

# From Single to Married: Feminist Teachers' Response to Family/Work Conflict in Early Twentieth-Century New York City

*Patricia A. Carter*

## Abstract

*In 1914, Henrietta Rodman, a high school English teacher and president of the newly formed Feminist Alliance in New York City, announced her group's plan to develop a twelve-story cooperative apartment house, based on the ideas of feminist philosopher Charlotte Perkins Gilman, that would meet the needs of professional working women like her, married with children. This research illustrates strategic activities teachers used in their attempts to reconceptualize wage-earning as the legitimate province of women, regardless of their marital or maternal status, and highlights the Feminist Alliance's contention that women's lack of economic self-determination lay at the root of female subordination.*

In 1914, Henrietta Rodman, president of the newly formed Feminist Alliance in New York City, announced the group's plan to develop a twelve-story cooperative apartment house that would meet the needs of professional working women like her, married with children.<sup>1</sup> Rodman, a high school English teacher, founded the Feminist Alliance to help strategize local fights for women teachers' rights to marry and maternity leave. She and other members of the Alliance viewed female teachers as a new class of professionals who, like men, would spend a long period of their lives in careers. But, unlike men, they had no wives to handle household and childcare concerns. The cooperative apartment house spoke to that dilemma. Rodman declared, "We want to see a condition where both men and women may work in their chosen professional life as equals."<sup>2</sup>

---

Patricia A. Carter is an associate clinical professor in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at Georgia State University. She is the author of *Everybody's Paid But the Teacher: The Teaching Profession and the Women's Movement* (2002), *Globalizing Education for Work: Comparative Perspectives on Gender and the New Economy* (with Richard Lakes, 2004), and several articles on women teachers in the United States.

<sup>1</sup>"Feminists Start Rent Round Robin," *New-York Tribune*, 13 April 1914, 5.

<sup>2</sup>"Feminists Design a New Type Home," *New York Times*, 5 April 1914.

The Feminist Alliance viewed housing as a linchpin in women's drive for economic independence. Housing not only had to be affordable but provide the necessary services to free the teacher from housekeeping and childcare chores that undermined her professional momentum. The Utopian design, which failed to come to fruition, was based on ideas of the eminent novelist and feminist philosopher Charlotte Perkins Gilman.<sup>3</sup> It included a laundry, dressmaking facility, a kitchen in the basement to deliver items to individual apartments via dumbwaiters, a twenty-four-hour child nursery, a rooftop Montessori school and playground, and a sick ward and dispensary. Rodman and Gilman believed that cooperative living and a well-trained staff would free professional women from the drudgery of household and childcare chores that sapped their intellectual and emotional engagement in work, family, and community.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the plan spoke to the New York City School Board's estimation of young mothers as inferior teachers and to the eugenicist's claim that college-educated women's failure to bear children was leading to "race suicide."<sup>5</sup>

This research adds to the history of teachers' responses to marriage bans<sup>6</sup> and introduces an unusual example of teacher activism to the scholarship on teachers forming female networks to overcome systemic professional biases. Several studies have noted the efforts of

---

<sup>3</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: The Economic Factor between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (Boston, MA: Small, Maynard, 1899); Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *What Diantha Did* (New York: Charlton, 1910). In Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "How Home Conditions React Upon the Family," *American Journal of Sociology* 14, no. 5 (1909), 605. Gilman states, "We need homes in which mother and father will be equally free and equally bound, both resting together in its shelter and privacy, both working together for its interests. This requires structural and functional changes that shall eliminate the last of our domestic industries and leave a home that is no one's workshop."

<sup>4</sup> "Feminists Debate Plans for a House," *New York Times*, 22 April 1914, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Mrs. and Mr. John Martin, "The Woman Movement and the Baby Crop," *New York Times Magazine*, 29 August 1915, 2, 7. For insights on Gilman's response to eugenics, particularly in this period, see Mary Ziegler, "Eugenic Feminism: Mental Hygiene, the Women's Movement, and the Campaign for Eugenic Legal Reform, 1900–1935," *Harvard Journal of Law and Gender* 31, no. 1 (2008), 211–35. Rodman's view is varied: "Protest Despotism Action," *Evening Post* (New York, NY), 16 November 1914, 8. For an alternative perspective from that presented by the Martins, see Charles F. Emerick, "College Women and Race Suicide," *Political Science Quarterly*, 24, no. 2 (June 1909), 269–83.

<sup>6</sup> David M. Donahue, "Rhode Island's Last Holdout: Tenure and Married Women Teachers at the Brink of the Women's Movement," *History of Education Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (Spring 2002), 50–74; Jennifer Redmond and Judith Harford, "'One Man, One Job': The Marriage Ban and the Employment of Women Teachers in Irish Primary Schools," *Paedagogica Historica* 46, no. 5 (October 2010), 639–54; Christine Ruane, "The Vestal Virgins of St. Petersburg: Schoolteachers and the 1897 Marriage Ban," *Russian Review* 50, no. 2 (April 1991), 163–82; and Sheila L. Cavanaugh, "Female-Teacher Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Ontario, Canada," *History of Education Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (June 2005), 247–73.

female teachers from the 1930s through the 1970s to abolish bans against married women.<sup>7</sup> This essay suggests that Rodman and her compatriots preceded this work by many years. Teachers such as Rodman, in a dance of accommodation and resistance, worked to eliminate taboos that prevented the marriage and maternity of female school employees while at least tacitly acknowledging that the traditional role of mother and wife could conflict with their instructional duties. Their refusal to resign their wages upon marriage implies an acknowledgement of both the changing pecuniary conditions and changing political attitudes about their situation.<sup>8</sup>

The Feminist Alliance attacked issues on both fronts in their efforts to eliminate bars to married and mother-teachers and to create housing arrangements that would smooth the work/family tension. The Alliance deflected the charge of race suicide by claiming that the board of education fostered spinster teachers and the decline of the middle-class birth rate.<sup>9</sup> Birth control historian Linda Gordon claims that race

---

<sup>7</sup>These include but are not limited to: Alison Oram, "Men must be educated and women must do it': The National Federation (later Union) of Women Teachers and Contemporary Feminism 1910–30," *Gender & Education* 19, no. 6 (November 2007), 663–67; Karen Leroux, "Lady Teachers' and the Genteel Roots of Teacher Organization in Gilded Age Cities," *History of Education Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (June 2006), 164–91; Oresta López, "Women Teachers of Post-Revolutionary Mexico: Feminisation and Everyday Resistance," *Paedagogica Historica* 49, no. 1 (February 2013), 56–69; Patricia A. Carter, *Everybody's Paid but the Teacher: The Teaching Profession and the Women's Movement* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002); Jackie Blount, *Fit to Teach: Same-Sex Desire, Gender, and School Work in the Twentieth Century* (Albany, GA: State University of New York Press, 2004); Kate Rousmaniere, *Citizen Teacher: The Life and Leadership of Margaret Haley* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); Kristal Clemons Moore, "I've Got to Do Something for My People: Black Women Teachers of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools," *Western Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 3 (Fall 2014), 141–54; Janet Nolan, *Servants of the Poor: Teachers and Mobility in Ireland and Irish America* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2004); Kathleen Weiler, *Country Schoolwomen: Teaching in Rural California, 1850–1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); and Sonya Ramsey, *Reading, Writing, and Segregation: A Century of Black Women Teachers in Nashville* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

<sup>8</sup>Elaine Tyler May, *Great Expectations: Marriage and Divorce in Post Victorian America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Joyce Antler, "After College What? New Graduates and the Family Claim," *American Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (October 1980), 409–34.

