Women have always played an integral role in the history of the Farm House. From the matrons of the 19th century to the Home Management students of the 1940s, and even the modern museum’s staff, women comprise an essential component of the Farm House Museum’s legacy.

Farm House Matrons
During the early years of the Farm House, families living there were expected to take responsibility for the maintenance and management of the home. The most important function of the Farm House matron was to run the home’s business of providing meals and renting out rooms to boarders. Mary Graves, wife of the college’s second farm manager and Farm House resident from 1864 to 1868, charged $0.50 a week for room and $3.50 for board, and hired laborers from local farm families to help with her extensive responsibilities.

When Eliza Gilmore inherited the position from Mrs. Graves in 1868, the Farm House matron’s duties included collecting rent from the boarders, caring for the three-acre kitchen garden, canning vegetables for the winter, collecting firewood for the home’s several stoves, and preparing and hosting dinner for 15-30 people every night. In his autobiography, 1870s farm superintendent Isaac P. Roberts wrote that while he “superintended” the farm, his wife, Margaret, “superintended” the Farm House. Payment for Mrs. Roberts's hard work was included in her husband’s salary of $1,750 per year.

Farm House matrons occasionally found their responsibilities too numerous to cover alone. When Esther Wilbur Wilson required help covering her duties as Farm House matron in the early 1890s, she hired several students to work for her in the kitchen. However, life for women in the Farm House was not such hard work all the time. The matrons' social responsibilities were also important to the development of the college. Olive Curtiss, wife of Dean of Agriculture Charles F. Curtiss and Farm House resident from 1897 to 1943, was well-known on campus for inviting friends, faculty, college guests, and students into the Farm House for luncheons and informal afternoon teas.
Home Management Students
When the Curtiss family’s 50-year residence at the Farm House ended in 1947, the home briefly housed several female faculty members before becoming one of five home management houses on campus. The Department of Home Management utilized the houses to test the practical skills of its female students. Groups of graduating seniors spent six weeks living in the homes, sharing everyday duties like housekeeping, cooking, and overseeing the home’s overall management. The students’ duties also included caring for orphaned infants provided and supervised by Iowa Children’s Services of Des Moines. The Farm House served as a home management house for the 1948-49 school year before once again becoming a private residence for Dean of Agriculture Floyd Andre and his family.

Museum Staff
When the Andre family moved out of the Farm House in 1970, women continued to play a vital role in the home’s narrative as members of the renovation committee and employees of University Museums. Neva Petersen, professor of Applied Art, was a member of the original restoration committee and eventually took an unpaid leave of absence from her professorship to dedicate more time to the Farm House. Lynette Pohlman, now director and chief curator of University Museums, has been involved with the Farm House Museum since assisting Petersen as a graduate student in Interior Design. Since opening as a museum in 1976, all Farm House Museum curators have been women, including Debra Steilen, Mary Atherly, and Eleanor Ostendorf.

Mary E. Atherly, *Farm House: College Farm to University Museum* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1995), 60.

Farm House Museum
*Women of the Farm House*
Additional information on the Farm House Museum and other University Museums information sheets are available at the University Museums office - 290 Scheman Building (2nd floor), 515-294-3342, or visit us online at [www.museums.iastate.edu](http://www.museums.iastate.edu).

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