



2006

Architecture of the Millennium: Catharine Beecher, Domestic Economy, and Social Reform

Erie M. Roberts
Illinois Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/constructing>

Recommended Citation

Roberts, Erie M. (2006) "Architecture of the Millennium: Catharine Beecher, Domestic Economy, and Social Reform," *Constructing the Past*: Vol. 7 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/constructing/vol7/iss1/5>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by editorial board of the Undergraduate Economic Review and the Economics Department at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

Architecture of the Millennium: Catharine Beecher, Domestic Economy, and Social Reform

Abstract

This article discusses Catherine Beecher's ideas about how women, as the Christian moral center and teachers, could reform American society. She put homemakers at a center of power, since she believed that they would be able to not only teach children to become true Christian citizens, but reform men as well.

**Architecture of the Millennium:
Catharine Beecher, Domestic Economy, and Social Reform**
Erie Martha Roberts

Early American reform movements have long been a subject of study and interest for scholars of American history. The period between 1820 and 1850, during and directly after the Second Great Awakening, gave rise to myriad different reformers and reform movements, all with different agendas. From temperance to manual labor, abolition to women's rights, the reformers of the early American republic were a varied group that might superficially appear to have little that connects one person or movement to another. However, as Robert H. Abzug convincingly proves in his book *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination*, underlying many of the major early American reformers was a strong sense of the coming millennium. While Abzug looks at the major reform movements of this period, his analysis overlooks some of the small details that help to fully construct this cosmic drama. This is especially evident when it comes to his analysis of Catharine Beecher, specifically, her ideas of women's education and the Christian home. For Beecher, only through proper architecture and upkeep can a Christian home be built; only within a Christian home with an educated mother-minister can a Christian family develop; only with both Christian homes and families can Christian neighborhoods and, thus, missionary work properly develop.

According to Abzug's theories, reforms were intended to restructure the cosmos in anticipation of the coming millennium and the symbology and structure of the comic drama underlay most reform rhetoric. Building upon the ideas of scholar Max Weber, Abzug posits that early reformers were, in fact, a particular brand of religious virtuosos. According to Weber (who based his definition on medieval Catholic societies), religious virtuosos are "individuals whose consciousness in most cases seemed tuned to heavenly rather than earthly matters."¹ This definition, when extended to relentlessly Protestant societies like America, includes individuals who "focus[ed] on the earthly and frowned upon formal holy orders, such types, as one scholar put it 'find their honor and their struggle everywhere on God's earth.'"² Thus, American Protestant reformers operated within an evangelically religious framework as they tried to reform earthly economic, social, and political problems.

American reformers built upon the symbology of the American Revolution, specifically "The Revolutionary image of an American bathed in millennial splendor . . . [which] became for reformers the basis of a self-scrutinizing national piety."³ Operating within this evangelical, millennial cosmic worldview, reformers "created in the minds of many a sense that their era was what, in the twentieth century, the theologian Paul Tillich has called a *kiros*. . . a movement in history marked by entry of the Kingdom of God into human affairs."⁴ Abzug extends this idea specifically to American reformers; people who "shaped their agenda from the social, political, and economic turmoil of the day, but within a millennial and sometimes apocalyptic sense of America's role in the cosmic drama."⁵ Using Abzug's reworked definition provides for new and useful insights into the underlying motivations of early American reformers.

¹Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 4

² *Ibid.*, 4

³ *Ibid.*, 7

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Constructing the Past

For early American reformers, then, “social, economic, and personal issues came alive within the reform cosmology. It constituted a broad sacralization of the world, where sacred and profane were of a piece.”⁶ The idea of religious virtuosos and the cosmic metadrama within which reform played out is a powerful way of understanding the varied and disparate aspects of reform during this time period. Working from ideas of “human nature, morality, society, and history [that] were clearly influenced by their faith,” early American reformers organized their rapidly changing society into one that functioned within an age-old cosmic, millennial symbology.⁷

One interesting commonality between these religious virtuosos is their general disdain, at least initially, of political processes. Instead of working within the system, religious virtuosos, for various reasons, initially chose to work outside the realm of politics. They created voluntary societies, such as the American Bible Society or the American Temperance Society, to help further their goals. This move from the political to the social opened the door for women reformers to take an active role. Building upon the idea of “Republican Motherhood,” a powerful term developed during the Revolutionary era that “signaled a shift in the rhetoric of womanhood—from inner piety to outward social behavior,” evangelical reform early in the nineteenth century helped expand a woman’s role outward into the community.⁸