<sup>9</sup>For background on race suicide see: Trent MacNamara, "Why 'Race Suicide'? Cultural Factors in U.S. Fertility Decline, 1903–1908," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 44, no. 4 (Spring 2014), 475–508; J. David Hacker, "Rethinking the 'Early' Decline of Marital Fertility in the United States," *Demography* 40 (November 2003), 605–20; Miriam King and Steven Ruggles, "American Immigration, Fertility, and Race Suicide at the Turn of the Century," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 20, no. 3 (Winter 1990), 347–69; Patricia A. Palmieri, "From Republican Motherhood to Race Suicide: Arguments on the Higher Education of Women in the United States, 1820–1920," in *Educating Men and Women Together: Coeducation in a Changing World*, ed. Carol Lasser, 49–64 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); and Thomas C. Leonard, "Retrospectives: Eugenics and Economics in the Progressive Era," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 19, no. 4 (Fall 2005), 207–24.

suicide attacks on middle-class educated women inspired feminist ripostes, from the outright rejection of the entire eugenic framework to shifting blame for the situation. The “most radical response to the race-suicide attack,” according to Gordon, “was one that reinterpreted women’s role and ‘duty’ altogether.”<sup>10</sup> This stance was exemplified by the Feminist Alliance project. Married New York City teachers, albeit a minority in a sea of educational practitioners, demonstrated a commitment to career while testing traditional notions of propriety by claiming the right to a concurrent family life.

The New York City teachers’ campaign for maternity rights, which backgrounds this essay, emerged during a transitional period between two generations of white, college-educated, middle-class working women: the first (employed 1865–1890) who resigned work upon marriage without much thought or other option, and the second (employed 1890–1930), who viewed job satisfaction as a salient factor in a woman’s decision whether to marry and/or have children. Historian Mary E. Cookingham suggests that women of the first generation were forced to marry since the salaries they earned were not sustaining. But new possibilities expanded as teaching wages rose with the exponential expansion of high school enrollments and the subsequent demand for college-educated teachers. A living wage, claims Cookingham, allowed well-educated women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to “turn down an unattractive or incompatible suitor, without risking financial dependence on parents and siblings in their later years.” Spinsterhood became “a viable lifestyle, associated with financial independence, social reform, and productive work.”<sup>11</sup> However, historian Julia Blackwelder finds a counter trend in the second generation in which educated women held on to their jobs after marriage. Loath to give up their wages and squander the time and effort spent in gaining their professional status in a period of sharply escalating costs of

---

<sup>10</sup>Linda Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

<sup>11</sup>Mary E. Cookingham, “Bluestockings, Spinsters and Pedagogues: Women College Graduates, 1865–1910,” *Population Studies* 38, no. 3 (November 1984), 360. This is a somewhat optimistic assessment of the single woman teacher’s situation as Linda Van Ingen establishes in her assessment of the problem of retirement for single women teachers in “‘One Can’t Live on Air’: Sarah McComb and the Problem of Old-Age Income for Single Women Teachers, 1870s–1930s,” *History of Education Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (May 2014), 172–96. Kay Whitehead notes a preference for married women teachers emerged in the 1950s and 1960s when “the new sciences of sexology and psychology were reinforcing marriage as women’s natural destiny and pathologizing older single women as ‘embittered, sexless or homosexual,’” in “Vocation, career and character in early twentieth-century women teachers’ work in city schools,” *History of Education* 34, no. 6 (November 2005), 592. Kristina Llewellyn makes a similar case in *Democracy’s Angels: The Work of Women Teachers* (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2012).

living, women struggled to balance work and family lives. Blackwelder explains, "Whether their career goals emerged from conversations with peers, from individual role models, or from experiences in higher education, small numbers of educated women in the 1920s remained in the labor force after marriage." She concludes, "Amidst the controversy over mother's work, employed mothers of the middle class spoke up for themselves. In doing so they changed the climate of opinion in which they or their peers judged wage-earning mothers."<sup>12</sup> The maternity rights activists in New York City allied themselves with this latter generation of women who helped spawn a demographic uptick in urban, married, wage-earning women.

Rodman's refusal to accept the choices forced upon her mother's generation instilled in her a resolve to overcome the practical as well as the social and psychological limitations assumed by women upon marriage and motherhood. Her work thus clarifies Ladd-Taylor's explanation that Progressive Era feminists "convinced that women's economic independence was a precondition of their liberation," utilized two main strategies. The first and most prominent in the United States was Gilman's idea of socialized housework. The second, which had greater adherence in Europe, was Ellen Key's proposal that mothers be granted a state wage that allowed them to stay at home with children. While the Feminist Alliance promoted deep discussion about both scenarios, it was the former which garnered far more attention in their activities.<sup>13</sup> An intrinsic goal of the Feminist Alliance's efforts was to create a living situation for working mothers whereby they could gain economic independence without sacrificing their desire to have children.

Another focus of this study, teacher housing, extends previous explorations on the habitats of single women teachers to include an example of the housing accommodations for married women.<sup>14</sup> For many, a woman teacher's residence symbolized her compliance with school

---

<sup>12</sup>Julia Blackwelder, *Now Hiring: The Feminization of Work in the United States, 1900-1995* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 79.

<sup>13</sup>Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 112; Rodman advocated a state subsidy to mothers, reasoning, "The child is a greater economic necessity to the state than it is to the parent; that is why, to avoid extinction the state must eventually, put a cash premium upon motherhood," in Charles Henry Adams, "New York Day by Day," *Evening Independent* (St. Petersburg), 17 April 1914, 3.

<sup>14</sup>Patricia Carter, "Building Houses for Teachers: Home, Hearth, and the General Federation of Women's Clubs," in *Everybody's Paid but the Teacher*, 59-75. Most teacher housing scholarship focuses on rural or frontier women, such as Mary Hurlbert Cordier, "Prairie Schoolwomen: Mid 1850s to 1920s in Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska," *Great Plains Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (April 1988), 102-19; Polly Welts Kaufman, *Women Teachers on the Frontier* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985); Andrea Wyman, *Rural Women Teachers in the United States: A Sourcebook* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1997); and

board and general community expectations about her moral decorum and dedication to her profession. Doris Pieroth notes that the 1910 Seattle School Board “made clear its preference that teachers live in . . . [respectable] private homes.” Others took up lodging at “reputable” residential hotels, but a mutual covenant of “respectability” reigned.<sup>15</sup> Karen Graves finds that the assumption that teachers would remain single “encouraged same-sex living arrangements and thereby promoted a degree of community acceptance for same-sex relationships.”<sup>16</sup> Jackie Blount agrees that single women, including those in same-sex relationships, “often lived together; and they built communities of like-minded women who socialized, labored for social uplift, championed political causes and organized for professional betterment.”<sup>17</sup> Housing, seen from these points of view, both circumscribed teachers’ lives and afforded them space for fomenting change within the profession and the culture. This research provides an example of the latter as the Feminist Alliance attempted to use housing to negotiate a more coherent relationship between teachers’ professional and private lives.

This essay also extends previous research about the collaborative efforts by teachers and female reformers to advance women’s rights. As I have argued elsewhere, female teachers’ collectivity, enhanced communications networks, and intellectual community served as the backbone of the twentieth-century women’s movement.<sup>18</sup> Teachers’ coalition building helped them develop counter-hegemonic thinking, exposing them to changing attitudes within the larger female community and, in return, community women gained insight into the wage-earning struggles of teachers. Membership in these groups expanded teachers’ individual and collective sphere of influence while garnering support for their own workplace issues as well as a degree of protective cover from the watchful eye of the school board. Teachers’ willingness

---

Diane Manning, *Hill Country Teacher: Oral Histories from the One-Room School and Beyond* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1990).

<sup>15</sup>Doris Pieroth, *Seattle’s Women Teachers of the Interwar Years: Shapers of a Livable City* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2004), 63–76.

<sup>16</sup>Karen Graves, “‘So, You Think You Have a History?’ Taking a Q from Lesbian and Gay Studies,” *History of Education Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (November 2012), 468.

<sup>17</sup>Jackie Blount, “From Exemplar to Deviant: Same-Sex Relationships among Women Superintendents, 1909–1976,” *Educational Studies* 35, no. 2 (April 2004), 107.

