

Nancy McNeal Roman

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Nancy McNeal Roman came to Cornell University in 1917 from the University of Chicago, where she had obtained the Ph.B. degree and where she had been an instructor in home economics for three years. The opportunity that brought her to Cornell University was the possibility of developing a program for rural girls in what was then Junior Extension, now 4-H Club work. Federal funds had recently become available through the Smith-Lever Act for extending the work of land grant colleges in home economics. While at Cornell University Mrs. Roman was a program developer, home improvement specialist, professor of housing and design, and always a dedicated teacher.

Her career had a contemporary flavor. She worked with the disadvantaged young, she worked under conditions that were often personally uncomfortable, she was acutely aware that not only must interest be stimulated, but that the results must be sufficiently swift and definite to maintain this interest. She had few guidelines: her tasks were to develop a program and an effective method of teaching it. Her problem differed from that confronting today's workers with the disadvantaged, mainly in that it was focused toward rural, not city, youth.

For more than thirty years Mrs. Roman worked with the 4-H Club program for rural girls. The tool she developed for stimulating and educating was the furnishing of the girls' own rooms. Through this medium, she demonstrated that not only could a girl's aesthetic appreciation and sense of accomplishment be advanced but that the results could be spread to other members of the family and community. Mothers were enlisted as local leaders, i.e., lay teachers. Rural families learned to appreciate the simple lines and sturdy workmanship of the handcrafted furniture that had often been relegated to the attic or barn, or which might be found in secondhand stores for a small price. Fathers and brothers helped to refinish and restore this furniture and build simple improvements in the rooms.

Nancy Roman had certain characteristics that were as crucial to her success as they would be to any present-day teacher. She had tremendous physical energy. She was willing and able to carry quantities of illustrative materials with her all over the state. She could turn unprepossessing rooms in churches and grange halls into acceptable teaching and work areas, even occasionally starting the fire in whatever heating equipment was available. She was highly skilled in the use of tools and materials, which enabled her to make practical applications of her theoretical knowledge.

She had the conviction that improvement of the most meager room was possible and worth undertaking. She constantly stressed that beauty in home surroundings need not, and should not, be limited to families of wealth. She believed that all persons responded to beauty and that to achieve it through their own creative efforts was doubly satisfying. She was familiar with the contents of many secondhand stores throughout the state and delighted in leading expeditions of would-be room-improvers through them, helping to discover the restorable pieces. She was aware of bargains in variety stores and mail order catalogs. She taught consumer education at the grass roots.

All those who worked with her, 4-H Club members, local leaders, and 4-H Club agents, were constantly stimulated. Her sensitivity to the capabilities and needs of youngsters and local leaders was coupled with an enthusiastic and innovative teaching style. Extension teaching, unlike classroom teaching, required practical demonstration of what needed to be done, but the actual teaching had to be left to the local community leaders. Thus the extension teacher had to teach the volunteer leaders how to teach, as well as what to teach. In 1927 Mrs. Roman completed work for the master's degree at Teacher's College, Columbia University, then noted for its new educational methods.

Her last five years at Cornell University, before her retirement in 1950, were spent in the resident teaching program. She found that the methods she had used in 4-H Club work, of stimulating and developing the aesthetic appreciation and creativity of the individual, were equally effective in teaching college students. She worked particularly with those who were expecting to teach, and with graduate students. She was the author of a number of bulletins, perhaps the best known of which were the *Handy-Man* series. This series has been adapted by workers in numerous states and has established a model for many of today's teaching aids.

She was the wife and widow of Dr. Frederick W. Roman, a well-known teacher and regent of the University of California. After her retirement she lived in Winter Park, Florida, with her sister, Wylle McNeal, former director of the School of Home Economics at the University of Minnesota.

Ruby Loper, Virginia True, Mabel A. Rollins