While few of the major reformers during this time period actively supported or campaigned for a new conception of a woman’s role, the development of various religious and reform groups allowed women to participate in the public sphere in new and unprecedented ways. Women were moving out of the home and participating in quasi-political actions, both radical and conservative. White women were among “the first to enlist for abolition.”⁹ Even women who most closely adhered to traditional, evangelical views of a women’s role “were motivated by the central tenants of evangelical republican womanhood to play a significant role in [reform movements], and that these activities required women to be involved in the public sphere.”¹⁰ This change manifested itself in several ways. Most conservatively, this change helped to entrench the idea that, even if women “should not be directly involved in public life . . . it is necessary for them to mold and shape the men who are.”¹¹ At the other end of the ideological spectrum, “evangelicalism’s millennialism encouraged women to attempt to reform society as a whole, a test that led them to engage in public activities such as writing, organizing benevolent societies, and even participating in politics.”¹² Yet, wherever individual reformers, activists, or religious virtuosos fell on this continuum, women reformers “reorganized [at] the limits of politics . . . they focused on strengthening institutions like families, churches, and voluntary societies.”¹³ Thus, a specific brand of feminine reform developed, one that focused on the family, and through family, society; one that focused on the particular role women played in developing society; one that worked through both conservative and liberal ideologies.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 7

⁷ Mark David Hall, “Beyond Self-Interest: The Political Theory and Practice of Evangelical Women in Antebellum America” *Journal of Church and State* 44 no. 3 (2002): 484.

⁸ Jeanne Boydstone, *Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women’s Rights and Woman’s Sphere*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988): 121.

⁹ Daniel Feller, *The Jacksonian Promise: America, 1815-1840*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995): 114.

¹⁰ Hall, “Beyond Self-Interest” 495.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 486

¹² *Ibid.*, 483

¹³ *Ibid.*, 499

Constructing the Past

Catharine Beecher, one of the era's most prolific and influential female reformers, was a religious virtuoso who worked within the developing concepts of Republican Motherhood and woman's role in order to improve the condition of society on a large scale. The daughter of influential evangelical reformer Lyman Beecher and sister to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catharine Beecher was a highly intelligent woman who "is a fine example of a Christian thinker who made a conscious attempt to integrate her faith with her life's work."¹⁴ Throughout her life, Beecher used her intellect and religious fervor to improve female education, "specifically, a program of rigorous training for their special role as cook, housekeeper, and heatkeeper for the American home,"¹⁵ and through that, to purify society as a whole.

As a child, Beecher's father Lyman cultivated her religious faith and education by including her in his ministerial work, including pastoral visits; he also encouraged her to imitate and emulate his thinking.¹⁶ But her early Calvinist world-view was profoundly shaken when her fiancée drowned on a trip to Europe. Her father and his version of Calvinism could not comfort Beecher, because it was not proven that her fiancée converted before he died, a prerequisite to salvation according to Lyman's theology. It was during this time of emotional turmoil that "Beecher discovered that theological rigor did nothing to assuage emotional pain."¹⁷ As a result, Beecher "responded to her spiritual frustration by spelling out an alternative road to holiness, one that made her own life emblematic for women in general and offered new religious and social ideals," a decision that has prompted many scholars to argue that Beecher was not an evangelical Christian.¹⁸

However, it is more correct to assert that "she abandoned some of the 'harsher' tenets of Calvinism but remained firmly in the evangelical camp."¹⁹ She also did not fully reject her father's stringent Calvinism; instead, it is better to claim that she "began to apply common sense," accordingly, modifying but not rejecting Lyman's religion.²⁰ Indeed, as Abzug demonstrates in his book, because Beecher was "Too strongly steeped in evangelicalism to abandon it, she instead reworked Lyman's evangelical cosmology by revaluing its consistent elements."²¹ This revaluation is evident in nearly all of her written works, whether political, social, or theological.

Throughout her body of work, Beecher created an ideological outlook that placed women in the center. Like other religious virtuosos, Beecher shared a conception of America's chosenness that began with the Puritans. Like them, Beecher "believed that America was a city on a hill destined to advance the kingdom of God on earth. Although God's victory was inevitable, America's leadership in this process was not. If America did not produce virtuous citizens, democracy could degenerate into majority tyranny."²² Only women could produce such citizens. Even though Beecher's ideal women remained behind the scenes, according to her

¹⁴ Mark David Hall, "Catharine Beecher: America's First Female Philosopher and Theologian," *Fides et Historia* 32 no. 1 (2000): 79.

¹⁵ Gerald Carson, "Catharine Beecher," *The New-England Galaxy* 5 no. 4 (1964): 3

¹⁶ Nicole Tonkovich, *Domesticity with a Difference: The Nonfiction of Catharine Beecher, Sarah J. Hale, Fanny Fern and Mary Fuller* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997): 5

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 178

¹⁸ Abzug, 191

¹⁹ Hall, "Catharine Beecher," 74.

²⁰ Mae Elizabeth Haverson, *Catharine Elizabeth Beecher (Pioneer Educator)*, (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969): 32.

²¹ Abzug, 191

²² Hall, "Beyond Self-Interest," 486

Constructing the Past

evangelical, millennial worldview, women were "the prime mover in the creation of values and models for a middle-class Christian society."²³ It was solely through a woman's unique role as wife and mother, educator and housekeeper that society would improve.

