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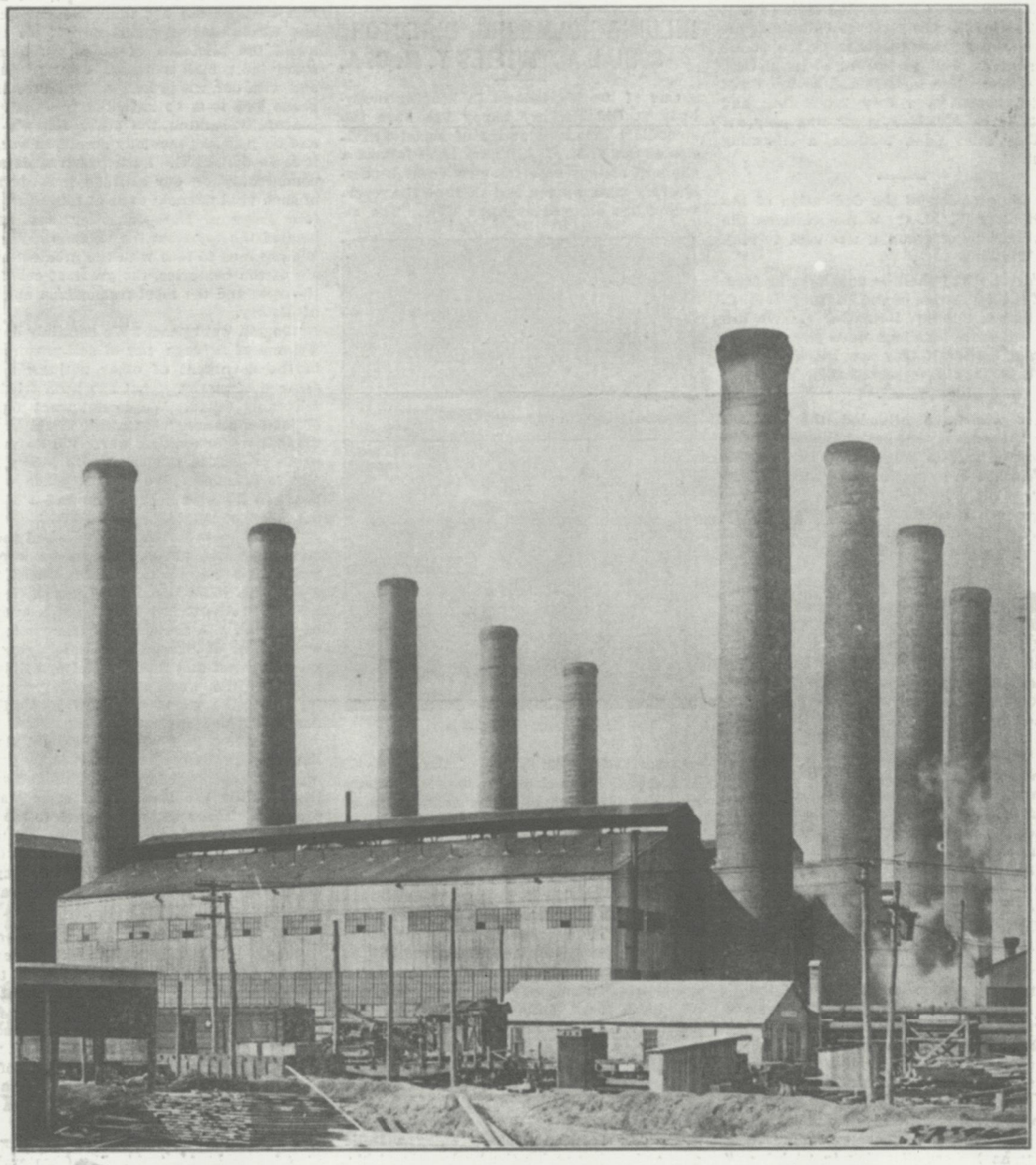
Old Hickory News

ISSUED IN THE INTEREST OF THE EMPLOYES OF THE OLD HICKORY POWDER PLANT

Volume 1 Jacksonville, Tennessee, December 14, 1918 Number 20

The Heart of Old Hickory



Largest Power Plant in the World---It Supplies Power and Light for Operation of Old Hickory Smokeless Powder Plant

In 1918, the world's largest munitions plant sprang into being at Old Hickory, Tennessee, giving employment to thousands of women such as Lou Cretia Owen during World War I. (from Old Hickory News, *Tennessee State Library and Archives)*

