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WORK WANTED – FEMALE: WOMEN AND WORK IN PINELLAS COUNTY IN THE 1950s

by Ellen Babb

During World War II millions of American women worked in wartime industries and in other non-traditional fields when mobilization of the armed forces called the nation's men into service. At first the entry of women into previously male-dominated sectors of the economy was viewed with alarm and some resistance by unions and the public at large. But by 1943, the federal government began hiring women in great numbers to meet emergency needs, and government propaganda and advertising in women's periodicals depicted female employment as a patriotic duty. For the first time in American's history, older, married women – many with children – dominated the country's female work force. Seventy-five percent of the new workers were wives and mothers. During the war, women gained well-paying jobs in new fields, and they won praise for their part in keeping the nation's businesses going and providing soldiers with necessary munitions and supplies.[1]

The employment of women in "men's work" was viewed as temporary, only "for the duration" of the war. They were then expected to return to their homes or to lower-paying jobs in female-dominated fields such as the service industry, relinquishing their wartime positions to returning veterans and younger men. Although four million women lost their jobs in the immediate aftermath of World War II, two million more women remained in the labor force than at the onset of the war.[2]

Just as the decade of the 1940s saw an expansion of economic opportunities for women, the decade that followed saw a parallel contraction in response to evolving social values which placed a premium on traditional gender roles and family life at the expense of individual needs and ambitions. The men and women who grew up during the uncertainty of the Great Depression and came of age during World War II were part of a generation obsessed with security and stability. In this setting, the family became the center of refuge, much as it had been during the Victorian era, and women were seen as the caretakers of home and hearth, confined to a life of domesticity and motherhood. Even as the number of women in the work force continued to rise, the social ideology and postwar government policies in housing and education conspired to restrict women from the work force by relegating them to the isolated sphere of home and family and by narrowing the types of opportunities available to women who chose to work for pay.[3]

A study of women in Pinellas County, Florida, during the 1950s illustrates the limited employment opportunities for women and exposes the psychological and social costs of being a working mother and/or housewife during this time. Because of postwar social ideology and because of Pinellas County's almost total reliance on tourism and related services during the 1950s, women found themselves severely restricted in the types of employment available to them.

Pinellas County's development was influenced by World War II in a number of important ways. At the onset of the war, the county's population growth came to almost a complete halt. With the city of St. Petersburg as its hub, the area relied heavily on tourism as its main economic

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During World War II government recruitment campaigns glorifying women's employment were steeped in patriotic sentiment.

Photograph from *Women, Families, and Communities: Readings in American History. Volume 2: from 1865*, edited by Nancy Hewitt.

base, and this foundation was undermined in the transition from peace to mobilization.

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Nevertheless certain areas of the county, particularly St. Petersburg, were saved from total economic devastation by an infusion of financial aid from the federal government in the early and mid-1940s. Local hotels, denied their normal tourist occupancy, were filled with soldier trainees, and local airports were used for flight practice. Thousands of service men and women and their families visited Pinellas County in the 1940s, and after the war many of them returned to the accommodating, residential environment and to the warm, sunny climate they remembered so fondly.[4]

Postwar affluence and the return of military veterans to Pinellas County led to the biggest population and building boom in the county's history. The newcomers' migration south was aided by the opening of the Sunshine Skyway, connecting Pinellas to Manatee county in 1954, and by the completion of the Gulf Coast Highway (U.S. 19) from Tallahassee to St. Petersburg the following year. These improvements in transportation helped end the geographic isolation of Pinellas County from important economic and political centers to the north and south. Between 1950 and 1960, the county's population increased from 159,249 to 374,665 – an increase of over 135 percent. Retirees and returning veterans made up the bulk of the new residents, and the local economy revolved around servicing their needs.

Nationwide as well, growth in the service and sales industries exploded during the 1950s. The American labor force, which had seen a great expansion of opportunities for women in all sectors of the economy during the 1940s reverted to employment defined by gender and race.[5] Women, particularly black women, provided the bulk of unskilled labor in service industries. Given the already narrow economic base of Pinellas County in the early 1950s, as well as the lack of unionization, meaningful career opportunities for men as well as for women were almost nonexistent. But a glimpse at the sexually and racially segregated help-wanted columns in the *St. Petersburg Times* indicates that while women were normally recruited for positions in housekeeping, restaurant work, general office work, and retail stores, positions available to men included higher paying jobs in management, construction, insurance sales, and administration. Not even the arrival of light industries by the end of the decade altered the pattern of work for women in any significant way. Throughout the 1950s, the majority of women in Pinellas County remained sequestered in the same low-paying, low-status occupations (see Table 1).