This idea recurs throughout many, if not most, of her non-fiction works. Although her works show a great reverence for the ideals of American democracy (which would include, one would assume, separation of Church and state), Beecher clearly believes the only way to fulfill the promise of the Revolution is if "the marked boundaries between the Church and the world"²⁴ continue to fade away. And as they fade, it will become apparent that "The principles of democracy . . . are identical with the principles of Christianity."²⁵ But, even though Beecher clearly saw Christianity and democracy as two sides of the same coin, the success of American democracy was far from certain.

Beecher continually circles back to the idea that only with Christian moral leadership can American democracy and her structures flourish. "The success of democratic institutions," she argues, "depends upon the intellectual and moral character of the mass of the people."²⁶ Once the masses are morally educated, it will not be long, Beecher argues, until her millennial dream becomes a reality. Already, society is nearing the:

future condition in that perfected state of society toward which . . . humanity, under the guidance of Christianity, is steadily tending. When this state is fully attained, every man and every woman will *practically* love their neighbors as themselves, and all the institutions of society will emanate from this spirit.²⁷

God's kingdom of heaven on earth was near. In this respect, Beecher stands alongside the other religious virtuosos of her era. Her writings draw upon her father's evangelical symbology, one that was developed under the influence of a cosmic metahistory and anticipation of the coming of the millennium. But unique to Beecher, she saw the millennium coming, not through temperance, abolition, or bodily reforms, but rather through the correct education of women in the art and practice of domestic economy. It is only by teaching women not only the correct way to run and maintain a home, but also to build it, that a Christian society ever come to pass.

Beecher's desire to form a Christian society by reforming private, often female dominated, institutions is evident in nearly all of her printed works, although most especially so in those treatises, essays, and books on religion, education, and domestic economy. In general, her books "present the foundational principles for the thoroughly Christian world-view . . . They also shed light on her political and social theory."²⁸ What is unique about Beecher's theory is the way that all aspects of it are bound together in Christian theology. She did not simply write about women's education, or how to properly ventilate a house; rather, her works pay "simultaneous attention to cultural expectations and private agenda."²⁹ Thus, her *Treatise on Domestic Economy* is not simply "a home economics textbook, but it is one that addresses the central questions of political theory in a sustained and intelligent manner."³⁰ Like any true

²³ Abzug, 191

²⁴ Catharine Beecher, *The True Remedy for the Wrongs of Women; with a History of an Enterprise Having That for Its Object* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson & Co, 1851): 19.

²⁵ Catharine Beecher, *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (New York: Source Books Press, 1970): 2

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁷ Beecher, *True Remedy*, 24.

²⁸ Hall, "Catharine Beecher," 65.

²⁹ Tonkovich, 12

³⁰ Hall, "Beyond Self-Interest," 485

Constructing the Past

religious virtuoso, Beecher combines the sacred and the secular, the heavenly and the earthly, the domestic and the political, and does so in such a way so as to make “women the central actors in the drama of social regeneration,”³¹ shifting the focus from the masculine public sphere to the feminine private sphere.

Beecher was one of the first reformers to make such a radical shift of focus from the masculine to the feminine. Those that came before, including her father, created a line of demarcation between women’s sphere and men’s. Generally, “most men and women shared a profound sense that the subordinate position of women was a piece with nature.”³² And while male reformers might have “recognized womanhood itself as a vital, flexible, and changeable sphere,” male reformers rarely tried to reconcile their vastly different view with the dominant one.³³ Thus, by virtually ignoring the daily struggles of their sisters-in-arms, male reformers implicitly privilege the masculine public sphere. Furthermore, it was in the public sphere that these religious virtuosos worked and acted; their actions imply that it was only through the public sphere that they could conceive of achieving a true, lasting millennium.

Beecher did not reject this notion of an evangelically hierarchical society; however, she did significantly rework it. She took her father’s “sense of woman’s sphere at face value, [made] it the dominant moral force in society, and place[d] at least some women out of the home to fulfill their mission. Women might then wield enormous power within a limited but crucial sphere of social endeavor.”³⁴ Most significantly, Beecher “recast both the teacher and the mother as female counterparts of the minister, charged, not only with educating of the mind, but within the perfection of the soul.”³⁵ This idea is even more revolutionary, since few religions at this time let women become ministers, including her father’s. As she stated and implied in nearly all of her works, Beecher stridently believed that “if this country is ever saved, it must be by woman more than man.”³⁶ Like the majority of her political and social theory, Beecher’s view of the powerful role women played in the cosmic drama developed from both religious and real world study. She claims that “the Bible’s view of the case[,] . . . that it is far *more favorable* to woman’s increased influence and high position in social and domestic life than that of those who dissent from it,” is the way things should be on earth.³⁷ Hence, even though she was working within traditional male/female boundaries, and would even go so far as to speak out against liberal woman’s rights groups, Beecher reworked traditional evangelical thought to create a special and powerful role for women in society.

