

Lemo Dennis Rockwood

March 28, 1896 — December 16, 1982

For close to forty years Lemo Dennis Rockwood was a leader in the family-life education movement in the United States. Born in a rural county in western Nebraska, Lemo Dennis taught grade school for a year after receiving her high school diploma in 1915. She was responsible not only for academic instruction but also for serving lunch to thirty-five students ranging in age from four and one-half to nineteen!

In 1919 Miss Dennis completed her undergraduate study in home economics at the University of Nebraska. For the next two years she ran a vocational home economics course for high school students in Lincoln that included supervised experience in a “practice house”—one of the first such programs for high school students.

From 1921 to 1925 Miss Dennis was assistant professor of home economics at Nebraska Wesleyan University. She spent her summers in graduate study at Teachers College, Columbia University, where she received a master's degree in 1926. This was at the height of the progressive education movement. She wrote later, “The emphasis in progressive education on organizing the curriculum around functional nuclei rather than in fields of traditional subject matter fitted in exactly with the purposes of family-life education.”

Lemo Dennis moved next to Lewis Institute in Chicago (now Illinois Institute of Technology), where she was responsible for the home management house as well as courses in child development and economic problems of the family. She spent a summer working at Hull House and became a charter member of the Chicago Association of Family Living.

Her studies took a new turn in 1929, when she came to Cornell on a Laura Spelman Rockefeller fellowship to work for a Ph.D. degree in sociology and psychology with a special emphasis on the family. After two years she received her degree and then spent a year in Rochester as director of the Observation Home for Dependent and Delinquent Children. At the lowest point in the Great Depression she went to Washington, D.C., to become the field worker in child development and parent education for the American Home Economics Association (AHEA). During the next three years she established a national reputation in this still young and hopeful field.

As AHEA field-worker Dr. Dennis encouraged college and high school home economics teachers to establish family-life education as an integral part of the home economics curriculum. To aid in this effort she published two books based on her research at Cornell, *Living Together in the Family* and *Pictures of Family Life*, and a teacher's

manual to go with them, *Teaching Family Relationships in the High School*. Conferences and workshops brought this material to the attention of home economics teachers in every state.

In 1935 Dr. Dennis, now Lemo Dennis Rockwood, returned to Cornell as extension specialist in the New York State College of Home Economics. Her husband, Cedric Rockwood, became a staff engineer at National Cash Register Company in Ithaca. The following year she was promoted to full professor, and from 1937 until her retirement in 1958 she devoted herself primarily to undergraduate teaching and research.

Teaching family-life courses to mixed groups of Cornell students was a very challenging task. The traditional sociology course on the family emphasized historical and anthropological materials, while the courses she had been designing for high school students emphasized the personal experiences and problems of the students in the course. Professor Rockwood was determined to combine both approaches in her teaching, but it was the experiential emphasis that brought large numbers of students to her course on marriage. There were presentations by physicians and nurses, and each year three or four married couples discussed with the class specific problems of marital adjustment. There were also frequent sessions in which students could explore their own attitudes and values. Lemo Rockwood was a superb discussion leader. She also believed that any faculty member offering such a course must be prepared to spend a great deal of time in personal counseling of students. She was extremely generous with her time and helped great numbers of students with emotional as well as academic problems during her years at Cornell.

Professor Rockwood's major piece of research was carried out with a younger colleague, Mary Ford, and grew directly out of her teaching experiences. It was a systematic study of the attitudes of several hundred Cornell juniors and seniors on such topics as sex education, premarital behavior, expectations of the marriage partner, working wives, number of children desired, separation, and divorce. The book reporting their findings locates Cornell students in 1940 along a continuum of attitudes—more liberal than their parents and the majority of middle class Americans but more traditional than students in urban college settings.

During Lemo Rockwood's last decade at Cornell she was in great demand as a speaker both on and off the campus. One of her major presentations was a review of the history of the family-life education movement, made in 1948 at the tenth anniversary meeting of the National Council on Family Relations. In this review she mentioned the interest in old-age clubs and counseling centers that had been developing since 1940; soon she was active herself in gerontology. She became a member of the Gerontological Society and with Professor Philip Taietz offered the

first course at Cornell on maturity and old age. She also helped with organization of the Tompkins County Senior Citizens Council—one of the first such organizations outside a major metropolitan area.

In July 1958 Lemo Dennis Rockwood was made emeritus and retired with her husband to Nebraska and then to Arizona, where she lived until her death in 1982.

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