TABLE 1

Jobs Held by Women over the Age of 14 in Pinellas County

	1950	1960
Clerical or kindred	22%	26%
Service workers	16	17
Private household workers	16	9
Professional, technical	12	13
Sales workers	11	11

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. *U.S. Census of the Population. Characteristics of the Population: Florida for 1950 and 1960*.

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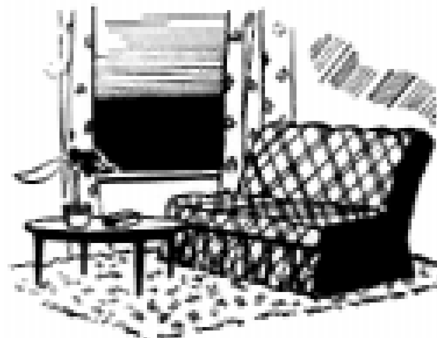

Brighter, more cheerful homes

After World War II new "labor-saving" devices such as the automatic washing machine actually increased the amount of time many housewives spent accomplishing routine household chores.

Photograph from *Never Done: A History of Housework in America*, by Susan Strasser.

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Charley and Winona Jones owned and operated this roadside fruit stand in northern Pinellas County in the 1950s.

By race, the statistics were even more exclusionary. Almost 100 percent of the female clerical and sales workers in Pinellas County were white in both 1950 and 1960, while 83 percent of cooks and maids in private homes in 1950 and 70 percent in 1960 were non-white women.[6]

The 1950s ideal of wives and mothers remaining at home was an illusion. In reality, the number of married women entering the workforce steadily increased after World War II, so that married women represented 60 percent of all women in the nation's workforce by 1960. Although this trend clashed with the prevailing social philosophies consigning women to domestic boundaries, some types of paid work received social approval. Wives were "permitted" to work if they did not destroy their husband's image as the primary breadwinner in the family and if their wages allowed their family to partake of the new material comforts. But even if a woman chose to work in order to help secure a comfortable home for her family, her employment was seen as temporary and could expect to be interrupted for child-rearing. A 1954 article, entitled "It Takes Only One Paycheck For a Happy Marriage" and published in the women's section of the *St. Petersburg Times*, explained the guidelines. The author, Dr. John Crane, advised readers that if a woman absolutely had to work in order to get her home established, her salary should never be put toward regular expenses, but should instead be set aside for such extras as furniture, new appliances and vacations. Crane warned that if the family

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adjusted to living off two paychecks, this would contribute to an inflated standard of living, and the family would suffer horribly when – not if – the wife stopped working to have children.[7]

Partners at home, as well as in business, Charley and Winona Jones shared housework and care of their children, Eugene and Sharon, shown next to the family truck.

Once the children were older and in school, it was again respectable for a woman to go to work in order to augment the family budget and help maintain a certain standard of living for the family. A sample of thirty-eight middle-class, white women, who worked and raised young children in Pinellas County during the 1950s, showed that three stopped working with the birth of their children and never went back; four continued working but on a part-time basis; fourteen returned when their children were older and in school; eight began their very first jobs after their children were older; and nine began working full-time again within two years of their child's birth. In this last group, almost half of the women who returned to work within a short period of time were employed in businesses owned by their families.[8]

Clearly, working in family businesses offered some working mothers benefits they could not find elsewhere. Marguerite Wilder worked as co-owner and manager of Wilder's Mobile Home Park after her only child was born in 1950, and she provided a place for him in the office while she worked, thus avoiding the high cost of day care most working mothers faced. During the 1950s, Winona and Charley Jones worked together in a cooperative family enterprise, managing a roadside express fruit shipment and delivery business while raising three young children. Charley worked another full-time job in addition to the fruit delivery venture, and he and Winona shared the housework. Looking back, Winona admits that they could never have devoted the time necessary to making their business a success if they had not received additional support from her mother and her in-laws, who assisted with child care, housework, home repairs, and meals. Winona also feels that as a white, Protestant woman working in a family business, she was spared the overt discrimination other ambitious women faced.[9]