According to historian Jeanne Boydstone, women now had “the voice of the female minister,” and Beecher gave them the power and opportunity to use it both in the classroom and in the home, the most powerful and important places in society.³⁸ It is to “intelligent, reflecting, and benevolent women—whose faith rests on the character and teachings of Jesus Christ”³⁹ that

³¹ Abzug, 192

³² Abzug, 185

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 192-193

³⁵ Tonkovich, 19

³⁶ Beecher, *True Remedy*, 242

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 224

³⁸ Boydstone, 121

³⁹ Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *American Woman’s Home*, ed. Nicole Tonkovich, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002): 21

Constructing the Past

Beecher directs her work; these are the women who are fit "for the right fulfillment of your high and holy calling:"⁴⁰ that of nurturer, teacher, and mother.

Using the idea of Republican Motherhood, Beecher conceived of motherhood as being a social role that was best performed in the house. However, if one was unwilling or unable to properly nurture or educate her children, the female teacher was an appropriate substitute. To the woman, she gives the "training of the human mind in the years of infancy and childhood . . . [their] appropriate and highest vocation."⁴¹ Furthermore, "It is WOMAN," she wrote "whom experience and testimony have shown to be the best . . . guardian and teacher of childhood, in the school as well as the nursery."⁴² Even in her *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, a home economics textbook designed for homemakers, mothers, and mothers-to-be, declared "all the responsibilities in regard to health, morals, and manners, rest upon the female teachers."⁴³ Whether these female teachers exist within the home, or without it, "the upward progress of the gage, and the advance of a more enlightened Christianity" depends upon their nurturing care.⁴⁴

Beecher's conception of a woman's role gains even more power when it is examined in light of the cosmic drama in which Beecher's reforms exist. Even though Beecher mostly keeps women in the private sphere of the home, with only the role of teacher as a viable, public alternative, she fervently believes that it is women, no matter what role they play, who will bring about the millennium by creating moral masses: "the moral and intellectual character of the young is committed mainly to the female hand."⁴⁵ It is not only the young that women influence, but also men of all ages. "Let the women of a country be made virtuous and intelligent," she argued, "and the men will certainly be the same."⁴⁶ Unlike the cosmos of her male counterparts, women are the prime movers in Beecher's cosmic drama.

Beecher even redefines "mother" so that it includes women who choose not to have children of their own. As Boydstone notes, Beecher's writings reveal a belief that "Any woman, married or single, became a mother simply through her ministrations to others"⁴⁷ Unlike many evangelical reformers, Beecher argues, "No woman is under obligations to marry unless she chooses to do so."⁴⁸ In her writings, the role of mother is always closely connected to that of teacher, both bound together by the idea of nurturing. In her *Letters to the People on Health and Happiness*, she groups together "wife, mother, educator, nurse, and house-keeper."⁴⁹ And she claims in her *Treatise on Domestic Economy* that all women "are agents in accomplishing the greatest work that ever was committed to human responsibility," regardless of whether it is "The woman who is rearing a family of children" or "the woman who labors in the school room."⁵⁰ The mother, whether as housekeeper and wife or teacher and nurse, was the most important actor in Beecher's cosmic drama.

⁴⁰ Catharine Beecher, *Miss Beecher's Domestic Receipt Book: Designed as a Supplement to Her Treatise on Domestic Economy* 3rd ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1852): 280.

⁴¹ Beecher, *True Remedy*, 33

⁴² *Ibid.*, 240-241

⁴³ Beecher, *Treatise*, 36

⁴⁴ Beecher and Stowe, 21

⁴⁵ Beecher, *Treatise*, 13

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 13

⁴⁷ Boydstone, 119

⁴⁸ Beecher, *True Remedy*, 227.

⁴⁹ Catharine Beecher, *Letters to the People on Health and Happiness*. (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 186

⁵⁰ Beecher, *Treatise*, 14

Constructing the Past

But in order for a woman to become the perfect mother, she must first learn all the necessary domestic skills: cooking, cleaning, nursing, educating, etc. The only way for her to do this is through the proper education of women; this is what Beecher's life's work became. There were two primary ways in which Beecher advocated for the improvement of female education. One was by writing tracts and treatises, explaining why it was vital to society that women's education became a rigorous and respected enterprise. According to Melissa Ladd Teed, in these essays, "Beecher envisioned the transformative potential of learned women."⁵¹ Teed goes on to note that Beecher "wanted to standardize the haphazard training most female teachers received so that their occupation might receive professional status and cultural legitimacy."⁵² Drawing upon earlier rhetoric of the sacred role women played, Beecher sought to argue that when "the Savior's prediction in regard to his coming kingdom will be fulfilled: 'The first shall be last, and the last shall be first.' Whenever this golden period arrives, *all women will be educated*, and, what is more, they will all be educated *for their profession*."⁵³ The millennium will only be achieved through the education of all women, not in ornamental skills such as drawing and painting, but in practical ones like domestic economy. Women were to be useful and trained for their job as moral leaders. As Mark David Hall notes, "Both her vision for the substance of this education, as well as her promotion of it, show that she wanted women to play an important role in the nation's public life" through their private work.⁵⁴