<sup>18</sup>Carter, *Everybody’s Paid but the Teacher*: 27. Jackie Blount, “From Exemplar to Deviant,” 107 agrees, finding that “many women teachers participated vigorously in such women’s cultures” serving in “significant leadership positions in suffrage associations as well as other reform-minded organizations.” For more on the relationship between feminist activism and the profession in the early twentieth century, see Kate Rousmaniere, *Citizen Teacher*, and *City Teachers: Teaching and School Reform in Historical Perspective* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997); Kathleen Weiler, *Country Schoolwomen* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); and Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900–1980* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

to risk social and economic sanctions indicated their desire, and often, the necessity to continue working after marriage and the birth of children. Organizations such as the Feminist Alliance provided teachers with a vehicle through which to voice their differences with the board of education, and to lobby at the local, state, and even national levels for significant changes that would allow them to achieve more just treatment in the workplace.<sup>19</sup>

### The Feminist Alliance

On April 4, 1914, a small group met at Rodman's apartment at 315 E. 17th Street with the aim to effect changes "to relieve modern women from the physical drudgery of housework and bringing up children and leave them time and opportunity to do useful work."<sup>20</sup> To this end, the Alliance lobbied for equal opportunities for women and girls in education and employment, equality before the law, the right of wage earners to marriage and motherhood, the right to retain their surnames after marriage, and the support of cooperative housing. As its titular head, Rodman conceded, "From any radical standpoint the program as outlined is almost reactionary, but from the standpoint of practical achievement it is laying out work perhaps that will keep another generation busy."<sup>21</sup> From its inception, the Alliance also lobbied for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that simply read, "No civil or political right shall be refused any person on account of sex."<sup>22</sup> The Alliance appealed to President Wilson and leaders of the Democratic, Republican, Progressive, and Socialist parties to support the amendment, and publicized the proposed amendment to suffrage and other feminist organizations throughout the country. The Alliance's political agenda included support for the Kent and Thompson bills that ensured American women who married non-U.S. citizens would not lose their own citizenship nor would female aliens be restrained from obtaining citizenship because of their husband's failure to do so.<sup>23</sup> Yet, the activity for which the Alliance gained the most attention was their endeavor to build a feminist apartment building.

<sup>19</sup>Carter, *Everybody's Paid but the Teacher*, 27, 29, and 32.

<sup>20</sup>Alice Eccles, "A Foreword for the Western Feminists," *San Francisco Chronicle* (Sunday Magazine), 7 June 1914, 6.

<sup>21</sup>Henrietta Rodman, "What All Women Must Demand If They Want Equal Opportunities," *New York Call*, 28 February 1915, 7.

<sup>22</sup>"Wilson Asked to Take Stand on Suffrage," *The Sun* (New York), 13 April 1914, 6.

<sup>23</sup>"When Women Are Aliens," *Evening Post* (New York), 4 May 1914, 4; "For Aid of Alien's Wives," *Evening Post* (New York), 13 April 1914, 4; and "Bill Restores Rights," *Washington (DC) Post*, 6 May 1914, 23.

Consisting of some fifty members, the Feminist Alliance included some of the most recognizable names in the women's movement in New York City and beyond. As leaders in their professions, well-published authors and artists, and articulate feminist philosophers, they were politically connected and astute, using these attributes to gain attention and support for the housing experiment. The organization represented a new wave among female reformers, what newspaper reporter and Alliance member Nixola Greeley called the "advance guard of feminism," which saw society's biases about women as systemic and based on misinformation, a situation ameliorated by education and modeling feminist behaviors.<sup>24</sup> Its members defined the relatively new concept of feminism as:

[A] movement which demands the removal of all social, political, economic, and other discriminations which are based upon sex, and the award of all rights and duties in all fields on the basis of individual capacity alone.<sup>25</sup>

Derided by critics as the "Feminist Palace" and the "Paradise Palace," the project was nevertheless forward-thinking and influenced not only by feminist theory but the ideas of socialism, progressivism, modern education, and economic efficiency.<sup>26</sup> Implied in Rodman's housing design was also new thinking about gender relations, including the emerging notion of a companionate marriage.<sup>27</sup> Where previous female institution-building was seen as a separatist strategy among feminists, this design included male residents as a part of its philosophic justification, thus signaling a transition from a focus on homosocial solutions to gender inequity to heterosocial feminist resolutions to work/family conflicts.<sup>28</sup> They believed that if men and women were to participate equally in the world they both should be involved in creating feminist solutions. And while men shared in the organization's leadership, women carried the burden of the project. The degree to

<sup>24</sup>Nixola Greeley-Smith, "Rights for Women in All Lines to Be Decided by Merit Alone," *The Day Book* (Chicago, IL), 7 May 1914, 10–11.

<sup>25</sup>"Feminists Start Rent Round Robin," *New-York Tribune*.

<sup>26</sup>Laura Fay-Smith, "That Feminist Paradise Palace," *New York Times*, 25 April 1915, 6; and "Socialism, Feminism, and Woman Suffrage," *Hudson (NY) Evening Register*, 22 October 1915, 2.

<sup>27</sup>Christina Simmons, *Making Marriage Modern: Women's Sexuality from the Progressive Era to World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Christina Simmons, "Women's Power in Sex Radical Challenges to Marriage in Early Twentieth Century United States," *Feminist Studies* 29, no. 1 (April 2003), 169–98.

<sup>28</sup>Estelle Freedman, "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870–1930," *Feminist Studies* 3 (October 1979), 512–29. On men's participation in Rodman's feminist community, see Lucy Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde: Transatlantic Encounters of the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 27–28.

which societal beliefs about the critical feminine role in housekeeping was apparent even in the Alliance itself, as evidenced by a talk in 1914 given by Alcan Hirsch on how a couple could live on \$78 a month and only spend ninety minutes a day on housework. A reporter for the *New York Times* described the amusement and intermittent peals of laughter of the Alliance's female members at "the working of the masculine mind on this supposedly feminine problem." Hirsch no doubt oversimplified his case about costs and housekeeping tasks, and some of the laughter was probably reserved for the pomposity with which he approached his subject, but it is clear that some found humor in Hirsch's temerity in reproaching women for making more of housework than necessary. Attitudinal changes were clearly still a work in progress even among feminists. Yet Hirsch was solid in his declaration that household tasks should not be the domain of women but all members of the household.<sup>29</sup>

The executive committee of the Feminist Alliance was composed of Rodman as chair, her husband, Herman de Fremery, as executive secretary, and Florence Wise as treasurer. De Fremery was a college instructor in neurology at Columbia University, while Wise was secretary of the Women's Trade Union League. Other board members included Robert Lowie, an anthropology curator at the American Museum of Natural History; Leta Stetter Hollingworth, a path-breaking feminist psychologist and Columbia University instructor; Edith Bryner, director of the Bureau of Education at the Russell Sage Foundation; and Max Heidelberg, architect for the housing project. Other members within the group constituted some of the key movers and shakers of the city, including the U.S. Commissioner of Immigration, the president of the New York City Teachers Union, physicians, lawyers, actresses, and suffragists. Overall, the prestige of its members allowed the Alliance to gain much press attention about the conditions faced by professional women like teachers.

### Teacher-Mothers and the Feminist Alliance

Concurrent with work on the design and funding of the housing project, the Feminist Alliance held citywide debates on the issues of the right of married women and mothers to retain or obtain positions as teachers; lobbied the mayor, the state commissioner of education and board of education members; and accompanied teacher-appellants to

---

<sup>29</sup>"Feminist Model Home," *New York Times*, 14 May 1914, 6; "Housework for the Feminist Man," *Sun* (New York), 13 May 1914, 6; Marguerite Mooers Marshall, "New Style of Husband Helps the Wife Wash Dishes, Sweep and Make the Bed," *Evening World* (New York), 14 May 1914, 4; and "Feminist Home Is Pure Fiction," *Sun* (New York), 14 May 1914, 5.

hearings and court cases.<sup>30</sup> In the most important of these cases, *People ex rel. Peixotto v. Board of Education of the City of New York*, 82 Misc. Rep. 684144 N.Y. Supp. 87, Justice Seabury of the New York Supreme Court compelled the Board of Education to return teacher-mother Bridgett Peixotto to her job. Seabury reasoned that Peixotto's dismissal for "neglect of duty" as a result of childbirth was "repugnant to the law and good morals." The school board did not agree, claiming the court had overstepped its jurisdiction in the matter and appealed the case. The Appellate Division agreed with the school board, explaining that the State Commissioner of Education, John H. Finley, should have decided on the case before it went to the courts. As this case and others wound through the courts and finally to the commissioner, the Feminist Alliance pursued a two-track strategy on behalf of women teachers. The first was to secure women's right to teach regardless of their marriage or maternal status, and the second to design a home that would accommodate their needs as professional women with children.