In a society that placed motherhood and the cult of domesticity at a high premium, women with true career ambitions were thought to be neurotic. When these women repressed their desires for external recognition and internal fulfillment in non-domestic areas and retreated into the socially-sanctioned isolation of home and family, they often found themselves on the analyst's couch, listless, bored, and unable to explain the source of their discontent. In her well-known commentary on dysfunctional American sex roles in the 1950s, Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* described this schizophrenic half-life common to so many women as "the problem that has no name."[10] "It is the mystique of feminine fulfillment and the immaturity it breeds," Friedan wrote, "that prevents women from doing the work of which they are capable. It is not strange that

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women who have lived...within the mystique...should be afraid to face the test of work in the real world and cling instead to their identity as housewives."[11]

Local tennis champion Janet Vuille (left) posed with her daughter Alison and friend Sissy Hunicutt at Bartlett Park in St. Petersburg in 1961.

Janet Vuille grew up in the shadow of the feminine mystique. As a young woman, Janet wanted to make a niche for herself in the field of anthropology or in law but was discouraged from doing so by contemporary attitudes and the disapproval of her husband. She applied to the University of Arizona and to the University of Chicago and was accepted at both, but instead of pursuing a career, Janet married immediately after graduation from St. Petersburg Junior College "because that's what everyone did."

Janet met her husband at the local tennis club where she had played regularly since first becoming interested in tennis as a teenager. He was ten years older than she, came from a wealthy family, and had just returned from three years of military duty overseas. For many years her husband managed the local tennis club, and their social life largely revolved around club activities and tennis tournaments. In 1957, Janet and her husband each won city championships; he won the men's singles and she the women's singles. Janet had plenty of time to devote to sharpening her tennis skills. She played while her five children were in school, as did many of her women friends, and the family hired a maid to take care of the housework. Janet recalls that because tennis was not considered a professional sport at the time, the intense competition associated with the game today was non-existent. Nevertheless, the required discipline and internal focus of the game drove Janet to excel. Throughout the 1950s, her name and picture appeared frequently in the *St. Petersburg Times*, as Janet accumulated titles and trophies.

The rhythm of life on the courts and at the club dominated Janet's life for many years, and she filled in her free hours with volunteer work with the PTA, the symphony, the League of Women Voters, and the Audubon Society. But when her youngest child was ten years old, Janet began to feel the need to do something more meaningful and productive. She still wanted to attend law school, but education courses fit in better around her children's school schedule and allowed her to be home for her husband in the evening. She went back to St. Petersburg Junior College and then attended the University of South Florida where she graduated with a degree in education in 1970. She was forty-three years old.

Janet was offered a job at Lakeview Elementary, but she took a year off and did more volunteer work before taking a teaching position at the Belleair Montessori School. She loved her work and decided that she wanted to operate her own Montessori school. During the summer of 1974, she left her children with her husband in St. Petersburg while she flew to Chicago to

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enroll for coursework certifying her as a Montessori teacher. She spent two more years teaching, this time as directress at Countryside Montessori School in Clearwater, but eventually she stopped because of the distance she was required to commute each day.

Janet spent the next year formulating plans to open her own school. She put together her portfolio and organized her instructional materials, but she had difficulty finding space to rent. Her husband could have afforded to set her up in her own school, but he disapproved of his wife being in business and told her she would have to finance her dream alone. Janet had hip surgery later that year, and during her convalescence gave up any thought of ever running her own school. In 1985, Janet was hired by another woman to start a Montessori School at Pass-a Grille Community Church. However, the pain of running another woman's business, one that she herself had built, was too much for Janet, and she left the work force permanently. She still plays tennis, secure in the knowledge that she was a good wife and mother, but like many women of her generation, she often reflects on a life of diminished dreams.[12]

Betty Fuller is a native of Pinellas County who graduated from Largo High School in 1940. Like many young women, she married right out of high school and had her first child at the age of nineteen. Another child was born in 1943, followed by a third daughter born in 1948. Betty claims not to have started working until 1961, but in reality she performed non-paid clerical work for her husband, a self-employed mechanic, all during the 1950s, bringing her youngest daughter to work with her each day. She also made dresses for customers at home, and the additional income paid for extras like her daughters' dance and piano lessons. Betty remembers that jobs for women were not plentiful in the 1950s and that even if they had been, she would have stayed home to raise her children, believing that it is important for a child's healthy development to have a mother at home, particularly in the early years. "My one claim to fame," she says, "is that I was a good mother."