The other way in which Beecher promoted female education is through her own textbooks on the subject. Her *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, *Miss Beecher's Domestic Receipt Book*, *Letters to the People on Health and Happiness*, and *The American Woman's Home* (which she co-authored with her sister Harriet Beecher Stowe) are all designed to teach young and inexperienced homemakers what they did not, and could not, learn in school. As she wrote in the introduction to *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, "It is painful, after years of trial and anxiety, to discover, that, in some important respects, mistakes have been made, which have entailed suffering and sorrow on ourselves, and on the objects of our care."⁵⁵ Even fifteen years later, when *The American Woman's Home* was published, the same problems still existed. In the introductory chapter, Beecher and Stowe wrote that:

while they sympathize with every honest effort to relieve the disabilities and sufferings of their sex, [they] are confident that the chief cause of these evils is the fact that the honor and duties of the family state are not dually appreciated, that women are not trained for these duties as men are trained for their trades and professions, and that, as the consequence, family labor is poorly done, poorly paid, and regarded as menial and disgraceful.⁵⁶

It is as a way to rectify this problem, as well as to "elevate both the honor and the remuneration of all the employments that sustain the many difficult and sacred duties of the family state" that Beecher devoted a large portion of her work to the direct instruction of women in the finer arts of domestic economy. Once women were educated for their job, Beecher believed that women

⁵¹ Melissa Ladd Teed, "'A Larger Sphere of Usefulness': Women's Education and Public Life in Hartford, 1815-1850" *Connecticut History* 39 no. 1 (2000): 8

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Beecher, *True Remedy*, 27-28.

⁵⁴ Hall, "Beyond Self-Interest," 489

⁵⁵ Beecher, *Treatise*, ix.

⁵⁶ Beecher and Stowe, 19

Constructing the Past

were finally ready to engage in their domestic labors and assume their roles within the Christian house.

Once Beecher firmly established the need for educating women, she then went about arguing for a woman's divine role within the house. The family is sacred, holy, and divine. Several times throughout her works on domestic economy, Beecher uses evangelical and millennial rhetoric to argue for the divinity of the family unit. She argued that Jesus Christ "came into this world to secure" the family state.⁵⁷ But even though her conceptions of family are based in a hierarchical, evangelical tradition, she placed educated, moral women at the center of a Christian household. Relying on traditional first-wave, conservative feminist rhetoric, Beecher argued in many of her works that the "chief responsibility of *sustaining the family state*, in all its sacred and varied relations and duties, should rest mainly on the female sex,"⁵⁸ and that "The family state . . . is the aptest earthly illustration of the heavenly kingdom, and in it woman is its chief minister."⁵⁹ Beecher both uses and subverts traditional evangelical paradigms in order to help bring about the millennium.

One of the most unusual and powerful ways that Beecher establishes women as the prime mover of the millennium is through her ideas about the architecture of the home. These ideas are most fully generated in *The American Woman's Home*, which, although coauthored by both Beecher and Stowe, is primarily Beecher's work.⁶⁰ The book opens with Beecher's precise, detailed plan for the perfect Christian home (Appendix 1).⁶¹ Beecher's diagrams are meticulous and exacting, at times even placing "A X by a door, [which] shows the place where the door should swing."⁶² Beecher plans the perfect Christian house: one that relies on "modes of economizing time, labor, and expense by the close packing of conveniences."⁶³ By this careful economizing, Beecher hoped to avoid needless activity, arguing that such an arrangement as the one she suggests "saves nearly one half the fatigue that housekeeping demands, when the nursery is in one story, the parlor in another, and the kitchen in the basement."⁶⁴ Using this design, mother will have the energy needed to focus on what is important.⁶⁵

Therefore, Beecher's plans are far more expansive than simply telling women the correct placement of the kitchen or what the second story of a two-story home should look like. The reasoning behind such an undertaking is intertwined with her ideas of the Christian family state and woman's role. Beecher's reasoning behind her amateur architecture, is to create "a Christian

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 23

⁵⁸ Beecher, *Letters*, 188

⁵⁹ Beecher and Stowe, 24

⁶⁰ It was basically an "enlarged edition of the earlier book [*Treatise on Domestic Economy*] with some quotations from Mrs. Stowe's *House and Home Papers* and some material that was entirely new," as well as incorporating some of Beecher's early newspaper and magazine articles. Haverson, 176.

⁶¹ Interestingly, Beecher first realized the potential of architecture and coming of the millennium when trying to establish the Hartford Female Seminary. There, she saw "how effectively a diagram concretized and helped to implement her ideas" (Valerie Gill, "Catharine Beecher and Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Architects of Female Power" *Journal of American Culture* 21 no. 2 (1998): 18.). Beecher also employed this technique in her tract, *The True Remedy for the Rights of Women*, when she was trying to raise money for the Milwaukee Normal School (Appendix 2).

⁶² Beecher, *Treatise*, 279

⁶³ Beecher and Stowe, 29

⁶⁴ Beecher, *Treatise*, 289

⁶⁵ And by inhabiting the male role of architect, Beecher is once again using traditional conceptions of femininity (that the woman's place is in the home) in order to expand the woman's role outward (the architect).

