2024

Home Ec Babies at Saint Ben's

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Recommended Citation
Roske, Peggy L., "Home Ec Babies at Saint Ben's" (2024). Archives History Lessons. 121.
https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/archives_history_lessons/121

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Home Ec Babies at St. Ben’s

The Saint Ben’s Department of Home Economics began with one purpose: “to provide for the domestic side of a young woman’s education,” as stated in the 1913-14 Catalog for the college. It covered “household arts, cooking and sewing.”

Thirty-first Annual Year-Book, 1913-1914, St. Benedict's College and Academy

https://collection.mndigital.org/catalog/stbm:2180#?c=&m=&s=&cv=35&xywh=16%2C-225%2C3143%2C3160
Domestic Science started out as a two-year course at the new College.
Photo from the 1914-1915 Catalog, opposite page 24
In the 1930s, the re-named Department of Home Economics appealed to three kinds of students:

- those wishing to teach Home Ec in high schools,
- those who wanted to become dietitians, and
- those “who wish to meet the responsibilities of homemakers intelligently and efficiently”

Bulletin for the College of St. Benedict 1938-1939
p. 68
https://collection.mndigital.org/catalog/stbm:2712#?c=&m=&s=&cv=71&xywh=331%2C2005%2C2237%2C2249
But in the 1940s and 50s, they were back to two sequences: for those wishing to teach Home Ec in high schools, and those who wanted to become dietitians. Apparently, those wishing merely to be intelligent and efficient homemakers need no longer apply?

https://collection.mndigital.org/catalog/stbm:2511#?c=&m=&s=&cv=68&xywh=163%2C2627%2C2158%2C2170
The 1964 Catalog went back to having three categories of students:

- those wishing to teach Home Ec in high schools,
- those who wanted to become ADA-qualified dietitians, and a new (old?) catch-all one:
- those seeking a BA degree with a major in Home Ec.

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/2812/rec/8
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/2857/rec/9
By the end of the 1960s, no fewer than five different bachelor’s degrees could be earned from the Home Ec department, reflecting how the “contemporary family” in society, with “automation and the consumer-oriented market,” was “compelled” to make complex decisions.

1969-70 [joint] Catalog, p. 94
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/15041/rec/14
That’s all a bit of academic background to my real history lesson today, which is about something that was a feature of the Home Economics Department for many decades: Home Ec Babies!
Photo from Susanna Humphrey Hynes. She was born in 1945.
A “home management” course shows up in the 1924-25 “College ‘Year-Book,’” i.e. the Catalog. The course offered lectures on home operation and maintenance, with emphasis on budgets and household accounts. Two years later, a “Lab Experience” has been added to the course, one that includes 12 weeks of actual experience in a home, complete with “care and behavior of a child of pre-school age.”

Top: Forty-Second Annual Year-Book, 1924-1925, St. Benedict College and Academy, St. Joseph, Minnesota
(Same in 1925-26)
https://collection.mndigital.org/catalog/stbm:4467#?c=&m=&s=&cv=71&xywh=562%2C1950%2C1888%2C1898

Bottom: College Bulletin 1927-1928, College of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, Minnesota
The special equipment for this department includes a foods laboratory with electric stoves and refrigerator, modern conveniences for cookery, a service pantry, a dining room, a nutrition and textile laboratory, and a clothing room. The class in Textiles has access to looms and spinning wheels. Two classes, Institutional Management and Large Quantity Cookery, make use of the institutional equipment in the college kitchen. For the Home Management course the following home departments are arranged for student care: kitchen, dining and living room, and nursery. A child of infant or pre-school age lives in the home during the course and is cared for by the students.

“A child of infant or pre-school age lives in the home... and is cared for by the students.”

1932-1939 Catalogs

By the 1930s, the Catalog gets more descriptive, noting that the department’s equipment includes electric stoves and a refrigerator, the classes make use of the institutional college kitchen, and the Home Management class uses a kitchen, dining and living room, and a nursery. AND their “special equipment” includes a child of infant or pre-school age who lives in the home and is cared for by the students.