Nevertheless, dissatisfaction with her life and the desire to provide greater opportunities for her daughters prompted Betty to return to school. In the late 1950s she enrolled in adult education courses at Clearwater High School, and then she took night classes in accounting at St. Petersburg Junior College. In 1961, her oldest daughter married, and Betty began experiencing "empty nest syndrome." At the same time, her middle child began to take classes a the junior college, and the family needed extra money to pay for her tuition. Since Betty's husband, whom she later divorced, did not believe that it was worthwhile to educate women, Betty started working for the city of Largo and applied all of her earnings toward her daughter's education. Her first job was only part-time as a substitute, bringing street maps and graveyard maps up to date, but her supervisors saw her potential and soon hired her fulltime. Her husband had to hire someone else to do his books. By the time Betty retired in 1990, she had been promoted several times, reaching the position of Risks and Benefits Coordinator for the city of Largo.

Feeling that she sacrificed many of her own dreams to raise a family, Betty still harbors great hostility toward her ex-husband for his lack of physical and emotional support. She would have preferred to have gone to St. Petersburg Junior College and gotten a better education for herself instead of getting married, but she felt her options were limited. Unable to pursue the career in journalism she had wanted, she bought into the dream of motherhood, claiming that "if you can't have what you want, want what you have." Betty has seen some of her own dreams realized

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through the success of her daughters, all three of whom graduated from college. One daughter is a music teacher who sings with the Atlanta Symphony (the piano lessons paid off); another manages a fabric store; and her youngest daughter, married with two adopted children, has her own business as a computer consultant. Betty thinks about the journalism career she might have had and spends her free time writing poetry, hoping to publish a book someday.[13]

Although the 1950s brought new technology and appliances designed to make housework easier, the average amount of time spent doing housework actually increased. With all the new cooking gadgets, the preparation of dinner and other meals became an art in itself. With the new, lightweight electric vacuum cleaners, a dutiful housewife might vacuum her rugs every day, whereas her mother and grandmother might have gotten by with beating the rugs once a month. In addition to the burdens of housework, women were expected to participate in volunteer work at their children's school and family churches, join auxiliary groups for their husband's professional organizations, and act as family chauffeurs, driving children to and from various school functions.[14]

While working in her husband's office and doing part-time seamstressing in her home, Betty Fuller also did all the housework, belonged to the PTA at her children's school, served as a Brownie leader and a 4-H leader, and organized a local chapter of the Rainbow Girls, an auxiliary group of the Order of the Eastern Star. This schedule explains why many middle-class white women, whose families could be supported on their husband's income, chose not to work outside their home. As Betty put it, "Who wanted to work for very little pay all day in a job like cooking or housekeeping, and then come home and work another fulltime job taking care of your own family and home?"[15]

Professional positions were also gender-cast during the 1950s. For example, women made up 85 percent of all elementary school teachers nationwide. Women who engaged in professional work were usually restricted to jobs in traditional care-taking work like teaching, social work, and nursing. Women employed in these areas were not considered threatening because they performed nurturing, non-agressive "female-type roles."[16]

Sarah Knutson worked her entire adult life, taking only brief periods off for maternity leave when her two children were born in 1946 and 1950. For thirty-two years, she worked full-time for the Florida Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS). Beginning her employment in social work in 1942 and working steadily in that field until her retirement in 1979, she took only a three-year hiatus in the mid-1940s to experiment with teaching and secretarial work. Sarah's consistent employment record and the management skills she subsequently developed led to a promotion to a supervisory position in 1955, and for the next twenty-four years she supervised HRS divisions in Clearwater, St. Petersburg, and Pinellas Park. Today, Sarah and her husband Rich both look forward to the arrival of two pension checks each month, but originally Sarah had a difficult time convincing Rich of her desire to work. He was, she recalls, "a hard sell." She succeeded in part because she reminded Rich that both of their mothers had worked and these women had managed to integrate their professional and personal lives without any ill effects on the family.