Constructing the Past

house,"⁶⁶ which is a house where "the wise woman seeks a home in which to exercise [her] ministry, she will aim to secure a house so planned that it will provide in the best manner for health, industry, and economy, those cardinal requirements of domestic enjoyment and success."⁶⁷ In choosing such a home, Beecher was, according to scholar Valerie Gill, trying to help the wise woman "prepare her family for the stringent requirements of a Protestant heaven."⁶⁸ Thus, the Christian home will not only help bring about the millennium, but it will also ensure that Beecher's sacred family state will achieve its place in heaven.

Beecher's interest on the physical home represents, what Gill terms, an "interest in the topography of female experience. . . [Beecher] conceptualize[s] the identity of women in spatial . . . terms, assuming that the fulfillment of their own sex can be quite literally mapped out."⁶⁹ Beecher's construction of the Christian house is one of the most interesting, powerful, and concrete attempts to bring her evangelical metadrama into play in the daily world. In her architectural drawings, Beecher enshrines the Christian family, makes it permanent, and links "the secular home and God's eternal home."⁷⁰ Furthermore, Boydstone notes that Beecher's drawings were part of a larger attempt to "domesticate [Christ-like selflessness] within the walls of the middle-class home."⁷¹ It is a tactile, lasting display of Beecher's religious virtuosity, and of the way her conception of the cosmos influenced nearly all of her attempts of reform.

But simply advocating the literal creation of God's home on earth alone is not what makes Beecher a religious virtuoso, or someone desirous of sacralizing the earth. Her true religious virtuosity is evident when Beecher takes her idea of the Christian home, developed in the first chapter of *The American Woman's Home*, and extends it. Her Christian home grows and becomes "a centrifugal entity, a moral force that radiates outward from the center of the actual Christian house to the circumference of society."⁷² Beecher opens the doors of her Christian house to include those in need of help—poor, indigent, and orphans. In *American Woman's Home*, Beecher argues that "the present mode of collecting special classes in great establishments, though it may be the best in a choice of evils, is not the best method for the physical, social, and moral improvement of those classes,"⁷³ Beecher urges women to open the doors of their home to those who need their ministry the most. While acknowledging the difficulties associated with administering to the poor and needy, Beecher argues that such work "is the peculiar privilege of women in the sacred retreat of a 'Christian home.'"⁷⁴ Furthermore, if the Christian home is built according to Beecher's drawings, then the time saved "by the selection and close packing of conveniences . . . thus may be attained for aiding to save the vicious, comfort the suffering, and instruct the ignorant."⁷⁵ The Christian house, thus, creates a place where woman's ministry can effectively be extended to the community at large.

Further extending her theories about the home and its role, Beecher then moves from middle-class ministry to the poor to the building of city tenements for immigrants (Appendix 3).

⁶⁶ Beecher and Stowe, 28

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 27

⁶⁸ Gill, 18

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 21

⁷¹ Boydstone, 122

⁷² Gill, 21

⁷³ Beecher and Stowe, 319

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 318

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 325

Using principles of design that “echoes [the] earlier plan for the Christian house,”⁷⁶ Beecher describes these tenant houses as being “four stories high, [that] would accommodate sixteen families of four members, or eight larger families, and provide light, warmth, ventilations, and more comforts and conveniences than are usually found in most city houses built for only one family.”⁷⁷ Thus, the recent immigrant mother is given the same opportunities to properly and effectively carry out her particularly female ministry as the middle-class woman. Beecher’s Christian neighborhood is one that incorporates every class of people, thereby actually attempting to bring the whole of the world into her cosmic metahistory.

It is unsurprising that Beecher then turns her focus toward the community in general, and not simply to the individual family. In Beecher’s final chapter, Gill notes that “The Christian household evolves outward . . . into the Christian neighborhood.”⁷⁸ Beecher describes this ideal community as being a place where “a truly ‘Christian family’ [is] instituted in any destitute settlement, and soon its goodness and fields would cause ‘the desert to blossom as the rose,’ and around would soon gather a ‘Christian neighborhood.’”⁷⁹ At the center of this Christian neighborhood would be a multi-purpose building, once again designed by Beecher (Appendix 4), that will be “a small church, a school-house, and a comfortable family dwelling.”⁸⁰ The school’s aim would be “during the week, to collect the children of the neighborhood, to be taught not only to read, write and cipher, but to perform in the best manner all the practical duties of the family state.”⁸¹ Thus, the Christian neighborhood would train more boys and girls to succeed at their roles in the Christian family; they will have the knowledge necessary to build a Christian house, to raise the proper Christian family, and to extend their ministry to those in need.