Bulletin for the College of St. Benedict 1938-1939
p. 69
The earliest published photo I could locate is this one, from the 1939 CSB yearbook, showing a baby outside with a couple of college students.

1939 Facula p. 23 of the pdf
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/9326/rec/1
But the Monastery Archives has this article from an Alexandria paper featuring a home-town girl taking the Home Management course at Saint Ben’s, with pictures of “Baby Roger” and his caretakers as they "...plan, cook, and do all the household duties" of the normal home. It goes on to say that "each year the college *usually borrows a baby from the St. Cloud Orphanage*, but this year the child comes from a private family."
This March 1941 article introduces Baby Bennie O’Leary, who had “arrived several weeks ago...His real parents, who live near East St. Cloud, have loaned him to the Home Economics Department until Easter.” “His best and most constant friend is Sister Glenore, head of the Home Ec department ...for she is a constant factor in his life. The Home Ec-ers take turns being his Mama every week,” and he “supervises” them “from the play pen or crib.”

1941-03 The Handshake Volume 06 Number 04 p. 3
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/1696/rec/1
The “most popular Bennie of 1942” was Home Ec baby, Drake. As the article notes, “Each girl has complete charge of him for one week; during that time she dresses him, feeds him, and in general treats him as she would her own favorite son.” I am actually related to this Home Ec baby, whose full name is Drake Dierkhising. His mother and mine were Lodermeier first cousins.

1942-02 The Benet Volume 07 Number 06 p.1
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/6490/rec/4
When Drake was three months old, his dad was off to the Pacific in World War II, and baby Drake and his mother moved back to St. Joe to live with her parents during the war. His mother, Kay, was not happy about handing over her precious firstborn baby to a bunch of college girls. (I can’t imagine doing so!) But Kay’s mother “couldn’t say ‘no’ to the nuns” (according to the Nov. 7, 2013 St. Joe Newsleader). The picture on the left shows Drake with his grandpa, by their house on West Minnesota Street, just a few blocks from Saint Ben’s.

Left photo: Nov. 7, 2013 St. Joe Newsleader
Right photo: 1942-02 The Benet Volume 07 Number 06 p.1
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/6490/rec/4
Drake was included in a 2014 article celebrating CSB’s Centennial with 100 interesting tidbits. It notes that Drake’s parents ran the La Playette when it was a gourmet restaurant. His mother later established Kay’s Kitchen; its “Dirk-L-Burger” is named in honor of his dad. (Drake later moved to California to operate another restaurant, Café Sarafornia, in the Napa Valley.)

(1942) 2014-03 Saint Benedict’s Magazine Spring p. 29
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/6909/rec/5
See also https://cafesarafornia.com/
The 1942 yearbook referred to Baby Drake as a “doll...”
1942 Facula p. 27 of the pdf
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/7195/rec/4
...and he got another appearance in the 1943 yearbook, too, along with baby Mary Jane, who was “sweet as sugar and good as gold. Ask any Senior Home Ec’er.” 1943 Facula [but with higher-res photo from St. Joe Newsleader superimposed on newsprint version beneath it]
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/7927/rec/6 p. 61 of the pdf
The same photo of Mary Jane is in the Archives, and appears on p.107 in Annette Atkins' book on the history of CSB with this caption: "S. Clarus Himsl and this 'Home Ec baby' (of whom there were many) helped students learn how to care for children."

1943 *Facula* p. 62 of the pdf
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/7928/re
SBMA photos O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Committees\Admin Assembly Presentations\In Process\Babies for Home Ec classes\Pics from CSB photos from SBMA.COLLEGE n-118.jpg
Another photo in the Monastery Archives shows Baby Jane being bottle-fed, which must have been the norm, with the babies separated from the moms!

SBMA photos O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Committees\Admin Assembly Presentations\In Process\Babies for Home Ec classes\Pics from CSB photos from SBMA.COLLEGE n-117.jpg
Another baby was named Geraldine, as noted in this senior’s short bio in 1944, which shares that the college student had her “struggles with the home management house and baby Geraldine.”

