

L. Leola Cooper

January 11, 1903 — April 23, 1989

L. Leola Cooper, retired professor of household economics and management died April 23, 1989 in Sun City, Arizona. Leola Cooper was born in Watonga, Oklahoma, to J.S. and Ladema Cooper. She grew up in central Oklahoma and was graduated from the Norman, Oklahoma, High School in 1921. She attended the University of Oklahoma, receiving the B.S. degree in home economics in 1924.

Between 1925-28 she taught home economics in high school and began graduate study at the University of Chicago for the masters degree, which she received in 1931. In 1928 she began teaching at the Milwaukee Vocational School, where she remained until she resigned in 1946 to accept a position as assistant professor with the New York State College of Home Economics in the Cooperative Extension Program in the Department of Household Economics and Management at Cornell. Leola was a home-management specialist; her primary interests were in the work centers of the home—the kitchens, the storage areas—the locales of household production frequently neglected by builders and architects.

This was a most timely appointment. The post World War II housing boom for both new and remodeled homes had created a growing demand for help with planning kitchens and/or other work centers in the home. The research on the Cornell Kitchen was well underway and faculty members were involved in time and motion studies of household work. Leola “took the findings to the field.” She was a good teacher, very popular with the county extension home economists because she was particularly skillful at translating the technical language and findings of research into practical suggestions. She did most of her teaching in the counties, leading work shops, running kitchen conferences, and consulting with Extension staff and others on the local scene. Her practical common sense approach to problems at hand, her sense of humor, as well as her wealth of knowledge of the field made her a very popular teacher.

Early in her professional career, Leola Cooper adopted the pattern of studying with the experts. In addition to her University of Chicago M.A. degree, she attended summer sessions and/or did sabbatic study at Columbia University, the University of California at Berkeley, Purdue and Ohio State.

During the fifteen years she was at Cornell she wrote several popularly received extension bulletins and leaflets dealing with household storage and related problems. Several of these were reprinted many times. She developed a

set of slides and other creative teaching tools that were used in teaching kitchen planning long before the general shift to visual aids.

Leola had a sense of color and design that came through in her teaching, her home and her wardrobe. Her enthusiasm for line and color was still evident in the last months of her life. She was fortunate in being able to live among her own things at Camelot Gardens until almost the very end. Those of us who worked with her or did graduate study in household economics and management at Cornell during Leola's tenure have warm memories of her friendliness, generosity and hospitality, especially her "Kentucky Custards" at holiday time. Several Ph.D. candidates were recipients of her thoughtfulness and skill as they received Cornell doctoral hoods which she had made especially for them when they finished their graduate studies.

Responding to the need to care for her aging father, Leola Cooper took early retirement in 1962. Although he passed away before she could finalize her move back to Kentucky, she located on the property of a cousin, living there for nine years and renewing acquaintances with a host of kin folks.

During this time she traveled extensively, often visiting former Cornell University graduate students in far off lands. A colleague remarked on how congenial she was as a traveling companion. In 1971 a chance visit of the pair to Sun City, Arizona resulted in a move to the Southwest where they each purchased a home in the Sun City development. There Leola lived near other Cornell retirees, one of whom had lost her sight. The latter reported to friends here that "Leola Cooper became my eyes."

Leola Cooper was a member of the American Home Economics Association and of Epsilon Sigma Phi, the extension honorary. She is survived by one niece, Wanda Young of Salina, Kansas, several cousins and other relatives plus many friends. A brother, Crawford Cooper, preceded her in death in 1975. She was buried in the family plot in Kevil, Kentucky with a grave side memorial service held in late April.

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