The result of Beecher’s plan is that “the ‘Christian family’ and ‘Christian neighborhood’ would become the grand ministry, as they were designed to be, in training our whole race for heaven.”⁸² Near the very end of *The American Woman’s Home*, Beecher refers back to her father and his stringent, evangelical Calvinism. She writes that she “still can hear the echoes of early life, when her father’s voice read to her listening mother in exulting tones the poet’s version of this millennial consummation.”⁸³ Her father’s millennialism, the one which she transformed through her own religious struggles, and the Bible, “The Blessed Word . . . cheers us with pictures of a drawing day to which we are approaching”⁸⁴ are at the back of her mind as she discusses the Christian neighborhood. For Beecher, the millennium was near; in order to achieve it, women must do their all to sacralize their world. It was their duty to build, run, and maintain a Christian house, to raise a Christian family, and to develop a Christian neighborhood. But this could not be done without having an educated woman, one who was trained in her profession.

Thus, Beecher’s ideas of education and domestic economy work together in her cosmic drama to create the mother-minister at its center. All of this manifests itself in the physical and metaphorical home. According to Gill, as *The American Woman’s Home* progresses, “Beecher’s conception of the home slips from its material confines into the surrounding neighborhood, the

⁷⁶ Gill, 23

⁷⁷ Beecher and Stowe, 328

⁷⁸ Gill, 23

⁷⁹ Beecher and Stowe, 337

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 333

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 336

⁸² *Ibid.*, 337

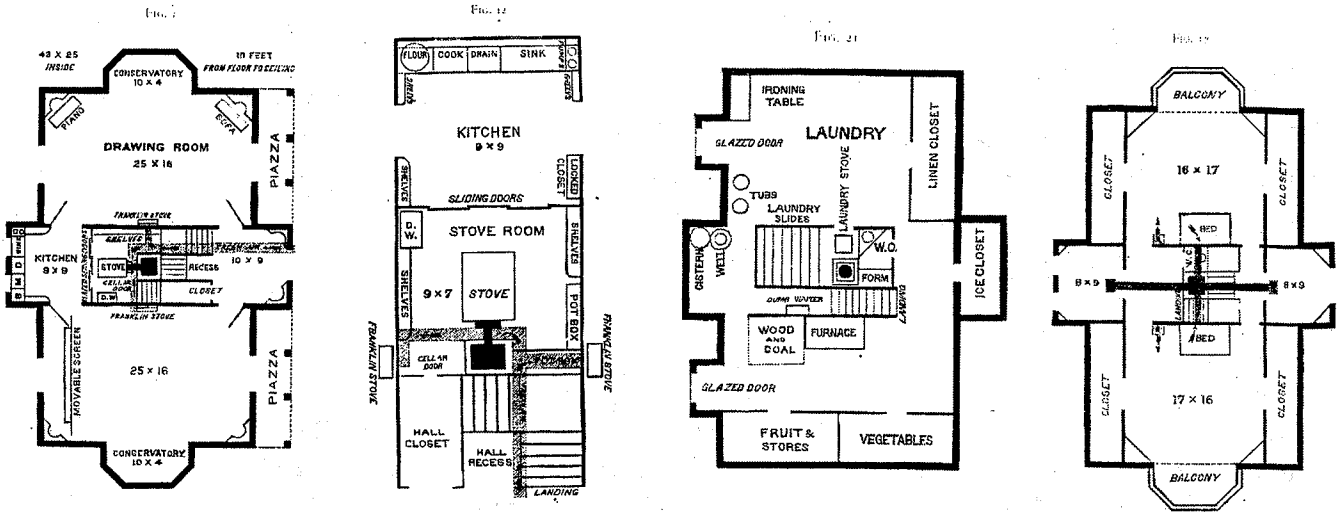
⁸³ *Ibid.*, 338

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

Constructing the Past

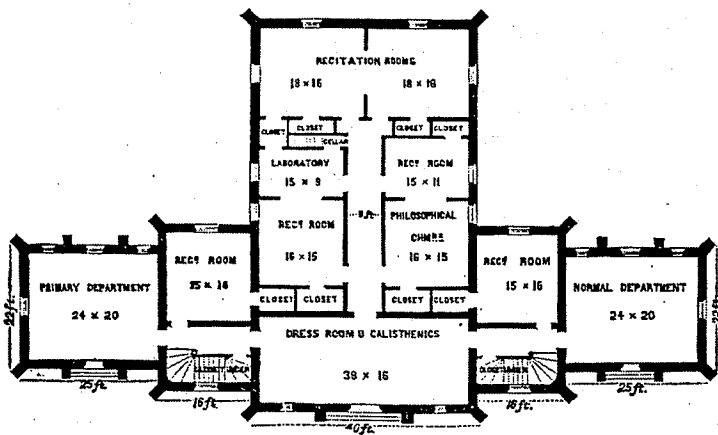
larger society, and, ultimately, the Christian afterworld."⁸⁵ Influenced by her father's own brand of evangelical millennialism, Beecher positioned the home, the family, and other traditionally feminine spheres as central actors in her cosmic drama. It is in the private, not the public, sphere that ultimate power rests, because it is only through the private sphere that the millennium will come.

