bissell, who initially hand-made the sweepers in their home. Two brushes mounted on the axles of the wheels swept dirt into a compartment as the sweeper was pushed over a rug or floor. Through extensive advertising, the sweeper became so popular that numerous other manufacturers produced variations, including a private-label model for the *Ladies' Home Journal* catalogs of the 1890s. The carpet sweeper, a 1902 Bissell ad stated, "has done more to lighten woman's work than any invention that has been produced during the past quarter century."<sup>21</sup> More than 125 years since its creation, the carpet sweeper has remained virtually unchanged and is still widely used.

Despite the ease of use, affordability, and effectiveness of the little carpet sweeper, the implement had limited cleaning capabilities. In 1908, Hoover addressed these limitations with the introduction of the electric suction sweeper, the appliance that would revolutionize housecleaning. (Figure 3-22.) According to a 1963 Hoover ad, the company's founder had said at the time, "It'll sell itself if we can get the ladies to try it." Almost as soon as production of the appliance was under way, Hoover mobilized a sales force to take his vacuum cleaner straight to consumers for home demonstrations. In fact, this aspect of marketing vacuum cleaners was so highly effective in generating sales that fifty years later the offer of a home demonstration was still frequently advertised.<sup>22</sup> Some brands of vacuum cleaners, such as Electrolux, continued to be available only by home demonstration.

As a result of this successful combination of advertising and well-trained teams in the field, sales of the electric vacuum cleaner ran well ahead of most other electric appliances, except the iron, all through the teens and twenties. Frantz Premier boasted in a 1914 ad that eighty-five thousand housewives already had been given "freedom from sweeping and dusting" with the purchase of its brand of electric cleaner. Three years later ads for the same company announced that three hundred thousand women now owned one of its cleaners.<sup>23</sup> A special testimonial to the efficacy of the marketing and advertising strategies of vacuum cleaner manufacturers came during the implementation of the Rural Electrification Administration in the late 1930s. Much to the chagrin of home economists at the time, one 1939 survey showed that 40 percent of the recipients of new electricity hook-ups in Ohio had purchased vacuum cleaners rather than much needed water systems.<sup>24</sup>

Vacuum cleaners were not inexpensive. The 1914 Frantz Premier cost \$32.50 with attachments. By the 1920s, installment plans had become the most popular way for manufacturers of high-end goods to sustain mass production and for retailers to broaden their base of customers. Makers of vacuum cleaners enthusiastically promoted their own installment programs by popping the down-payment price in their ad banners. "Yes, madame, \$6.25 is all you need to obtain a Hoover complete with household cleaning equipment," read the header of a 1924 ad. Only in the last line of the copy was the



Avoid Dangers of  
Improper Sweeping

**\*BISSELL'S**  
(\*Cryo\* Roll Sweeper)  
**Carpet Sweeper**

No dust raised—to increase health and fire—  
settle down on curtains and furniture, causing  
more work.

Threads, dirt and lint picked up quickly  
and thoroughly once and for all.

Made experimenting by famous "Cryo"  
principle. Used or carried with ease.

Where there is an electric cleaner, the every-  
day convenience of a Bissell's is needed.

If any dealer can't supply Bissell's write  
his price list and booklet—"Sweeping Facts  
and Fallacies."

Put Your Sweeping Beliefs  
on a Bissell's Appliance

**BISSELL CARPET SWEEPER CO.**  
519 Erie St., Grand Rapids, Mich.  
(Makers of Largest Sweepers Market)  
Made in Canada, Inc.









1921



1946



1952

Figure 3-26. To most Americans, the hallmark of a successful homemaker was her ability to cook. American society inculcated girls with this gender-role socialization at an early age, and food product manufacturers stereotyped the idea in ads.

### Food Preparation and Consumerism

Food preparation has been foremost among the categories of housework for women throughout the centuries. Skill at cooking was one of the measurable benchmarks of a prospective bride, since fertility commonly was not tested prior to marriage, and beauty was in the eyes of the beholder. (Figure 3-26.) From an early age girls were inculcated with this message of successful homemaking. Royal Baking Powder used the age-old cliché “the way to a man’s heart” in its 1921 ad, where a plain, preteen girl is shown triumphing over a beautiful rival for the attentions of a boy when she proudly presents her homemade cake. In 1952, a Procter & Gamble ad showed a startled groom embracing his bride next to a huge header asking, “Can she cook?” In answer, P&G assured the new husband (and bride) that Crisco always “pleased wives because it made cakes and pies that kept Papa coming home for dinner.” Campbell’s soup ads also periodically told women not to worry if they could not cook. A 1946 version advised young brides that he’ll think he “courted an angel and married a cook [when they] include one of his favorite soups.”