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Lou Cretia Owen And The Old Hickory Munitions Plant During World War I

by Deborah L. McConnel

At the turn of the twentieth century, women enjoyed civil rights roughly equal to those of children, criminals, and idiots. In many states, including Tennessee, women could not vote, own property, or participate in government. In response to the efforts of women to obtain the franchise in Tennessee, Governor Malcolm Patterson revealed the entrenched prejudices of many men when he said, "Let the women pray and the men vote." If a married woman worked outside the home, her wages were considered her husband's property. It was not until January 1914 that a Tennessee law went into effect allowing women to "acquire, hold, manage, control, use, enjoy and dispose of all property."[1]

Women who decided to enter the job market, or, more likely, were forced to seek employment out of economic necessity, found that most jobs were considered unsuitable for females. By 1900 nearly one-fifth of the Tennessee work force was comprised of women, but they were relegated mainly to domestic and textile mill jobs. When the United States entered World War I, the situation changed dramatically. The war created a huge demand for American industrial production at the same time as the male labor force left their jobs and marched away to defend democracy.[2] Industry and government leaders found that their only alternative was to mobilize women more completely into the labor force.

Female labor was important in industrial production during World War I in munitions plants. In 1918, E. I. DuPont de Nemours & Company built what was then the world's largest munitions plant at a bend of the Cumberland River near Nashville, Tennessee. Originally named Jacksonville, the town encompassing the plant soon became known as Old Hickory. The plant included an independent company town with housing for workers, a school, hospital, churches, restaurants, and other facilities. The end of World War I, November 11, 1918, made such massive production of gunpowder unnecessary and the plant closed in January 1919. Several years later DuPont reopened the plant as a rayon factory.[3]

At the Old Hickory Munitions Plant's peak of production, over fifty thousand workers were employed; more than ten thousand were women. Impressed by the need for industrial workers to help win the war, women everywhere felt encouraged to venture into uncharted territory of employment. Organizations such as the YMCA, YWCA, and the Red Cross provided women with opportunities for volunteer work, easing them out of their domestic roles and into the war effort. More striking evidence of change was the navy's decision to break the long-standing barrier against women in the armed forces. The barriers quickly fell as the necessities of the war impacted business, and women took positions previously out of reach for them in such male-dominated workplaces as automobile production plants and railroad yards, and as office managers instead of office clerks. During this time of economic growth and change, the Old Hickory Munitions Plant gave women a secure environment and the opportunity to experiment with their changing roles in society.[4]

Lou Cretia Owen began work in October 1918 as a welfare worker in the Woman's Work Department of the Old Hickory Munitions Plant. She kept a daily journal, including copies of her memos, for the duration of her employment there. Born on December 9, 1895, Lou Cretia was the youngest child of Sarah S. and William P. Owen of Henry County, Tennessee. Owen left few records of her early life, and those who knew her later say that she disclosed very little information about that period to them, usually changing the subject when questioned about her origins. Personal remarks

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Lou Owen, a native of Henry County, served as a welfare worker for anything dealing with woman employees at the Old Hickory plant. Shown here in 1919, her World War I-era diary provides an important glimpse into the lives of female war industry workers. (Photograph courtesy of Mary Donna Barksdale)

were also kept to a minimum in her diary, perhaps reflecting a lifelong habit of reticence. Owen did tell her friends about teaching school at a young age in a poor Appalachian area. She was 22 years old when employed at Old Hickory.[5]

In her diary Owen described her position at Old Hickory as overseeing anything dealing with female employees. "Mr. Williams [supervisor of the Welfare Department] and I made arrangements today for all questions concerning the welfare of women to be referred to the Woman's Work Department."[6] Owen told of regularly inspecting the living and working conditions of female employees at Old Hickory. She also dealt with women who were arriving daily in hopes of obtaining employment. "After the usual inspection tour of dormitories today I went to the city employment office to meet a train load of recruits sent here from Federal employment bureaus. Sunday is the same as a week day here. Our work does not stop. In distant centers, labor scouts sign up hundreds of men and women who are shipped here regardless of the time they are to arrive. Our offices have to be open to receive them."[7] Owen stated that dealing directly with the work situations and problems of numerous women employees helped her "understand the wild heart of Old Hickory."[8]

In 1933 Owen donated her diary to the Tennessee State Library and Archives. Her diary is the best source of women's involvement at the Old Hickory Munitions Plant, and documents the social evolution of American women in the early 1900s. Owen recounted stories of women from all walks of life who ended up at Old Hickory, often revealing through her comments stereotypical attitudes commonly held during the World War I era.

Scholars using Owen's diary have pointed out that some entries closely resemble information from magazine articles about other munitions plants. In one such article, "Eight Months Ago a Corn Field: To-day a City of 27,000," published in *The American Magazine* in 1915, a great deal of the language is similar to passages in Owen's diary. An example is the word "hyper-picturesqueness," used in both, but seeming awkward in the context of Owen's writing. Another example of possible plagiarism arises when she told of a gun being shot and someone on the street stating "I reckon it was [a] jitney tire bustin'."[9] While it is very likely that Owen incorporated some published stories into her journal entries on occasion, most of the diary appears to be a genuine first-hand account of happenings in the lives of women employed at the Old Hickory Munitions Plant.