Appendix 1

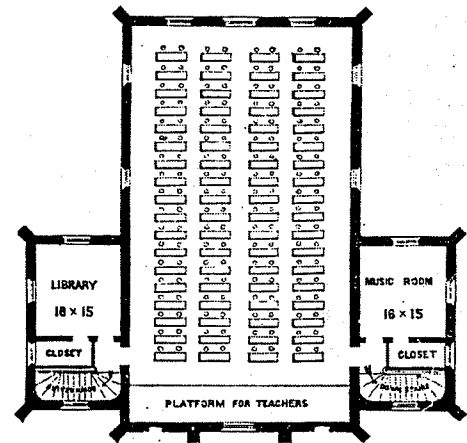


Beecher and Stowe, 27-41.

Appendix 2



Proposed ground plan for the Milwaukee Normal Institute.—From a Design by the Author.



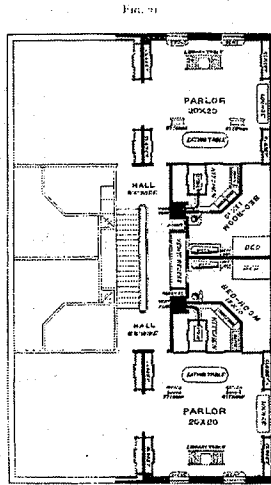
Proposed plan for the Second Story of the Milwaukee Normal Institute. From a Design by the Author.

Beecher, *Treatise*

⁸⁵ Gill, 231

Constructing the Past

Appendix 3



Beecher and Stowe, 324

Appendix 4

FIG. 76

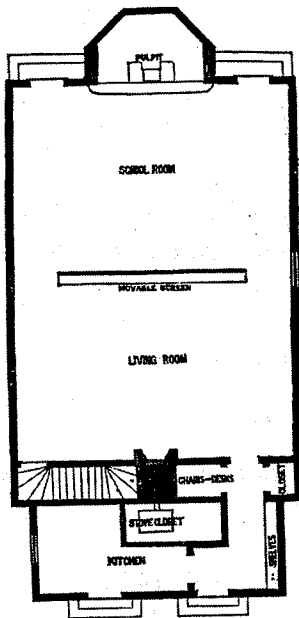
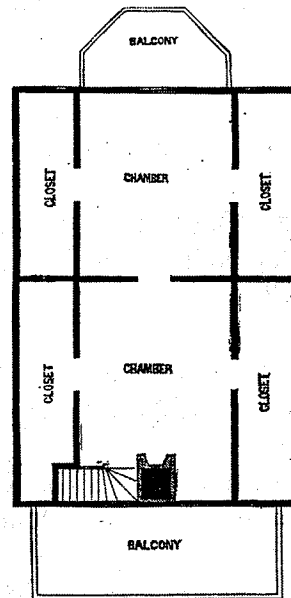


FIG. 77



Beecher and Stowe, 334-336.

Constructing the Past

Bibliography

- Abzug, Robert H. *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Beecher, Catherine and Harriet Beecher Stowe. *The American Woman's Home*. Nicole Tonkovich, editor. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002.
- Beecher, Catherine E. *Letters to the People on Health and Happiness*. New York: Arnos Press and The New York Times, 1972.
- . *Miss Beecher's Domestic Receipt-Book: Designed as a Supplement to Her Treatise on Domestic Economy*. 3rd ed. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1852.
- . *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*. New York: Source Books Press, 1970.
- . *The True Remedy for the Wrongs of Woman; with a History of an Enterprise Having That for Its Object*. Boston: Phillipps, Sampson, & Co., 1851.
- Boydstone, Jeanne. *Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women's Rights and Woman's Sphere*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.
- Carson, Gerald. "Catherine Beecher." *The New-England Galaxy* 5 no. 4 (1964): 3-10.
- Feller, Daniel. *The Jacksonian Promise: America, 1815-1840*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- Gill, Valerie. "Catherine Beecher and Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Architects of Female Power." *Journal of American Culture* 21 no 2 (1998): 17-24.
- Hall, Mark David. "Beyond Self Interest: The Political Theory and Practice of Evangelical Women in Antebellum America" *Journal of Church and State* 44 no. 3 (2002): 477-499.
- . "Catherine Beecher; America's First Female Philosopher and Theologian." *Fides et historial* 32 no. 1 (2000): 65-80.
- Harveson, Mae Elizabeth. *Catherine Esther Beecher (Pioneer Educator)*. New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969.
- Perlmann, Joel, Silvana R. Siddali, Keith Whitescarver. "Literacy, Schooling, and Teaching among New England Women, 1730-1820." *History of Education Quarterly*. 37 no. 2 (1997): 117-139.

Constructing the Past

Preston, Jo Anne. "Domestic Ideology, School Reformers, and Female Teachers: Schoolteaching Becomes Women's Work in Nineteenth-Century New England." *The New England Quarterly* 66 no. 4 (1993): 531-551.

Tonkovich, Nicole. *Domesticity with a Difference: The Nonfiction of Catherine Beecher, Sarah J. Hale, Fanny Fern, and Margaret Fuller*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997.