Feeding the family was one household responsibility that women would even rise from their sickbeds to perform. Before 1900, preparing meals was a major undertaking. Few manufactured food products were purchased to relieve the housewife’s cooking chores. Instead, women made trips to the market virtually every day for fresh food. That could mean live fowl to be killed, plucked, and dressed, or fish to be gutted and scaled. Green coffee had to be roasted and ground before brewing, bulk sugar cut and pounded, spices chopped and ground, flour sifted, nuts shelled, raisins seeded, fruits peeled and pitted, and dozens of other tasks performed before cooking could even begin.





Figure 3-29. Images such as the National Biscuit boy in his rain slicker and the cookie clown with his open umbrella visually reinforced in ads the promise of safe, protected food packaging. Uneeda ad 1901, ZuZu ad 1910.

housewives baked their own bread about twice a week,<sup>30</sup> packaged cakes, cookies, and crackers became standard stock items in most kitchens. Manufacturers of packaged goods resolved consumers' concerns about shelf life, freshness, insect infestations, and sanitation of products usually sold by bulk. The typical sack of bulk crackers or cookies scooped out of insanitary barrels at the local grocer's was replaced by sealed packages and cartons of standardized products.

In 1898, the National Biscuit Company introduced its In-er-seal carton, an airtight package lined with wax paper. During the next few decades, this safety packaging was widely advertised with the image of a boy clad in rain gear or a clown with an open umbrella. (Figure 3-29.) Such visual icons as the slicker boy and the cookie clown instantly conveyed to consumers that the In-er-seal packaging guaranteed protection from moisture and external contaminants.

In conjunction with food safety messages, National Biscuit ads also promoted the convenience and variety of its packaged foods. "Many a wise homekeeper finds that it is far easier, and far better, to stock the pantry shelf with a few varieties of National Biscuit Company products than to stand and bake for hours, with all the attendant uncertainties of baking day," said one 1922 ad. (Figure 3-30.) Susan Strasser cites the importance of this kind of widely distributed advertising campaign as "product education." National Biscuit "was promoting not simply its own products but the product category: packaged crackers and cookies."<sup>31</sup> Ads that generated product education to a mass market benefited the competition as well, so the third purpose of National Biscuit's saturation of advertising was brand awareness. All three messages—food safety, product education, and branding—helped catapult the company into the preeminent position it would retain for more than a century.

As self-serve grocery stores expanded across the country in the 1920s, lines of packaged products that fit the new way of food shopping likewise expanded. In a 1928 ad by Hostess Cakes, the question of serving guests store-bought packaged cakes was addressed. (Figure 3-31.) Written in an editorial format, with the byline of a fictitious Alice Adams Proctor, the copy



Figure 3-30. The National Biscuit Company suggested in ads that the "wise homekeeper" did not waste time baking when she could stock up on quality baked goods from its kitchens. Ad 1922.

Figure 3-31. Ads for Hostess Cakes were presented in an editorial format featuring the fictitious Alice Adams Proctor, who extolled the social acceptability of serving guests store-bought baked goods. Ad 1928.

assured readers that with Hostess Cakes so easily available at their nearby grocery store, “baking cake at home is utter folly.” Hostess, like the National Biscuit Company and other packaged food manufacturers, persistently used such advertising for product education during the early decades of the century. Part of this process was designed to help consumers overcome the stigma that the homemaker who relied on packaged or canned foods “was held in open scorn by her neighbors as lacking in culinary skill, or perhaps shirking her duty,” as a writer for *Good Housekeeping* later recalled.<sup>32</sup>

For the housewife of the twentieth century, use of packaged and canned foods helped reduce the time and labor in grocery shopping and in cooking meals. Yet, although women liked the convenience of these products and relished the freedom from so much time in the kitchen, most women still wanted to preserve some creativity and craft satisfaction with their cooking. Food manufacturers found a product niche between processed foods and cooking from scratch: the mix. The more than thirty steps and several hours needed for baking as outlined in a 1913 Gold Medal Flour ad was reduced to simply adding milk to a mix by the 1950s. (Figure 3-32.) In the end, both



Figure 3-32. Food manufacturers found a product niche between processed foods and cooking from scratch: the mix. Gold Medal ad 1913, Pillsbury ad 1955.