After the Seabury decision in the *Peixotto* case, the school board was forced to allow teachers in rank to marry but it barred married women from applying for teaching positions or new female employees from continuing to teach after marriage. Those employed prior to the rule could marry, but were required to report their marriages immediately. However, Rodman argued that those who did placed themselves in a category where they were no longer seen as eligible for advancement. She claimed, "Life is to be made so unendurable for married teachers, they are to be compelled to make such heartbreaking sacrifices, that they will sooner or later accept defeat and allow themselves to be driven out of the school."<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup>"Teacher Mother Fight Arouses City's Interest," *New York Herald*, 15 November, 1914, 6; "Rodman Writes Letter of Challenge: Asks Commissioner to Seek Teachers' Opinions," *Evening Post* (New York), 4 January, 1915, 4; "Mother-Teacher Appeals to Mayor," *New York Herald*, 5 November, 1914, 20; "New Fight to Save Teacher Mothers," *New York Times*, 1 October 1914, 5; "Teacher Mothers Win Court Decision," *New-York Tribune*, 12 November 1913, 6; and "Woman Lawyer's Club to Fight Motherhood Battle," *New York Evening Telegram*, 13 March 1913, 3. Rodman founded a second organization, the League for the Civic Service of Women, which also worked on these issues. Both organizations involved some of the same members and overlapped in interests and activities, especially around women teachers' rights, with the exception of the feminist apartment house, which remained an Alliance project. For more on the League for the Civic Service of Women and deeper discussion of the married teacher and mother-teacher court cases see: Patricia A. Carter, "Henrietta Rodman and the Fight to Further Women's Economic Autonomy" in *Women Educators, Leaders and Activists, 1900-1960*, eds. Tanya. Fitzgerald and Elizabeth M. Smyth (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 152-78.

<sup>31</sup>"Restoring the Family," *New Republic* 1, no. 4 (November 1914), 8 states, "Life is to be made so unendurable for married teachers, they are to be compelled to make such heartbreaking sacrifices, that they will sooner or later accept defeat and allow themselves

Rodman advocated that teachers keep their marriages secret to avoid such consequences. But as she discovered when her own clandestine matrimony was exposed, the tactic usually proved unreliable. Rodman used the revelation of her marriage, within a month of the nuptials, to strategic advantage, gaining sympathetic media coverage for the cause.<sup>32</sup> Instead of taking Rodman up on charges, the board, embarrassed by yet another episode of negative press, instead launched a study to scientifically illustrate that married women made inferior teachers. The evidence, however, proved inconclusive and each side chose to interpret the results from their own perspectives.<sup>33</sup> Rodman conceded one point, however: "The baby is the great problem of the woman who attempts to carry the responsibilities of wage-earning and citizenship."<sup>34</sup> She saw the feminist apartment house as part of the Feminist Alliance's full agenda, which addressed what members saw as the most pressing issues related to women's status in the workplace, community, and home.

Nationwide, teachers presented a potentially sizable force for change. In 1910, four of five women in the professions in the United States worked as teachers. Over 18,000 of the 20,000-member teaching staff in New York City were female.<sup>35</sup> Although teachers in Rodman's generation still held the more tenuous, poorly paid, and less-respected positions among the professional class, improved working conditions paralleled the escalating demand for college-educated instructors, especially in urban areas. Between 1910 and 1920, married women's presence increased in the U.S. teaching profession by 3.3 percent. Though small, it was significant, representing the largest gain of married women among any group in the professions. In 1914, statisticians estimated that 18 percent of the New York City female teachers were married (many secretly), but they projected that if the bar against marriage were completely removed nearly half would marry.<sup>36</sup> The true figure for the

---

to be driven out of the school." For more on the secret marriage strategy, see Carter, *Everybody's Paid but the Teacher*, 116–122.

<sup>32</sup>"Education Board Plot, Charges Teacher Wife," *New-York Tribune*, 20 October 1913, 9; "Aided Mrs. Edgell, Married Herself," *New York Times*, 19 March 1913, 8; "Henrietta Rodman Defies the Board," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 19 March 1913, 8; "Married Teachers Find a Martyr," *Sun (New York)*, 19 March 1913, 6; "Silent Strike Teacher a Bride," *New York Herald*, 19 March 1913, 22; "Teacher Admits She Was Married Feb. 15," *New York Press*, 19 March 1913, 1; and "Weds Secretly to Fool School Board," *New-York Tribune*, 19 March 1913, 1.

<sup>33</sup>John Martin, "The Married Teacher," *New Republic* 1, no. 5 (December 1914), 23.

<sup>34</sup>George MacAdam, "Feminist Apartment House to Solve Baby Problem," *New York Times (Sunday Magazine)*, 24 January 1915, 9.

<sup>35</sup>"Dignified US Census Backs Feminists Contention," *New-York Tribune*, 2 August 1914, 9.

<sup>36</sup>"Pleas for Teacher Mother," *The Sun (New York)*, 17 June 1914, 7.

percentage of married women teachers in the New York City schools was anyone's guess, but pregnancy provided irrefutable evidence the board's rules of celibacy had been broken.

In an effort to keep mothers out of the teaching ranks, the school board ordered an investigation of all female teachers who might conceivably be hiding the fact that they had given birth or would soon do so.<sup>37</sup> Ultimately, thirty women were revealed to be mothers, all of whom failed to report their marriage or natal condition as required by the rules. Humiliated by their exposure in the local press, several left their jobs immediately; others were fired for falsifying records. Some of the latter sued. These cases were ultimately decided on an individual basis by the state commissioner of education in 1915, with several being returned to their teaching positions. This outcome was due in large part to the publicity created by the Feminist Alliance.<sup>38</sup>

### Housing as a Continuing Issue for Female Teachers

Apprehensions about appropriate housing for female teachers was addressed as early as 1869 in designs offered by Catharine Beecher and her sister Harriet Beecher Stowe in *The American Woman's Home*. Their solution was to provide a living space for the teacher inside the school building itself.<sup>39</sup> The General Federation of Women's Clubs advocated for building homes for teachers in rural areas of the country in the 1910s and 1920s. These structures, known as teacherages or teachers' manses, were meant to attract and retain a peripatetic teaching force in small-town schools. Although some three thousand teacherages were developed over an eight-year period, ultimately few lived up to the ideal of safe, comfortable, and private spaces imagined by their advocates. A survey by the U.S. Board of Education found that out of 2,816 teacherages, fewer than 20 percent met modern housing standards. As Carter explains, "Rural parsimony often overwhelmed the more altruistic motivations of the teacherage advocates, resulting in cheaply built structures, with too many teachers sharing too little space, ironically replicating the problems they experienced when boarding around."<sup>40</sup>

Urban teachers of the period, such as those in New York City, often complained of an inability to find housing situations that matched their needs and salaries within a reasonable commuting distance. It

<sup>37</sup>"Maxwell Reports Mother-Teachers," *New York Times*, 23 October 1913, 20.

<sup>38</sup>"Teacher-Mothers Win Final Verdict," *New York Times*, 12 January 1915, 1. See also Carter, *Everybody's Paid but the Teacher*, 116–22.

<sup>39</sup>Catharine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home: or, Principles of Domestic Science* . . . (New York: J. B. Ford, 1869), 457.