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As a young woman in the early 1900s Sarah's mother, Catherine Huckaday McIntosh, had gone to business school, but she was unable to finish due to family commitments. White-collar jobs for single women in business and sales rose by 64 percent in the 1910s, and women like Catherine McIntosh entered business and trade schools in large numbers. In 1914, Catherine married a young elementary school teacher but found herself widowed the following year. She went back to school and finished her business degree in Tampa. She then moved home to Dade City, where she worked in a bank before marrying her second husband, Charles Anderson McIntosh (Sarah's father), in 1917. Catherine divorced Charles ten years later, when Sarah was six years old, and she took a job in the office of the clerk of circuit courts in Pasco County, where she remained until her retirement in 1962. From 1938 until 1970, Catherine held a second job as the social reporter for the *Dade City Banner*. After working all day, Catherine came home and worked in the garden until dark, and then made dinner for the family. During the Depression, Sarah's brother worked in their grandfather's grocery store, and Sarah sold flowers from her mother's garden to local hotels.

A family of working wives and mothers: Hannah Knutson (left) and Catherine McIntosh (right) served as role models for Sarah Knutson (center), shown here with children Cathy and Andy.

Rich's mother, Hannah Madson Knutson, was also widowed at a young age. Left with three young boys to raise, Hannah survived as many women did during the 1920s and 1930s; she put her domestic skills to work and opened a baking and sewing business out of her home. The new, ready-to-wear clothing put a dent in her business at first, but Hannah soon specialized in alterations and remodeling work. Although Hannah was a widow when she opened her home business, many married women were similarly employed during the Great Depression, doing home sewing and canning and taking in boarders to help make ends meet.[17]

Because of her own personal familiarity with the experience of working mothers, Sarah never felt any guilt or remorse about working full-time, and she enjoyed a successful career that gave her status and some financial independence. Like most women who achieved some degree of success, Sarah had the physical and emotional support of her family. Her mother-in-law lived with her family during the winter months and helped with child care and everyday housework. Later, Rich began working the night shift at Florida Power so he could be at home and watch the children while Sarah worked.[18]

Reflecting other newspapers and women's periodicals, the *St. Petersburg Times* reinforced sexual stereotypes through advertising and special "women's sections" of the paper. This section usually lacked news of any substance, and instead reported on social happenings, gave restaurant reviews and advice on manners and cooking, listed club and church meetings, and announced

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Catherine Huckaday McIntosh, the mother of Sarah Knutson, attended business school in the early 1900s, and worked first in banking and then in local government until her retirement in 1962.

Hannah Madson Knutson, the mother-in-law of Sarah Knutson, worked to support her three young sons after she was widowed at a young age.

engagements. A regular column, the "Women's Exchange," gave information about household cleaning, interior design, pets, and etiquette. On January 16, 1954, the women's page announced that Janet Vuille and her partner, Janet Turville, had defeated the top-ranked doubles team in the South. Ironically, a quip in the same section the following day read, "A smart girl is one who knows how to play tennis, golf, and piano and act dumb.[19]

Sex was an acceptable outlet for women within the feminine mystique, and, of course, within the boundaries of their own marriages. Advertising and articles in women's magazines stressed the importance of a youthful, attractive appearance for women.[20] Help-wanted advertisements in newspapers often made age and appearance a condition for employment. In the January 1960 classified section, samples of such openly sexist advertising in the *St. Petersburg Times* included the following: "Receptionist-trainee: excellent advancement for attractive typist"; "Receptionist, automotive. Attractive, experience helpful"; and "Receptionist-office manager. Highly polished woman 25-35. Very high standard of appearance and skill needed for high salary offered."[21]

In Pinellas County, where so much of the population was sixty-five and older, many ads were age-specific in favor of experienced, "mature" women. Eileen Bennett, who moved with her husband and two small children from Ohio to Pinellas County in the late 1950s, remembers that the county's changing demographics often worked against younger women in the field of employment. Between 1950 and 1960, the county experienced an increase of more than 200 percent in residents age sixty-five and over. By 1960 almost one-quarter of Pinellas County's