Figure 3-33. Decade after decade, Jell-O assured homemakers how quick and easy desserts could be made with its mixes. Left ad 1911, right ad 1959.

methods achieved the same result—home-baked foods fresh from the oven.

Jell-O, too, had long advertised that its flavored gelatin mixes were so easy anyone could successfully—and quickly—produce a perfect dish every time. (Figure 3-33.) “She may spoil everything else, but she will make a fine dessert of Jell-O,” the copy said in a 1911 ad, “for she cannot go wrong there.” Almost half a century later, the same message was directed in an ad to brides: “because friend-in-deed Jell-O can’t burn, can’t fall and can’t fail to delight the light of your life.”

Eventually entire meals were boxed for convenient yet fresh-from-the-kitchen cooking. (Figure 3-34.) Chef Boy-Ar-Dee introduced a line of complete dinners in

the 1960s that allowed women to feel that they had prepared a “homemade” meal. “In 15 minutes you can prepare a spaghetti dinner that would take an Italian chef 4 hours,” the ad copy declared. Instead of having to peel tomatoes to make a sauce, roll and cook meatballs, prepare pasta dough, and grate cheese, the cook found everything premeasured in an assortment of containers boxed together. Other complete meal packages developed by food manufacturers included Chinese and Mexican dinners, as well as dozens of one-pan dishes to which the cook simply added a favorite meat or fish.



Figure 3-34. For the homemaker who wanted convenience and yet wished to maintain some craft satisfaction with her cooking, entire meals were premeasured and packaged ready to cook. Ad 1965.



Figure 3-35. By the 1950s the use of frozen foods was part of virtually every American housewife’s meal preparation—from truly fresh-tasting fruits and vegetables to the complete TV dinner. Philco ad 1956, Banquet ad 1963.

The ultimate in cooking convenience, frozen foods, was developed commercially in the 1930s by Birds Eye. Consumers could now enjoy the year-round availability of truly fresh-tasting fruits and vegetables, which accounted for more than half of all commercial frozen food production prior to 1960.<sup>33</sup> Prepared foods for the freezer had been tested throughout the 1940s and culminated in the “TV dinner” of the early 1950s. (Figure 3-35.) With the frozen dinner, women surrendered all control of meal preparation. The manufacturer determined the menu and portions of each dish, seasoned and applied butter or sauces, and even eliminated the need for dishwashing by arranging the meal on a disposable tray.

By the 1970s, convenience food manufacturers were able to have it both ways. For women too busy to cook or disinterested in culinary arts, the variety of microwave, boil-in-a-bag, frozen, canned, or packaged meals was enormous. For women who enjoyed cooking, manufacturers began to advertise the added value of their convenience foods. The cook could create the main dish from scratch but add frozen side dishes, microwave a frozen entrée but bake fresh bread from dough in a can, or combine convenience foods to create an original dish of her own.

### Housecleaning Consumables

Cooking may have been the most important daily chore a woman could do for her family, but cleaning was by far the most time consuming. The need to wash, scrub, scour, mop, dust, and polish everything in the home week after week generated a whole industry of consumables to aid women in this domestic pursuit. Innumerable soaps, detergents, cleansers, waxes, polishes, and specialized household chemicals were created to lessen the intensity of their many cleaning labors. Ironically, the addition of all these specialized products to the household cleaning routine created more tasks. For instance, specialized products for cleaning wood, glass, porcelain, metal, and fabrics all required individual steps and different equipment for use. Studies from the 1950s showed that “women actually spent more time on household chores than had their mothers . . . logging a 99.6-hour workweek.”<sup>34</sup> A similar study cited by Betty Friedan indicated that American society—and marketers—wanted women “to have their cake and eat it too . . . save time, have more comfort, avoid dirt and disorder, have mechanized supervision, yet not want to give up the personal achievement and pride in a well-run household.”<sup>35</sup>