1944 Facula p. 23

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/3219/rec/4

SBMA photos O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Committees\Admin Assembly Presentations\In Process\Babies for Home Ec classes\Pics from CSB photos from SBMA.COLLEGE n-121.jpg
I’ve been keen on this topic ever since I first learned about it, but it was fairly recently that I made a discovery; my neighbors, both with deep Collegeville connections and married later in life, were both Home Ec babies. This photo is of Susanna Humphrey Hynes, aka “Susy,” who shared this photo with me. She said, “Our mom wasn’t happy with the results of my being a Home Ec baby... [Her sister] felt that baby Susanna didn’t recognize her mother when she came home from St. Ben’s. “She said Mother was very upset when I came back from St. Ben’s, and I wouldn’t pay attention to her.... [And] my mother wouldn’t have dressed me like that [in the photo]; I would have had overalls. So the students must have done that.”

Photo from Susanna Humphrey Hynes.
Susanna’s younger brother Paul was also a Home Ec baby two years later. And her future husband, Denis, had been one, too, near the same time. Denis said, “I heard that Mom would leave me on the counter in the Biology lab and the girls would gather around to learn how to take care of a baby while Mom went off to work in the St. Ben’s library.” - Denis Hynes

Home Ec Baby Paul Humphrey (Don’s son, Susanna’s brother); he was born in November 1946. Photo from Susanna Humphrey Hynes.

“They took my brother Paul much later, when our house burned down.”
The spring semester baby’s arrival was a significant event, as noted in this February 1948 article in the student and alum newsletter, *The Benet*. The Home Ec students would take care of Baby Danny for six weeks, during which time he would turn four months old. Another group would form another household after Easter, presumably with another baby...


https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/1736/rec/2

SBMA photos O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Committees\Admin Assembly Presentations\In Process\Babies for Home Ec classes\Pics from CSB photos from SBMA.COLLEGE n-114
...or not! An April article notes that “Danny celebrated his sixth month last week.” So unless they got another baby with the same name, Baby Danny spent 12 weeks with the students as caregivers. The article also notes the return to St. Ben’s, as a student, of a Home Ec baby from the previous decade.

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/1733/rec/9
SBMA photos O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Committees\Admin Assembly Presentations\In Process\Babies for Home Ec classes\Pics from CSB photos from SBMA.COLLEGE n-126
This 1950 *Benet* article mentions that a previous Home Ec baby was the son of Josephine Zehnle Terwey, class of ‘39. Some of you may recall Josephine being celebrated at CSB’s centennial as the oldest living alumna at that point; here is a photo of Josephine with Sister Lois Wedl. (Josephine and her friend Betty Schneider were also significant in CSB history for befriending some black students when they spent a summer as social workers in New York, two of whom became the first students of African descent to attend CSB.)

Text: 1950-12 *The Benet* Volume 16 Number 02 p. 4
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/1746/rec/11

Zehnle Terwey: 2015 fall *Saint Benedict’s Magazine* p. 23
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/8864/rec/64

SBMA photos O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Committees\Admin Assembly Presentations\In Process\Babies for Home Ec classes\Pics from CSB photos from SBMA.COLLEGE n-124.jpg
This baby, in the 1960 yearbook, was identified as Wayne Hoeffer, the Home Ec baby who put in “three and a half weeks at St. Ben’s without credit” – and had the advantage of one of the students being his aunt.

1960 *Facula* p. 110 of the pdf

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/13359/rec/22
The Wenner children, ten months apart — for whom we also have the photograph used for the news article — lived at St. Ben’s for four weeks in 1961. Their mother was in the class of 1952.

April 1961 The Benet p. 2
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/8956/rec/13
SBMA photos O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Committees\Admin Assembly Presentations\In Process\Babies for Home Ec classes\Pics from CSB photos from SBMA.COLLEGE n-116.jpg
Here’s another unidentified baby outside on the Saint Ben’s lawn with Sister Clarus (I think) in this undated photo.