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total population was aged sixty-five and older. Eileen says that companies often preferred to hire retired women who brought their benefits and social security with them to Florida and who were willing to work part-time for a low salary. Older women also often had experience and required little in the way of additional training. Working against men and women, Eileen says, were employers who came from outside Pinellas County and brought in their own employees.[22]

For black women, the field of opportunity was particularly narrow, and the majority had no choice about working - the prevailing social and economic caste system dictated that they would. Classified advertisements in the *St. Petersburg Times* sought "colored salad girls" and "colored maids," as well as black couples for work in private homes. One ad in 1960 read: "Colored maid for Key West. Husband may go as houseman." The same ad noted that there were openings for the summer with northern hotels, indicating that some blacks followed employment on a seasonal basis, working in Pinellas County during the peak winter season and traveling north during the heaviest tourist months in those areas.[23] The 1950 federal census indicates that 81 percent of all working non-white women were employed as cooks or maids in private households, or in some other aspect of the service industry catering to tourists and winter residents (see Table 2).

TABLE 2

Jobs Held by Non-White Women over the Age of 14 in Pinellas County.

	1950	1960
Private household workers	59%	49%
Service workers	22	23
Operatives	9	7
Professional, technical	4	5
Unreported	1	11

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. *U.S. Census of the Population. Characteristics of the Population: Florida. 1950 and 1960*.

Some opportunity for self-employment existed within the African-American community. A cursory review of the 1950 *Clearwater City Directory* indicates that a number of black women owned their own dress shops and beauty parlors. "Beauty culture" was an important part of black life, and black operatives serviced black customers. According to one woman interviewed, it was not uncommon for white women to travel to beauty parlors within African-American communities for less-expensive, high-quality grooming, but black women were not permitted entry to white-operated salons.[24]

Only four percent of working non-white women were employed in technical or professional jobs in 1950. The majority of these were employed as nurses in all-black institutions like St. Petersburg's Mercy Hospital or as teachers in one of the county's numerous segregated schools. Although the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v Board of Education* in 1954 declared

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segregated schools to be inherently unequal and therefore unconstitutional, Pinellas County nevertheless built nine brand new all-black schools between 1954 and 1963.[25]

Except for the one year she worked for the State Department of Education in Tallahassee, Dorothy Thompson spent her entire teaching career of thirty-eight years in the Pinellas County school system.[26] Both of Dorothy's parents were school teachers; her father, Gilbert Maxwell, served as principal of the Clearwater Colored Junior High School. When Dorothy graduated from eighth grade in 1931, plans were just getting underway to build a high school for blacks as an addition to the "colored junior high," and the secondary school became known as Pinellas High. With that high school not yet available, Dorothy's parents enrolled her in a private academy outside of Ocala. From there, Dorothy went on to earn her Bachelor of Science in health and physical education from Florida A. & M. University in 1938, minoring in English and biology. She spent three summers at the University of Michigan completing requirements for her master's degree.[27]

In her professional career and personal life in Pinellas County, Dorothy Thompson suffered the double burden of discrimination based on race and sex. Her career began innocuously enough. From 1939 to 1946, Dorothy taught health and physical education at Pinellas High, in the neighborhood where she had grown up. She remembers teaching in sub-standard buildings, poorly lit and badly ventilated. At that time, black students commonly received their textbooks in the way of discards from well-funded white schools in the county. One year, Dorothy's parents went all the way to Jacksonville to buy new books for her students, because those allocated to her class were so worn and dirty. Dorothy provided much of the equipment and materials her students used in the classroom, paying for them out of her own pocket. The school PTA also raised funds to augment the school budget, but the money did not go for extras. It went for basic materials that the school board provided as a matter of course to white schools. Dorothy took great pride in her work, and Superintendent Greene Fuguitt publicly commended her for excellence in the classroom on many occasions.[28]

In 1943, Dorothy Thompson became the plaintiff in a salary equalization suit against the Pinellas County School Board, and she found herself in an adversarial position with black and white administrators alike. She was elected by a majority of the Black Teacher's Union to represent them in the second chapter of a battle that had started six years earlier in 1937, when Gibbs High School principal Noah Griffin and five of his colleagues were fired by Fuguitt for filing a similar suit. When Dorothy's case went to court, black teachers were receiving $75 a month while white teachers with equal education and less experience received $105 per month. Unlike Griffin, Dorothy was not fired, and on October 17, 1945, the Pinellas County School Board approved an equal pay plan.[29] But Dorothy remembers that discrimination against black teachers continued in the form of unequal evaluation policies.