<sup>40</sup>Carter, *Everybody's Paid but the Teacher*, 74.

was a continuing dilemma. In 1866, the *New York Times* identified the problem when it referred to that city's professional workers as the "houseless class." While a swelling immigrant population flocked to tenements and the wealthy built palaces on the new avenues, the growing middle class found private homes beyond their means. The choice to live well outside the city and commute to work or to embrace collective living slowly brought the apartment house concept into favor within the middle class.<sup>41</sup>

For single female teachers, places might be found in hotels built specifically for working women or in subsidized housing provided by charitable institutions. However, the latter institutions usually prioritized young women earning working-class wages, and sometimes required residents to fall within certain religious and/or occupational categories. Residents at women's hotels complained of high costs and intrusive scrutiny of their social interactions, with rules that forbade males from even entering common areas such as the dining room.<sup>42</sup>

Questions about the affordability of teacher housing were included in the 1913 and 1919 National Educational Association's surveys. Although both surveys indicate that the majority of female teachers resided with their parents or other relatives, the data points out that the older the teacher the more likely she was to live independently. Regardless of their living situations, teachers across the country complained about their inability to stretch their incomes to cover the costs of housing, clothing, food, and other necessities of life and career. The cost of housing often determined the distance a teacher had to travel each day to work, and its safety, function, and suitability for the preparation of lessons. One New Haven female principal explained that rising costs forced her to remain in an "old-fashioned house" since a move to an improved abode would "add at least \$120 to her rent bill." Often the cost of a teacher's housing was tied to her community status. A woman who boarded in a less than socially respectable house in order to save money was viewed as scandalous or, at least, judgment impaired. Moreover, the teacher who spent more time on housekeeping than on lessons risked condemnation by colleagues and administrators alike.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup>Elizabeth Collins Cromley, *Alone Together: A History of New York's Early Apartments* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 11–12; Elizabeth Hawes, *New York, New York: How the Apartment House Transformed the Life of the City (1869–1930)* (New York: Henry Holt, 1994), 188–214.

<sup>42</sup>Esther Packard, *A Study of the Living Conditions of Self-Supporting Women in New York City* (New York: Metropolitan Board of the Young Women's Christian Association, 1915).

<sup>43</sup>C. Robert Brooks, *Report on the Committee on Teachers' Salaries and the Cost of Living* (Ann Arbor, MI: National Educational Association, 1913), 222–24; and Edward S. Evenden, *Teachers' Salaries and Salary Schedules in the United States, 1918–1919* (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1919).

This was an issue that Rodman hoped to resolve through the design of the feminist apartment building. Echoing Gilman's sentiments, Rodman denigrated housekeeping as "terribly antiquated," a condition best remediated through the scientific efficiency of cooperative housing. She claimed, "It is no more fitting for the woman of today to attempt her own housekeeping than it is for the man of the house to make shoes for himself and his family."<sup>44</sup>

Cooperative living did seem like a possible answer to the dilemma of married teachers, who, like many middle-class women, despaired of their ability to hire and keep competent and well-trained servants. During the early decades of the twentieth century, young women left domestic service in droves for positions that paid more and/or did not require living with their employer and suffering their constant oversight.<sup>45</sup> Both the expense and availability of live-in or day staff proved particularly difficult for teachers, who usually earned at the bottom of the wage scale for middle-class workers, and often below it. This problem was particularly challenging for women teachers who worked in districts that permitted, tacitly or legally, the continued employment of married women teachers with children, or what was commonly referred to as "teacher-mothers." Moreover, those teacher-mothers who hired help to fulfill their "motherly duties" were often perceived as abandoning their natural womanly roles, bordering on child cruelty.

One example of this attitude occurred in 1913 when Rodman invited the Women's Health Protective Association to support the teacher-mothers cause. Much to her surprise, every member but one expressed strong sentiments against the teacher-mothers. They charged the teachers with neglecting their own children while "devoting time, health, and strength to teaching other people's children." The president of the organization, Mrs. A. E. Fraser, further claimed, "When a woman is teaching in the schools her children are left at home in the care of servants, which in the case of teachers are not the best type because they cannot afford to hire efficient help."<sup>46</sup> The New York State Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage expressed a similar sentiment when it declared that such feminist principles were "wholly detrimental to the welfare of the child, and therefore dangerous to the future of the race." To the idea that a highly trained expert could share the mother's

---

<sup>44</sup>"Thousand Years Behind the Times," *Evening News* (San Jose, CA), 1 September 1915, 2.

<sup>45</sup>Vanessa H. May, *Unprotected Labor: Household Workers, Politics, and Middle-Class Reform in New York, 1870-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); and Jan H. Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).

<sup>46</sup>"Teacher-Mothers Attacked by Women," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 22 November 1913, 14.

burden (as in the feminist apartment house model), its president, Alice Chittenden, replied dismissively, "Why should not the mother be the expert and specialist for her own child?"<sup>47</sup> Mrs. Charles H. Denison, honorary president of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, saw the dilemma in starker terms: "A teacher cannot be a conscientious teacher and a mother, because to be a good mother she must deprive her class of her interest. The duties of either a teacher or a mother are enough for any woman." New York City Board of Education member John Martin voiced a similar sentiment when he claimed, "It is the duty of a married woman to bear and rear children, and the salaries of the male teachers are placed on an assumption that the men will be fathers and properly discharge their duties to their children."<sup>48</sup>

### Henrietta Rodman and the Teacher-Mothers

Rodman fervently disagreed with such assessments of feminists' indifference to children. Maintaining that "marriage and motherhood is not a substitute for a chosen career," Rodman avowed:

The self-supporting mother is here. In steadily increasing numbers women are refusing to make the cruel choice presented to them for fifty years, the choice between brain and heart, between intellectual development and emotional fulfillment. In steadily increasing numbers women are proving that the best mothers are those whose mentality is daily exercised by some skilled occupation, and the best workers are those whose natures are stimulated by "domestic happiness."<sup>49</sup>

When questioned about the economic logic of working women hiring other women to care for their children, Rodman replied, "Just now we are in a transitional period" where such "makeshift" arrangements are being made. In the near future, she insisted, "the cooperative nursery" with its "baby specialists" would meet the needs of working mothers. She concluded, "The mother will not be forced to give up her skilled work to enter the field of baby tending in which she is unskilled. On the other hand, in place of the untrained nursery maid we shall have highly efficient, scientifically educated, young women whose career will be child culture. And self-respect will be preserved all around."

---

<sup>47</sup>Mrs. Dimeon H. Guilford, "Feminists Are Family Menace," *Washington (DC) Herald*, 25 April 1915, 7. For similar critiques, see Laura Fay-Smith, "That Feminist Paradise Palace" and "Perils of Feminism," *Indianapolis Star*, 21 April 1914, 8; and Mrs. John Martin, "Feminism Makes Males Drone in Beehive," *New York Times*, 12 April 1914, Sunday Magazine 4, 11.

<sup>48</sup>"Contest Over Mother-Teachers to Be Waged by Educators Today," *New York Herald*, 12 March 1913, 6.

<sup>49</sup>Marguerite Mooers Marshall, "Wage Earning Mother Social Phenomenon Will Not Abandon Her Chosen Career," *Evening World* (New York), 13 January 1915, 3.

She further attributed the growing divorce rate to the unhappiness of husbands with their familial roles largely limited to the fiscal. As to the notion of feminist as antimen, Rodman laughed, "It is so absurd to say that feminists are opposed to the home. I have never met any women anywhere who don't want their own homes, their own husbands, [and] their own children. But the women of the future will be three-fold, home-maker, wage-earner, and citizen."<sup>50</sup>

One reporter posed the question whether every man had to become a paid worker or could become a housekeeper and caregiver for their children while his wife worked. Rodman responded, "Any work fit for a self-respecting woman is fit for a self-respecting man. But the vital defect in your question is that it is based on the assumption that society is to continue in its present condition." She continued:

Now we feminists object to women being prisoners in the home, and there is no reason why men should be prisoners there, either. Feminism means that the home as it is known today, the industrially isolated home must go: the old home industries must be pooled under some cooperative scheme, of which our feminist apartment house is a forecast.

