

FAMOUS WOMEN

led the way 1873-2023

BY ROGER ADAMS

In a poem for the dedication of Justin Hall in 1960, “A Panorama of Home Economics at KSU,” Dr. Ruth Hoeflin, a future dean of the College of Health and Human Sciences wrote, “First, famous women led the way...”

Many women have been integral to the success of Kansas State University. Among these are Nellie Kedzie Jones and Helen Brockman, whose achievements at K-State and beyond have left a lasting mark on their fields.

Nellie Kedzie Jones

No history of domestic science is complete without the story of Nellie Kedzie Jones.

Nellie Sawyer was born in Madison, Maine, and moved with her family to Kansas in 1870. She graduated from K-State in 1876 and received her

master’s degree two years later. In 1881, she married Robert Fairchild Kedzie, a professor of chemistry, who died seven weeks after their marriage.

Kedzie taught in Topeka schools before returning to her alma mater. In 1887, she was appointed professor of household economy and hygiene and became the university’s first female department head.

Ten years later, the newly appointed Populist Board of Regents forced all K-State faculty to resign. Though re-offered her position soon after, Kedzie refused and accepted a position at Bradley Institute in Peoria, Illinois. By 1900, she was a weekly lecturer at Purdue University and a frequent lecturer at Farmers’

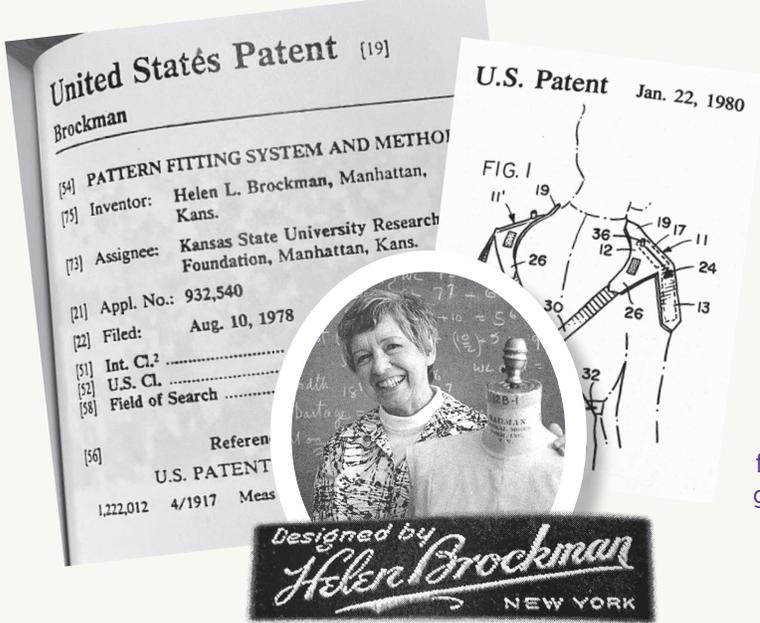


Above: Nellie Kedzie (immediate left of the column) seen here in an early photo of a class in the basement of Anderson Hall.

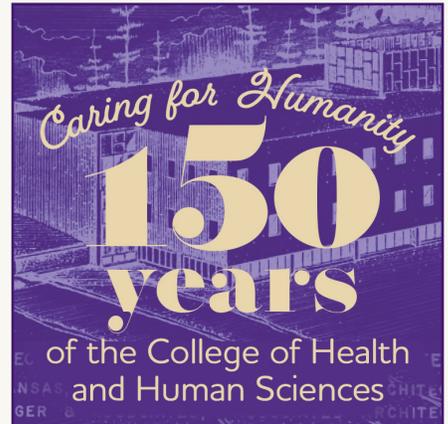
Left: Nellie Kedzie, circa 1882-1887, became the university’s first female department head.

Institutes. In 1901, Kedzie married Rev. Howard Murray Jones, who taught English and public speaking at K-State. She later became the home economics Extension leader at the University of Wisconsin from 1918-1933.

In 1925, during K-State’s College of Home Economics Golden Jubilee, Kedzie Jones was granted a Doctor of Law in recognition of her many years of work in the field, during which she achieved a national reputation for her teaching and scholarship.

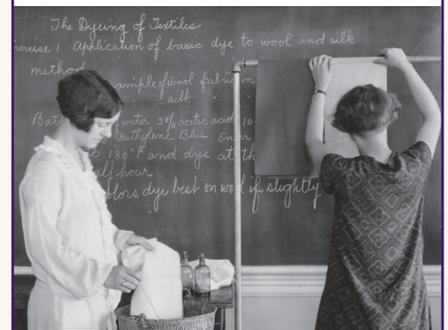


Left: Photo of Helen Brockman, a dress tag with her logo and photos of her 1980 patent for a system of modifying paper patterns used for making garments.



A new exhibit at Hale Library, 150 Years of the College of Health and Human Sciences, features books, photographs and artifacts from various collections that showcase the rich history of the seven departments that currently make up the college.

It is free and open to the public, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, and will be on display until June 28, 2024.



Left: Constructed in 1897 and dedicated in 1899, Domestic Science Hall was the first college building in the United States designed for the study of what was then known as home economics. Classes began using the building in 1898, and in 1902, it was renamed Kedzie Hall.

At the time of her passing at the age of 97, Kedzie Jones was K-State's oldest living graduate.

Helen Brockman

Born Helen Lewis in 1902 in Palo, Iowa, Helen Brockman made a career in the New York fashion industry as a pattern designer, shortly after her divorce during World War II. She began teaching at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City in 1958 and retired in 1968.

She accepted a position at K-State that year and taught fashion design until she retired from teaching in 1974. Her definitive book, "The Theory of Fashion Design," was taught in classrooms for many years and is still recognized as a pioneering work.

Brockman became a social host for dignitaries and other university guests at her home, The Brockman House, in Manhattan, Kansas. It was there she designed thousands of clothing patterns and authored a cookbook, books of poetry and another standardized pattern book.

Until her retirement in 2007, Brockman was recognized as one of the oldest working Kansans. Two years before her death in 2008, she published a memoir, "Both Sides of Nice," that included a two-line verse to summarize her career:

A hill that isn't tough
enough to climb,
Is nothing but a waste of time.



The Richard L. D. and Marjorie J. Morse Department of Special Collections at K-State Libraries preserves and collects the history of Kansas State University. K-State Keepsakes are compiled from photos, diaries, memorabilia and documents in University Archives.