Dorothy Thompson's determination and outspokenness brought retribution from school administrators. She was transferred to Jordan Elementary in St. Petersburg, twenty-two miles from her home in Clearwater, and she remained there for fourteen years. "Everyone knew it was my punishment," she recalls. "At that time, it was not fashionable for a teacher to live one place and work another. Everyday when I left here to go there, I thought about why I was going. Because I was considered uppity for demanding my rights as a human being."

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The transfer of her teaching assignment to St. Petersburg posed great hardships for Dorothy's family. Since she did not drive, the family was forced to buy a car so that her husband could drive her and their young son to and from Jordan Elementary every day. When her husband lost his eyesight as a result of glaucoma, she took trains and buses cross-county. Immediately prior to her transfer, Dorothy had held a supervisory position, but with her re-location she was demoted to a teacher's salary. Her family had only recently purchased a new home, and because her husband's poor health prevented him from working, Dorothy worked two and three jobs to make ends meet. In addition to offering dance classes at the YWCA, she also taught teacher re- certification courses off-hours in Tampa. Finally, in 1964 Dorothy was allowed to return to Pinellas High (which became Clearwater Comprehensive Middle School in 1968), and she remained there until her retirement in 1976.

Dorothy Thompson, a teacher at Pinellas High School.

Photograph from *The Pinellasonian, 1945-46*.

In her personal life, Dorothy Thompson suffered additional indignities as a black woman in Pinellas County. When she first met her husband, whom she married in 1944, he worked as an auditor for the North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company. One weekend she took the train up to see him, calling ahead to reserve a seat in the coach section. When she arrived at the Seaboard Coastline Station, the ticket agent balked at seating her, claiming he thought she was white when she ordered the ticket. Dorothy insisted on boarding the train, and remained standing in the aisle until they allowed her to sit, just outside of Plant City. When her only child was born in 1948, Dorothy gave birth to him in the basement of the local hospital, because blacks were not permitted upstairs.[30]

In 1939, the *St. Petersburg Times* began publishing a "Negro News" page. Written by black staff members, the insert of news about the local African-American community was distributed only in black neighborhoods. White subscribers to the *Times* learned nothing about the daily life of their black neighbors, but were only exposed to negative stories about black crime. The "Negro News" reported on achievements and events such as births, deaths, graduations, sports, and club meetings. When Mamie Brown (then Mamie Doyle) was hired in 1952 to work as an assistant to Calvin Adams on the "Negro News" page, she became its first full-time black society reporter. Mamie remembers calling a local department store to get a description of the gown a young woman had chosen for her wedding and was aghast when the clerk told her "Oh, you don't want to know about her dress."[31] She's a Negro. Mamie remembers being treated fairly by her colleagues in the newsroom, but adds that the camaraderie ended outside the office walls. When she left the *Times*, she called a former white colleague of hers from the newspaper who

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Students at Pinellas High School in 1946, with Dorothy Thompson (in the center back row wearing a dark dress), who served as faculty advisor for the yearbook.

Photograph from *The Pinellasonian, 1945-46*.

had just started her own telephone answering service. The woman told Mamie that her voice was "too Negroid" for her to be a phone operator, but that "she did need someone to wash windows."[32]

In spite of the obstacles they faced and the hardships they endured, Mamie Brown and Dorothy Thompson managed to escape the menial job opportunities that awaited most black women in Pinellas County in the 1950s. Ninety-five percent of non-white working women were relegated to nonprofessional jobs.