But she allowed, "With such a system in practice, of course, men would take part in what is now regarded as the house work of women."<sup>51</sup>

Rodman's confidence in her assessment of a changing society was informed by her life experiences as well as her penetrating examination of traditions that bound women to the past. Her membership in feminist and socialist organizations stimulated her intellectual inquiries beyond mere rhetoric to substantive action. She pursued change in a national equal rights amendment, the rights of teachers to marry and gain maternity leave, ending racial restrictions in club memberships, and expanding the curricula beyond the status quo, among many other activities.

Sandra Adickes, one of the few scholars who have cited her, places Rodman at the center of "almost every movement in New York [City]" in the years just prior to World War I. She quotes writer and Rodman contemporary Floyd Dell's description of Rodman as "naïve and reckless believing in beauty and goodness," who was "laughed at a good deal and loved very much indeed, and followed loyally by her friends into new schemes for the betterment of the world." Dolores Hayden, who includes the Alliance's apartment house within her historical overview of feminist architecture and community planning, establishes Rodman as a member of a vital and lively tradition "... of powerful polemicists

---

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>MacAdam, "Feminist Apartment House to Solve Baby Problem," 9.

and activists” of the cooperative and Utopian housekeeping movements that included Melusina Fay Peirce, Marie Stevens Howland, Mary Livermore, Ellen Swallow Richards, Mary Hinman Abel, and Ethel Puffer Howes. Yet, Hayden also assesses Rodman as myopic on the issue of class due to her depiction of the project as democratic, when in fact unwelcome chores were simply shunted onto another class of female workers whose career choices were far more limited than that of the residents. On the other hand, Meredith Kimball sees Rodman’s project as one of the few attempts in the period that went beyond individualistic solutions to overcome the housing hardships that faced working mothers. Rather than attack maternity, Rodman chose to develop solutions that “allowed women to procreate and achieve as men had always done.”<sup>52</sup>

Rodman, whose ancestors settled in the Astoria area prior to the Revolutionary War, spent her life in the New York City area. She received initial teacher training at Jamaica Normal School on Long Island and graduated with a bachelor’s degree from Teachers College, Columbia University in 1903. After four years as a primary school teacher, she achieved the necessary credentials to assume a position to teach English at Wadleigh, a public girls’ high school in 1904. In 1910, she helped form the teachers’ organization, which became Local 5 of the American Federation of Teachers. Rodman engaged in an array of cultural, social, and political activities throughout her life. Teachers’ rights; children’s rights; labor rights; socialist education; immigrant education; suffrage; improved ethnic and race relations; vocational guidance; antiwar activities; clothing reform; communal housing design; birth control; sex education; and film, theater, and dance were among the causes she promoted. She taught high school during the day, adult classes at the socialist Rand School of Social Science at night, and lectured widely. All of this took place in a relatively short period between 1904 and 1923, marking the beginning of her career as a high school teacher and her death at age forty-six when her youngest child was just seven years old.

She adopted three children, two as a single woman. The first, Alice, a teenager and out-lesbian, began living with Rodman around 1910. Joan was adopted as a five-year-old in 1912. In 1913, Rodman married Herman de Fremery (1880–1968), and they adopted Sheela as a three-year-old. Rodman’s choice of postinfancy adoption was likely

---

<sup>52</sup>Sandra E. Adickes, *To Be Young Was Very Heaven: Women in New York Before the First World War* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2000), 4, 74; Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 4; and Meredith M. Kimball, *Feminist Visions of Gender Similarities and Differences* (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, 1995), 43.

made to accommodate her busy lifestyle and to avoid additional conflict with school administrators and school board members, many of whom insisted that mother-teachers were anathema to the classroom and their own children.

Rodman was a fervent advocate of alternative educational experiments, including the Montessori method, and tried to establish a Montessori school for the children of professional women who lived in Greenwich Village prior to her housing proposal. But like the feminist apartment house, it never materialized. She published pieces on Montessori and interviewed Maria Montessori for the *New York Tribune* when Montessori toured the United States in 1915.<sup>53</sup> In her widely read column for the newspaper, she illuminated other alternative educational initiatives, such as those pursued at Marietta Johnson's School of Organic Education at Fairhope, Alabama, and summer camp schools at Arden, Delaware, and Greenwich, Connecticut, in 1915, as well as Caroline Pratt's Play School experiment, which expanded to become the City and Country School in New York City.<sup>54</sup> Her site visits provided her with ample evidence of the striking contrasts to the methods used in the New York City schools.<sup>55</sup> A steadfast critic of the public schools, Rodman assiduously advocated for increased latitude for teacher pedagogy and curricular experiments, such as vocational guidance, the Gary Plan, and learning through museums, gardening, and dance.<sup>56</sup> She was a founding member of anarchist Francisco Ferrer's Modern School, trained teachers for socialist Sunday schools in

---

<sup>53</sup>"Plans Montessori School to Be Started in Greenwich Village Oct. 1," *New-York Tribune*, 14 September 1912, 8; Henrietta Rodman, "If Children Are Taught to Follow Reason, Not Merely to Follow Tradition, There Will Be No More Wars, Declares Dr. Montessori," *New-York Tribune*, 22 April 1915, 7; and Henrietta Rodman, "Dr. Montessori Aims to Aid Poor," *New-York Tribune*, 21 April 1915, 6.

<sup>54</sup>Joroen F. Staring, "New Light on Marietta Johnson," *Journal of Education and Human Development* 3, no. 3 (September 2014), 213–14.

<sup>55</sup>Joren Staring, *Midwives of Progressive Education: Bureau of Educational Experiments, 1916–1919* (Nijmegen, The Netherlands: Integraal [Werkgroep Integrerende Wetenschapsbeoefening], 2013); Henrietta Rodman, "Children Develop Their Own Ideas," *New-York Tribune*, 17 March 1915, 3; and Henrietta Rodman, "Libertarian Conduct of Fairhope School Even More Striking than That of Wirt System," *New-York Tribune*, 31 August 1915, 5. See also Henrietta Rodman, "How the Pestalozzi-Froebel Kindergarten Is Conducted in Berlin," *Kindergarten-Primary Magazine*, June 1915, 313; Henrietta Rodman, "Looks to Children to Revive Dancing," *New-York Tribune*, 9 April 1915, 6; Henrietta Rodman, "Garden Course at NYU Incalculable Value to Education of Children," *New-York Tribune*, 14 August 1915, 5; and Henrietta Rodman, "Museum Schools Offer Peculiar Kind of Summer Education," *New-York Tribune*, 11 August 1915, 5.

<sup>56</sup>"Modern Teacher Lets Pupils Do Teaching," *Toledo (OH) News-Bee*, 4 April 1912, 16; "Girls Should Work: Must Be Able to Support Themselves, says Miss Rodman," *Syracuse (NY) Herald*, 26 June 1912, 5; "Says Schools Create Sponges," *Oakland (CA) Tribune*, 23 March 1913, 15; Henrietta Rodman, "What Shall We Do With Our Daughters?" *San Francisco Chronicle*, 4 January 1914, 1; Henrietta Rodman, "Miss Dun-

the city, and taught what was probably the first women's studies course in the New York City public schools.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, she lent her critical educator's eye to the plan for the teachers' apartment building.