The industry that by the middle of the twentieth century would fill entire aisles of grocery stores with cleaning products started out simply enough. An ordinary bar of all-purpose soap was what most women of 1900 used to wash just about everything from laundry and dishes to their children. Commercial soap production had originated in the mid-nineteenth century as a by-product of other industries such as meatpacking and cottonseed oil processing. Several brand-name, all-purpose soaps were already in wide distribution by 1900, including Ivory, Sapolio, and Gold Dust. In fact, at the time Ivory was created in 1878, the Cincinnati soap firm that was to become Procter & Gamble already had twenty-four other varieties of soap on the market.<sup>36</sup>



Figure 3-36. Manufacturers of all-purpose bar soaps advertised the versatility of their products as well as the quick and easy results. Ivory ad 1906, P & G ad 1916.

To wash clothing the bars of soap had to be chipped into the washtubs, or else a solution of soap dissolved in boiling water was used. (Figure 3-36.) Some manufacturers produced soap powders, but before the granulated process was developed these powders often solidified into chunks that were more difficult to dissolve than chips from bars. The promise of the product, though, as spelled out in early soap ads, was quick and easy results. That clothes came clean with most any soap was understood. What drove the competitive advantage of branded soaps was the claim of how much quicker and easier one cleaned than the other. One such ad in 1916 told women they could save their energy for more pleasant things than washing clothes because P & G soap “does not merely help you wash; it, by itself actually washes; . . . it does your part too.”

Bar soap used for laundry and household cleaning was gradually replaced by more specialized cleaning products. In 1906 Lux introduced boxed soap chips, and in 1918 Rinso created the first clump-free granulated soap powder.<sup>37</sup> Other manufacturers quickly followed suit with forms of their own. (Figure 3-37.) By the end of World War II, the arduous chore of washing the entire laundry by hand had been mostly replaced by the washing machine, whether in the home, apartment laundry facility, or coin-operated laundromat. The inconvenience of hand-chipping bar soap into an automatic washer and the annoyance of gummy residues sometimes left by boxed soap chips made granulated detergents quickly become the most popular choice of consumers. Detergent manufacturers even developed cooperative promotional programs with washing machine manufacturers to provide a sample box of their brand with new washer models. (Figure 3-38.) In turn, detergent manufacturers used this as an endorsement in their ads, and machine manufacturers got co-op advertising plus a bonus customer incentive.

The bottom line for marketing these products was, by the 1950s, product differentiation. If soap powders were basically all the same, consumers might wonder, then how did one detergent clean better than its competition? Tide ads claimed to work in the “hardest water,” Surf contained “ultraviolet whitener,” and Dash was “concentrated fury.” (Figure 3-39.) Though most of these vague claims were distinctions without a difference, they effectively played on what Daniel Cohen

1922

*Washing tests made by nation's biggest manufacturer of yarns*

Show safe way to wash knitted things

Wash is necessarily learned by your hands—by those very other fibers. A strong [or effective] soap, by example, will break, reduce and break back. Rubbing takes away the ballness and gives a hard-like appearance. It is as important to the manufacturer as to the wearer to find the safe way to wash woolens. For this reason the makers of the Finest Yarns had carefully searching tests made. The latter tests are compared with the strongest things that can be done and why, as a result, it is recommended Lux is the safe way to wash woolens.

To keep knitted things soft and comfortable

**LUX**

**Distinguished Committee of 17 Launches New Soap Discovery**

Mrs. James J. Davis, Mrs. Carl G. Smith, Ethel Barrymore, Anna May Wong, in groups to judge new soap for best interest

**PALMOLIVE BEADS**  
For washing face fabrics. Large Box 10¢

1931

*Makers of Fine Woolens say —*  
**“The IVORY FLAKES”**

Wash like the cleanest, most delicate thing! Use Ivory Flakes with a soap that's just a flake away from your hands — and you'll have the best of both worlds!

Wash like the cleanest, most delicate thing! Use Ivory Flakes with a soap that's just a flake away from your hands — and you'll have the best of both worlds!

**IVORY FLAKES**

1935

Figure 3-37. Boxed laundry soap chips were first produced in 1906, and granulated detergents followed in 1918.