The work experiences of women in Pinellas County during the 1950s generally parallels that of the majority of American women at that time. After World War II had briefly opened up a wide range of opportunity in traditionally "male fields" because of the shortage of manpower, women were asked to return to "female type" jobs in service, sales, and office work where wages were low and upward mobility was an unfamiliar term. In Pinellas County, which featured an economy based on the tourist industry and related services, this translated into entry-level jobs in restaurants, hotels, private homes, and clerical/secretarial positions in business offices. Not surprisingly, black women comprised the bottom rung of the economic ladder in an era of racial segregation.

Married women faced another set of problems. Cold War preoccupation with social stability, conformity, and traditional sex roles placed a heavy burden on women who wished to establish

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an identity separate from that of wife and mother. Even when they worked to augment the family income, many working wives experienced guilt and remained ambivalent about their decision to work. Yet the penalty imposed on those women who took the socially accepted path and remained at home was often equally painful. Later in life, many of these women looked back on the choices they made with sadness and regret. Despite the great strides made in the area of equal employment opportunities and civil rights for women over the last forty years, the legacy of the 1950s remains as women still struggle to break free from the confines of a sexually segregated marketplace.

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[1] Mary P. Ryan, *Womanhood in America from Colonial Times to Present* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1983), 225-79.

[2] Ibid., 257.

[3] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 76; Ryan, Womanhood, 270.

[4] Pinellas Planning Council, *Pinellas County Historical Background* (Clearwater: Pinellas County Planning Department, 1986), 40; Raymond Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream 1888-1950* (Norfolk/Virginia Beach: The Donning Company, 1988), 299-301, 308.

[5] Pinellas Planning Council, Pinellas County, 5, 48-49; Ryan, *Womanhood*, 278, 282.

[6] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of the Population: 1950. Characteristics of the Population, Florida* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of the Population: 1960. Characteristics of the Population, Florida* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964).

[7] Ryan, *Womanhood*, 253-54, 280, 286; May, *Homeward Bound*, 167; *St. Petersburg Times*, January 17, 1954.

[8] Results compiled from written survey conducted by Ellen Babb in Pinellas County and randomly distributed to women who lived in Pinellas County at any time between 1950 and 1960 and who were of working age during that period of time. Distributed and collected between September 1990 and March 1991.

[9] Written survey responses from Marguerite Wilder and Winona Jones.

[10] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1984 [19631), 19.

[11] Ibid., 253.

[12] Interview of Janet Vuille by Ellen Babb, March 18, 1991.

[13] Interview of Betty Fuller by Ellen Babb, October 15, 1990.

[14] Ryan, *Womanhood*, 271; John Patrick Diggins, *The Pride Decades: America in War and Peace 1941-1960* (New York: Norton, 1988), 212.

[15] Fuller interview.

[16] Ryan, *Womenhood*, 281-282.

[17] Telephone interview of Sarah Knutson by Ellen Babb, May 3, 1991; Ryan, *Womanhood*, 230.

[18] Knutson interview.

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[19] *St. Petersburg Times*, January 16 and 17, 10-C and 4-E.

[20] May, *Homeward Bound*, 109-112; Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, 228-29.

[21] *St. Petersburg Times*, January 3, 1960, classified advertising section.

[22] Interview of Eileen Bennett by Ellen Babb, November 5, 1990; Pinellas Planning Council, *Pinellas County*, 53.

[23] *St. Petersburg Times*, January 3, 1960, classified advertising section.

[24] *Polk's 1950 City Director: Clearwater* (Richmond: R. L. Polk and Co., 1950); Interview of Dorothy Thompson by Ellen Babb, April 2, 1991.

[25] Patricia Perez Costrini, ed., *A Tradition of Excellence: Pinellas County Schools 1912-1987* (Clearwater: School Board of Pinellas County, 1987), 30.

[26] Videotaped interview of Dorothy Thompson by Ellen Babb, June 4, 1990.

[27] Costrini, *Tradition of Excellence*, 87; Thompson interview (1991).

[28] Ibid.

[29] Costrini, *Tradition of Excellence*, 26-27.

[30] Thompson interview (1991).

[31] Robert Hooker, "100 Years: July 25, 1884 to July 25, 1984. The Times and Its Times," insert to the *St. Petersburg Times*, July 25, 1984.

[32] Telephone interview of Mamie Brown by Ellen Babb, March 15, 1991.

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