### The Feminist Apartment House

Despite misapprehensions about feminist indifference toward children, the Alliance's apartment house design carefully planned for young residents' needs. The rooftop nursery offered three rooms for the preschool educational plant. One room was designed for children under the age of one, the second for those from two to six years of age, and the third provided a dormitory for naps. The teacher/student ratio was projected at one-to-six for infants, one-to-ten for toddlers, and one-to-twenty for older children. Unlike the poorly trained grade-school dropouts about which many middle-class women complained, Rodman planned to hire college women trained in the Montessori Method to supervise the day-to-day education of the building's children. Each older child would get his or her own garden plot and have access to the rooftop sandpile, swings, and gymnastic apparatus. Overall, the rooftop ideal spoke to a crowded city with insufficient park space and to a desire for an efficient use of space that would have otherwise gone underutilized, as it did in other New York City buildings. A sickroom and medical dispensary were at the ready for parent and child day and night.<sup>58</sup> Even the on-site laundry, the apartment dumbwaiters, and communal dining room were meant to afford parents more uninterrupted time with their children. For Rodman, the goal was quality versus quantity time:

---

can Might Teach Educators," *New-York Tribune*, 29 March 1915, 7; Henrietta Rodman, "Pupils Study City Problems," *Milford (IA) Mail*, 15 April 1915, 2; "Teachers Not Allowed to Think: One of Them Diagnoses Trouble with Present-Day Education," *Palm Beach (FL) Post*, 23 October 1920, 8; Henrietta Rodman, "Merits of Wirt System Praised," *New-York Tribune*, 22 May 1915, 11; Henrietta Rodman, "Twenty Thousand Children Want Jobs and Can't Get Them," *New York-Tribune*, 3 July 1915, 5; and Henrietta Rodman, "Defends Gary Training System," *New-York Tribune*, 1 May 1915, 7.

<sup>57</sup>Patricia A. Carter, "Guiding the Working Class Girl: Henrietta Rodman's Curriculum for the New Woman, 1913," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 38, no. 1(2017) forthcoming. See also, "The First Anniversary of the Francisco Ferrer Association," *Mother Earth* (July 1911), 157-60; "Anarchists Will Dedicate New Colony," *New Brunswick (NJ) Times*, 9 April 1915, 1; "Training Teachers' Class," *New York Call*, 8 April 1911, 7; Henrietta Rodman, "Wrong Vocational Education Feared," *New-York Tribune*, 27 February 1915, 5; and "Teaching Girls New Things: It Is Called Vocational Guidance at Wadleigh High School," *New-York Tribune*, 11 November 1911, 9.

<sup>58</sup>"Babies Cared for at Fifty Cents a Day," *Syracuse (NY) Herald*, 18 June 1914, 21. Rodman tried to get a state law passed to require all new buildings in the city to include rooftop nurseries and playgrounds, in Marguerite Mooers Marshall, "Nurseries on Apartment House Roofs, Latest Wrinkle in a Plan for a Home," *Evening World* (New York), 27 May 1914, 3; "Nurseries on Flats Is Feminist Plea," *The Sun* (New York), 26 May 1914, 11.

Because we replace sentiment with science in the nursery does not mean that the feminists would eliminate mother love from children's lives. We believe, however, that the place where love enters into a child's life is in its spiritual and not its physical association with its mother. When a mother spends her whole day in the physical care of a house and family, in the nerve-racking scramble from kitchen to bedroom to cellar, carrying on a dozen different industries at once, her spiritual association with her child lacks beauty.<sup>59</sup>

Although antifeminists scoffed at such sentiments, it represented a growing attitude among working professional women.<sup>60</sup> Feminists used the popularity of scientific efficiency in the culture to underscore the rationality of their position and to dismiss the delusions of women who clung to the old ways. Inez Milholland, a journalist and member of the Feminist Alliance, claimed that the day of the housewife had become defunct since many of her traditional tasks, such as preserving foods and making cloth and clothing, had shifted to the industrial sector. In her view, middle-class women wasted the best years of their lives isolated in homes, inevitably drifting toward conservative political stances, and disassociating themselves from working women and the "new freedom and power of the sex." "More than ever before in the history of the human race," Milholland optimistically concluded, "the [feminist] ideal of marriage is a fine, healthy, continuous companionship and sharing of burdens, permitting the rearing of healthy children under the continuous intelligent and loving care of the parents."<sup>61</sup>

Such statements apparently appealed to the target audience for the feminist apartment house, since less than two weeks after the Feminist Alliance's inaugural meeting they reported receiving more than a hundred applications for the planned 250 apartments in Greenwich Village. Announcements regarding projected costs varied widely, indicating a struggle between a desire to gain publicity and the necessity to set reasonable fees for the building. Moreover, the press captured a rising tension between Alliance members (and spouses) as to whether democratic principles were really driving the project as intended. Herman de Fremery, Rodman's husband, urged greater attention to the

---

<sup>59</sup>Emma Bugbee, "Baby Garden of the Feminists Is Here," *New-York Tribune*, 19 April 1914, Section III, 12.

<sup>60</sup>For instance, to Rodman's contention that she and her daughter had "the greatest of fun," A. H. C. responded that Rodman exhibited "No sense of duty, no sense of grave responsibility for that most wonderful of all flowers . . . the child," in A. H. C., "Nature Slapped in the Face," *The Sun The Sun* (New York), 29 May 1914, 10. Support for the feminist sentiment is seen in Marguerite Mooers Marshall, "Wage-Earning Mother Social Phenomenon Will Not Now Abandon Chosen Career;" and Jennifer Scanlon, "Old Housekeeping, New Housekeeping, or No Housekeeping? The Kitchenless Home Movement and the Women's Service Magazine," *Journalism History* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2004), 2–10.

<sup>61</sup>Inez Milholland, "The Changing Home," *McClure's*, March 1913, 212.

cooperative ideal when his wife announced that she had secured promises from “prominent feminists” to underwrite the erection of the structure. The goal had been for the project to be totally funded by those who would live there. That way the residents would have a voice in all aspects of the project. Rodman was apparently desperate enough to trade-off at least some of the principles of mutual cooperation in order to gain the funds necessary to get the project off the ground, while de Fremery apparently worried that even well-intentioned funders would skew the outcome with unsolicited advice.<sup>62</sup>

Efforts to make the apartment house more populist were stymied by the need to acquire substantial upfront payments for land acquisition and building construction. The projected building costs alone ranged from \$300,000 to \$490,000 for a site at Waverly and Eleventh Street in Greenwich Village (\$6,888,030 to \$11,250,449 in 2013 dollars).<sup>63</sup> Further, the expectation of a sizable, well-trained, and unionized staff, while commendable, was expensive at \$200 (\$4,724.79) a month for a family of five or \$85 (\$2,008.03) for two people. The plan for a typical apartment included a 15 × 18 ft sitting room, one or two bedrooms of 10 × 12 ft, and a bathroom. The sitting room and bedrooms would have Murphy beds to maximize efficiency. A dumbwaiter would deliver prepared foods in thermos containers to each unit from the basement’s central kitchen run by a \$3,000 (\$70,871.82) a year salaried dietician. The apartment dweller could serve the prepared food or make their own out of the tiny “kitchen closet” located in each apartment.<sup>64</sup> Each breakfast would cost \$0.20 (\$4.72) per person and dinner \$0.30 (\$7.09), plus a \$3.00 (\$70.87) a month surcharge.<sup>65</sup>

Children further increased the dweller’s fees. The cost to place an infant in the day nursery for a month was expected to run \$15 (\$354.36). Moreover, children between two and six would be cared for in the rooftop Montessori school for \$4 (\$94.50) a month per child. Costs for after-school care of older children were also set at \$4 (\$94.50) a month per child. Laundry and mending for two people was expected to run about \$6 (\$141.74) a month. Cleaning costs added another \$0.25

---

<sup>62</sup>“Feminists Debate Plans for a House,” *New York-Tribune*, 22 April 1914, 12; “Keepless Housekeeping Is Feminist Apartment Secret,” *New-York Tribune*, 17 June 1914, 4; and MacAdam, “Feminist Apartment House to Solve Baby Problem,” 9.

<sup>63</sup>The conversion from 1913 to 2013 dollars, in which \$1 in 1913 equals \$22.96 in 2013, was computed using the U.S. Inflation Calculator at <http://www.usinflationcalculator.com/>.

<sup>64</sup>“Ready to Build Feminist Flats,” *New-York Tribune*, 13 May 1914, 4; “Babies No Bother in Feminist Apartment,” *The Sun* (New York), 17 June 1914, 9; “Apartment House Co-op the Latest,” *New York Evening Call*, 5 April 1914, 4; “Apartment for Women,” *New-York Tribune*, 16 April 1914, 16; and “Feminists to Build Apartment House,” *New-York Tribune*, 22 April 221914, 7.

