

Martha Van Rensselaer

Director of the College of Home Economics

— *May 26, 1931*

A long service of peculiar significance in Cornell University was brought to a close by the death of Director Martha Van Rensselaer on May 26, 1931. It was she who made the earliest beginnings in home economics education in the University, first in extension work among the women of the State, and later in resident instruction. Every step in the entire development of the work in home economics, organized first as a department in the College of Agriculture, then as a school, and finally as one of the constituent colleges of the University, was taken under her guidance, and every activity of this large enterprise had, to the day of her death, her closest scrutiny.

Miss Van Rensselaer was called to Cornell University in 1900 to set up an educational service for women living on the farms of the State. The type of work thus begun has grown into a highly organized and effective movement permeating the entire State, still receiving leadership and technical assistance from the College of Home Economics, but firmly established in the interest and activity of organized groups of women in all parts of the State. This phase of the work remained throughout as Miss Van Rensselaer's direct and chief responsibility.

Together with Miss Flora Rose, who became her associate in directing the development of home economics at Cornell University, Miss Van Rensselaer initiated in 1907 the instruction of resident students, taking an active part herself in the teaching relating to the family, the widening interests of women, and household management. The work of resident instruction has grown steadily, outstripping the successive material provisions for it.

It is Director Van Rensselaer's distinction that she accomplished these pioneer efforts and, because of her own growth, maintained an effective and stimulating leadership in her field throughout her thirty-two years of service. It is a record that discloses wisdom in planning, vigor in carrying through, fortitude under many discouragements, and capacity for long-sustained, hard work. In all of her activities, official and personal, she emanated a spirit of joy in her work, of genuineness, of simplicity, and of warm and generous understanding.

Miss Van Rensselaer's leadership in home economics was widely recognized and great demands were made upon it. During the World War she was called upon to take charge of the Division of Home Conservation in the United States Food Administration. Death came to her as she was recording the findings of the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection, and of the President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, to each of which undertakings she had been summoned for active leadership.

The memory of Miss Van Rensselaer's personality and of her fruitful activities, together with her ideals of home economics education, which grew with the years, will be a lasting heritage for the University and especially for the College which she administered; and the College, in turn, will ever be a great memorial, in the University, of her devoted service.

Source: Fac. Rec, pps. 1737, 1745 Resolutions of the Trustees and Faculty of Cornell University, November, Nineteen Hundred And Thirty-Two