Figure 3-38. Laundry detergent manufacturers developed co-op programs with washing machine makers to provide sample boxes of their brands with new washer models. Dash ad 1956, Tide ad 1966.



refers to as the American “cult of cleanliness” created by advertising in which “housewives are mortified by . . . clothes that are ‘dingy’ and shirts with ‘ring around the collar’.”<sup>38</sup> There, in the ads of issue after issue of magazines, and daily in TV commercials, were the answers to a housewife’s laundry dilemmas.

Before the segmentation of general-purpose soaps into specialized soaps such as laundry detergents, most manufacturers promoted the versatility of their brands. A 1906 series of Ivory ads illustrated a single use in each, including washing hands, hair, infants, dishes, clothes, and even ostrich feathers.<sup>39</sup> Clearly the more things the housewife could use bar soap to wash, and the more often she washed them, the more soap she needed to buy.

Figure 3-39. By the end of World War II, machine washing had mostly replaced hand-washing, and granulated detergents had surpassed chips and bar soaps for laundry use. Brand product differentiation on packages and in ads for detergents centered on degrees of cleaning effectiveness rather than convenience of use.



1949

1957



1967







Figure 3-43. The exceptional promise made in ads for toilet bowl cleaners was that the products would do the work for you. Sani-Flush ad 1917, Vanish ad 1967.



plumbing (94 percent in urban areas).<sup>41</sup> As tubs, showers, sinks, and toilets became permanent fixtures in the home, the housewife faced new cleaning problems. Water stains, mildew, soap residue, mineral buildup, and rust all left their marks on porcelain, tile, ceramic, and steel surfaces. Cleaning these stains was no job for a mild bar soap. Instead, manufacturers such as Sapolio and Bon Ami introduced scouring powders as early as the 1860s. (Figure 3-42.) Comprised of powdered soap and pulverized mineral abrasives such as calcite and feldspar, these commercial cleansers were aggressively marketed for the difficult cleaning chores in the kitchen and bathroom. Yet, consumers initially resisted these commercial cleansers for two reasons. First, many housewives used homemade abrasives such as potash and even ground sand, or inexpensive scouring bricks made of dried clay, all of which were highly effective in removing stains.<sup>42</sup> Second, the homemade scouring cleansers frequently damaged the surfaces they cleaned, so consumers presumed commercially

made cleansers were equally harmful. However, with logo taglines like Bon Ami's "hasn't scratched yet," consumer confidence in manufactured scouring cleansers eventually grew, and so did market share.

One of the best promises a cleaning product could make was to do all the work for you. This is what toilet bowl cleaners claimed from the time they were introduced in the 1890s. (Figure 3-43.) "Cleans without fuss or mess," read the label of early Sani-Flush containers. These cleansers contained

Figure 3-44. Even the cleanest homes could still be dens of infection, warned ads from disinfectant manufacturers such as Lysol.



1935



1942



1976

chemicals that reacted with water and fizzed away stains and rings. “No hands in the bowl,” Vanish assured housewives in its ads.

Despite daily scrubbing and scouring, a clean house may not be enough, suggested some chemical manufacturers. (Figure 3-44.) Some of the most melodramatic ads created in the 1930s and 1940s were for Lysol Disinfectant. In a 1935 ad, a nefarious “criminal” was shown lurking in the shadows just outside the window of an ideal, clean home. The sensationalized copy told readers that the “criminal at large” was infection, which caused “more illness, more unhappiness, more deaths than all the gangsters of the world put together.” During World War II the ad copy and imagery were updated from the gangster metaphor to that of wartime concerns. Even if put in a gas mask, the copy and illustration warned in a 1942 ad, children may not be safe against infectious disease. Terms like “enemies,” “invaders,” and “home defense” made the copy relevant to the national crisis of the time. Decades later, with all the advances in medicine, education, and home-care technology, women were still being told in ads that “even the cleanest homes need Lysol,” if only to eliminate household odors. “House-atoxis” became the latest social stigma marketers invented for housewives in the 1960s. The word was derived from “halitosis,” the term for bad breath, which itself was a word invented by a mouthwash advertiser of the 1920s.