SBMA photos O:\ Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Committees\Admin Assembly Presentations\In Process\Babies for Home Ec classes\Pics from CSB photos from SBMA.COLLEGE n-122.jpg
Understandably, a course in psychology eventually became a prerequisite for students caring for a Home Ec baby. And the Home Ec course went down from 12 weeks in the 1930s to 8-10 weeks in the 1940s & 50s.

1939 Catalog
https://collection.mndigital.org/catalog/stbm:2712#?c=&m=&s=&cv=75&xywh=615%2C2689%2C1942%2C1953

1938-39:
https://collection.mndigital.org/catalog/stbm:2712#?c=&m=&s=&cv=75&xywh=676%2C2780%2C1728%2C1737

1952-53:
https://collection.mndigital.org/catalog/stbm:4905#?c=&m=&s=&cv=73&xywh=788%2C1773%2C1859%2C1869
The Monastery Archives has some syllabi forms from the late 1950s. This one, from spring semester 1956, was filled out by Sister Clarus, noting that “when possible, a child is kept in the house so that each girl has one week of child care responsibility.”

SBMA Scans RG22 Home Ec
"As part of the study of child care, a seven-month old boy lived in the house for about 5 weeks, with the students rotating the responsibility of caring for him."

This form was completed by Sister Ingrid Anderson. "As part of the study of child care, a seven-month old boy lived in the house for about 5 weeks, with the students rotating the responsibility of caring for him."

SBMA Scans RG22 Home Ec
In spring 1958, "7-month old Joey Reber...lived with us for about 5 weeks."

SBMA Scans RG22 Home Ec

In the St. Joseph Cemetery: headstone for Benedict Davidson (3 Sept 1957-Apr 13 1962), carved by Joe O’Connell
A photo of “‘Pal Joe,’ the darling of the Home Management class,” presumably Joey Reber, is in the 1958 yearbook. 1958 Facula p. 96
"Home experience in baby care was provided when 7-month old Bernard Davidson spent a week in the home management house."

The last form in the Archives is also by Sister Ingrid, who identifies another Home Ec baby as 7-month old Bernard Davidson, who was only there for one week. I suspect he was the son of the campus’ Doctor Davidson who built his home near campus – a house which later became the Idzerda home, the CSB presidents’ residence, and the Eco house before it was torn down. (Baby Bernard’s younger brother Benedict is buried nearby in the St. Joe cemetery, after the four-year-old fell off the home’s balcony and died. His headstone was carved by local artist Joe O’Connell.)

SBMA Scans RG22 Home Ec
In the St. Joseph Cemetery: headstone for Benedict Davidson (3 Sept 1957-Apr 13 1962), carved by Joe O’Connell
SBMA photos O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Digital Archives\Committees\Admin Assembly Presentations\In Process\Babies for Home Ec classes\Pics from CSB photos from SBMA.COLLEGE n-129.jpg
According to the 1964-66 Catalog, the total home management experience is down to 5-6 weeks, but still 4 credits. [“ITS” behavior??]
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/2857/rec/9
In 1966, they split it into two 2-credit courses, one on theory and the other including “experience with the care and responsibility of a pre-school child.”

1966-68 College of Saint Benedict Catalog cover & p. 58
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/5978/rec/10
Class descriptions p. 56
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/5979/rec/10
In the first joint CSBSJU Catalog in 1967, the Home management course description still says, “experience with the care of a pre-school child,” but leaves out the part about responsibility for the child. Might that mean no more Home Ec children? And a year later, the course has become a 4-credit January Term course; January Term classes were then four weeks long (but students only took one class).

1967-68 joint Catalog p. 37
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/14731/rec/11
By 1970, it’s become a Home Management Practicum, with one component being “acquaintance with pre-school education.” It’s not clear when the Home Ec babies program ended, but by this point, there were no more.

1970-71 Combined Catalog p. 58

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/14628/rec/16
Bye-bye, Home Ec Babies!

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