<sup>65</sup>“Keepless Housekeeping Is Feminist Apartment Secret.”

(\$5.91) to \$1.00 (\$23.62) a day depending on the size of the apartment.<sup>66</sup> As a consequence, a family of four (two parents, an infant, and an eight-year-old) who availed themselves of all services would pay a monthly rent of \$244 (\$5,764.24).

While the majority of women who expressed interest in living in the apartment building were teachers, without the presence of a spouse who earned a considerably higher income, they would not have been able to afford it.<sup>67</sup> In 1914, New York City female teachers earned an average annual salary of \$1,266 (\$29,907.91) or about \$105 (\$2,480.51) a month.<sup>68</sup> This average was undoubtedly skewed by a high proportion of female teachers in the lower grades who received less than high school teachers. But even after sixteen years, a city grade school teacher received a maximum salary of \$1,500 to 1,800 (\$34,883.72 to \$41,860.47) per annum. According to one report, the executive committee of the Feminist Alliance began restricting applications to families with annual household incomes between \$2,000 and \$4,000, virtually eliminating many of the intended clients.<sup>69</sup> Of course, there were ways to economize: dinner might be prepared in the cooking closet in the apartment; a smaller apartment might be selected with fewer rooms. And while cleaning one's own apartment, doing one's own laundry, and preparing one's own meals were possible, the original concept of the plan would be compromised. Yet, the fees associated with the feminist apartment house did not appear to be out of line with those of other "elevator buildings" in the city charging between \$800 (\$18,899.15) and \$4,000 (\$94,495.76) per year; particularly given other buildings did not include the child-related services of the feminist apartment house.<sup>70</sup>

In October 1914, the Alliance abruptly announced that the co-operative could not be "carried out at this time on account of the financial situation creation by the war."<sup>71</sup> It is hard to determine based on extant evidence whether the war was the sole reason for the apartment plan's demise. The difficulty of making the apartment house both democratic and cost-sensitive had undoubtedly created some weariness within the Feminist Alliance. Rodman's focus was further divided by

<sup>66</sup>"Ready to Build Feminist Flats," 4.

<sup>67</sup>"Feminists to Hold Open Meeting," *New York Times*, 18 October 1914, 3.

<sup>68</sup>George Walbridge Perkins and Henry Jaromir Bruère, *Report on the Teachers' Retirement Fund, City of New York for the Commission on Pensions* (New York: Trow Press, 1915), 36; and "Radical Reforms in Schools Proposed," *Evening Post* (New York), 16 September 1915, 1, 3.

<sup>69</sup>"Apartment House Co-op the Latest."

<sup>70</sup>Florence Finch Kelly, "Co-operative Apartment Houses in New York," *The Independent*, May 1908, 1139-42. Elevators were still a relatively new accouterment within the city's buildings and thus noted as a selling point.

<sup>71</sup>"Feminists to Hold Open Meeting."

her many pursuits, including the teachers' union activities, the increasing complexities of teacher-mothers' legal cases, and her work within the antiwar movement. Moreover, by October, Rodman was facing suspension from her teaching job for a letter she published in the *New-York Tribune* excoriating the board of education for its position against the teacher-mothers. Yet, the war did create a financial situation that mediated against erecting the apartment house or any nonmilitary-related building in the city. Well before the United States became officially engaged in World War I, a considerable percentage of the U.S. gross national product was tied to construction materials shipped overseas to shore up the European war effort. After the war, a pent-up demand for residential construction drove up building costs as competition for workers and materials rose 300 percent over prewar figures.<sup>72</sup> The cost of living between 1915 and 1920 increased 100 percent, while teachers' salaries rose only 45 percent due to the stagnation of assessed property values and the reluctance of municipalities to increase tax rates during the war emergency.<sup>73</sup>

In December 1914, Rodman was suspended from teaching until September of the following year. The *Tribune*, which had published the offending letter, promptly hired her as its education columnist during the period of her suspension. In this role, she lobbed verbal missiles at former enemies and reported on the various successes of the teacher-mothers and other modern education causes, much to the chagrin of many board members.<sup>74</sup> While Rodman and the Feminist Alliance were successful in gaining incremental concessions for teachers' marital and maternal rights, the apartment house plan was lost.

## Conclusion

In applying Charlotte Perkins Gilman's theory of cooperative housing, Rodman sought to increase the political and economic independence of women in the Progressive Era. Teachers, though tailor-made clients for the project, had salaries ill-suited to sustain the initial and ongoing costs involved. While most people in New York City felt a similar economic pinch, cost cutting at the feminist apartment house meant the demise of the original and unique mission of the project. Inflation continued as

---

<sup>72</sup>W. Randolph Burgess, *Trends of School Cost* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1920), 90, 101, 111–12, 123.

<sup>73</sup>Burgess, *Trends of School Cost*, 57, 58, 62, 81–82, 83–84, 85, 110; and W. Jett Lauck, *Increase in Cost of Living and Prices, 1914 to 1920* (Washington, DC: US Railway Labor Board, 1920), 7 and 9.

<sup>74</sup>For example, Henrietta Rodman, "Teacher Asks Women to Judge Her Case," *New-York Tribune*, 15 February 1915, 4; and Henrietta Rodman, "Women to Defend Married Teacher," *New-York Tribune*, 6 February 1915, 7.

an impediment to implementing the design well into the early 1920s, when Rodman, the driving force behind the development, died in 1923.

Rodman's commitment to a professionally trained and well-paid staff ultimately placed the housing scheme beyond teachers' means, given the spiraling costs of the era. Had the project relied instead on young, single, immigrant female employees, and installed them in a small dormitory in the basement, as was done in many large hotels, the costs could have been lowered. However, Rodman wanted her employees to have the same opportunities as the residents for a full family and community life. Moreover, as a teacher of working-class teenage women, Rodman sought opportunities for their future employment, and she saw them in positions as trained nutritionists, childcare specialists, and housing managers within the feminist apartment house.

Other factors possibly leading to the plan's cancellation included Rodman's suspension from her teaching position in the 1914–1915 school year, as punishment for her efforts on behalf of the teacher-mothers. Although salaried as the education reporter for the *New-York Tribune* during this period, the disruption was no doubt unsettling and diverting. Rodman's continuing engagement on behalf of the teacher-mothers' cause as well as her new activities in the peace movement, and more specifically the free speech movement for teachers who opposed the war, also took up an increasing portion of her time during the war and in the subsequent Red Scare era.

Several factors resulted in the wide and even sympathetic press coverage of the venture. The name recognition that many of its members achieved through careers, as well as political and community accomplishments, increased attention given to the activities of the Feminist Alliance. The synergy between the apartment house plan and Rodman's campaign for local teachers' right to marriage and maternity leave further amplified its public exposure. Popular attitudes about such feminist projects were far from uniform. While news of the exhilarating scheme generated immediate requests for inclusion, others attacked it as socialist, antichild, or simply harebrained. Yet, the project's attention to developing pleasurable, challenging, and nurturing experiences for children exposed the false stereotype of feminists as opposed or indifferent to children.

Attitudinal change about female teachers was also in transition in this period. Women were over 90 percent of the 20,000 plus member teaching staff in New York City. Constituting a large portion of the female professional class, teachers held a significant potential to affect the perceptions of the local populace about working women. Teachers' willingness to risk social and economic sanctions indicated their desire, and often the necessity, to continue working after marriage and the birth of their children. As Rodman pointed out, teachers were hamstrung by the

outmoded views of school board members who preferred single women and married men as teachers. Female teachers were either obliged to conform or compel institutional and social modifications that would permit them to carry out their multiple functions as new women in the twentieth century. Organizations such as the Feminist Alliance provided teachers with a vehicle through which to make their needs heard and to lobby for significant changes to better negotiate the boundaries between their private and public lives.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup>Carter, *Everybody's Paid but the Teacher*, 27, 29, 32.