From the dawn of civilization, homes had been plagued with all manners of dust, dirt, soot, and ashes deposited throughout interiors from open doors, open fireplaces, and open-flame lamps. Protecting floors, woodwork, and furnishings through preventative maintenance had been emphasized in ads by manufacturers of polishes and waxes since the mid-nineteenth century. (Figure 3-45.) By 1900, the housewife had a good selection of products from which to choose for protecting her interior woods from any permanent damage all this dust and grime might have caused. O-Cedar not only manufactured a polish that protected floors and furniture, it also produced dusting pads and mops that according to its ads reduced “cleaning, dusting, and polishing to almost nothing.” Johnson’s Wax went one step further to encourage women to wax their wood and linoleum floors more often; the company began renting electric floor polishers in the 1920s. As home interiors changed from the Victorian era to the modern era, wood home furnishings and floors were replaced by those made of metals, glass, plastics, vinyl, and other synthetic materials or surfaces. The need for protective polishing and waxing became obsolete in many homes, and dusting was easily done with antistat-ic sprays and ammonia-based cleaners.

### Conclusion: All the Better to Cook, Clean, and Care for the Home

“The fact that women say they ‘hate housework,’” wrote Laura Clarke Rockwood in 1911, “does not lessen their responsibility for doing it well.”<sup>43</sup> In each succeeding generation throughout the twentieth century, women who faced the daily drudgery and labor of housework saw their lot improve over that of their mothers and grandmothers. By the 1920s, the burdens of housekeeping already had been dramatically altered by the mass marketing of an extraordinary array of electric home appliances, processed and packaged foods, and specialized household cleaning products. A deluge of mass-media advertising inspired and cajoled women toward improved, easier



Figure 3-45. Besides polishes and waxes, manufacturers created line extensions to include implements for applying their products. To urge homemakers to use even more of its products, Johnson's Wax rented electric floor polishers for those who could not afford to buy them. O-Cedar ad 1913, Johnson's Wax ad 1931.

ways to clean, cook, and care for their homes and families. As their era and society permitted, these millions of women consumers responded to the advertising from home product manufacturers, distributors, and retailers and bought mass quantities of soaps and canned soups, electric irons, washers, dryers, and fryers, all in the quest for safer, cleaner, and more comfortable homes. From the start of the century, women's social structures had begun to rapidly evolve and extend beyond traditional boundaries as marketers led consumers to new ideas and new ways of homemaking. For instance, while the social stigma of using processed foods instead of cooking from scratch was gradually alleviated by persistent advertising, the social stigmas of dishpan hands, spotted glassware, or house-atosis were newly created by advertising.

Another dichotomy in this evolutionary process of housekeeping was one of quality versus quantity. Unquestionably, manufactured household goods helped ease the burdens of labor-intensive and time-consuming housework and improved the resulting quality of the housewife's cooking or cleaning efforts. The electric washing machine and iron were milestones in work reduction for women. Canned goods and processed foods helped eliminate steps in cooking as well as in food shopping. Specialized cleaning products answered the challenges of relentless stains, dirt, and grime. Yet, with the continuous segmentation of housekeeping products into specialized variations different and additional types of housework emerged. Each appliance may have lessened the labor of a respective chore, but as the appliances accumulated added tasks of care and maintenance came with them. Cleaning carpets and rugs with a vacuum cleaner, for example, was less intense work than using a broom. However, vacuum cleaners had to have dust bags changed or emptied and washed, sweeper brushes unclogged, attachment tools cleaned, and worn hoses, belts, and cords replaced.

In her 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan examined this phenomenon of marketing and "housewifery." In her observations of a fifteen-year study by Ernest Dichter of the Institute for Motivational Research, Friedan wrote that the moral of the study was explicit: "Since the Balanced Homemaker represents the market with the greatest future potential, it would be to the advantage of the appliance manufacturer to make more and more women aware of the desirability of belonging to this group. Educate them through advertising that it is possible to have outside interests and become alert to wider intellectual influences . . . . The art of good homemaking should be the goal of every normal woman."<sup>44</sup>

To this end—"the art of good homemaking"—the advertising messages of household product marketers throughout the twentieth century were designed to reaffirm women's roles as housewives, while at the same time to lead them into new, ever expanding arenas of consumerism. What Friedan and later social critics might deem as a stereotyping of the American woman was for advertisers a realistic reflection of her role in society. To marketers, the housewife of 1999 wanted better ways to cook, clean, and care for her home, just as her great-grandmother had in 1900.