Owen attributed women's interest in employment with the Old Hickory Munitions Plant to various causes, including the economy, the desire for adventure, a means of escape, and the fulfillment of patriotic duty. Economic factors were probably the most significant. When the breadwinner of a household was called to war, other means of financial support became necessary. Women who had never worked outside the home were forced into the labor market.

The enticement of high wages encouraged women to seek employment at Old Hickory. Owen records: "Rosie — a shy little New Orleans girl

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looks afraid of her shadow. She came out of a orphanage. Has been working since she was 13, errand girl in a shirt factory. She worked up to be inspector [at the Old Hickory Munitions Plant]. This she thinks is her chance to escape from the grind of the factory life."[10] Wages for an eight-hour day at the Old Hickory Plant ranged from $2.50 to $15.00, with an average daily income of approximately $6.00. The United States daily average for manufacturing in 1918 was $3.76. The pay scale provided an unusual economic opportunity for women.[11]

The ability to make a living at Old Hickory Munitions Plant allowed many women to fulfill their desire for adventure without risking the security of having a place to live, a good job, and someone to "watch over" them. Owen reported: "The colorful life of the reservation brought two pleasure-seeking girls from a western city today. They arrived without food or money thinking that this is a sort of an El Dorado. They ran away [from home] when they heard that women were needed and left homes where they had been protected."[12] This desire for adventure and change came from all social classes. Owen told of five girls who ran away from affluent homes because they were bored with "high society." Owen declared "now that they had a taste of the joy of independence and creating a place for themselves, they thrilled to it and are not satisfied to go back home and be flung into the social whirl."[13]

Sometimes the desire for adventure was accompanied by the desire to escape from traditional roles. Owen, being single, could not conceive why a woman would choose to leave her family and come to Old Hickory. "What do they seek, these women who break the shackles of home; smash conventions and start in search of romance and adventure? Today a husband came in search of his wife. The woman deserted him after ten years of married life; left her two small children under the guise of patriotism."[14]

Some women sought refuge at Old Hickory from troubled family life. During the influenza epidemic Owen often visited female patients in the hospital. Entries in her diary recorded one young girl's story: "As I pass down the corridor at the hospital, I see a young girl, a war bride, who repeats deliriously that she is married and begs to have her secret kept. . . . I found the girl-bride's marriage certificate of her wedding. She married a sailor and declares that he will not return to her if her marriage is announced. She pleads with us to keep the secret from her mother. The doctor says that she cannot recover and advises me to notify her mother of her condition."[15] Owen attempted to contact the girl's parents but found that the information given on her employment application was false. On October 4, 1918, Owen reported, "When I returned to the emergency wards for women this afternoon, I found that death had claimed the young war-bride. . . . Consequently another tragedy was added to the list and while somewhere a sailor dreams of his wife, she goes to a nameless grave."[16]

Patriotic desire to do their part in the war was the driving force behind some women's decision to come to Old Hickory. Owen disclosed the following women's stories in her diary: "Jane heard of the glory of Old Hickory and came because she believed it to be her patriotic duty. She left her widowed mother and expects to send money back to her monthly."[17] Jane was only one of the many women motivated by a combined desire to help in the war effort and provide extra income for their families at the same time. For others, money was a secondary consideration. Owen tells of a female stenographer employed in a business office who wanted to make her contribution to the war. When the woman's employer learned that she was thinking about going to Old Hickory, he offered her a raise if she would stay. She managed to solve her dilemma of conscience with a leave of absence. "When the war is over, she expects to return to her place better prepared and satisfied because she came."[18]

The knowledge that one's daily work was a contribution to saving the lives of American soldiers and defeating a hated enemy had a positive effect on morale at Old Hickory. Owen reported that enthusiasm about war-work was evident among the employees. Her own attitude is represented in her diary. "Here I am ready for any adventure or to give my services as may be needed. . . . Thrown into the midst of the drama here, I feel that we are near to the war front. Men and women are making a fight to play their part in the war program. . . .United we stand at Old Hickory, a line behind the trenches to help win the war."[19] This attitude was encouraged through the *Old Hickory News*, a newsletter distrib-

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The high spirits evident in this photograph of the Woman's Work Department staff reflects the enthusiasm Owen noted among all the munitions plant's workers: "United we stand at Old Hickory, a line behind the trenches to help win the war." (Lou Owen Diary, Tennessee State Library and Archives)

uted by the DuPont Company "in the interest of the employees of the Old Hickory Powder Plant."[20]

The *Old Hickory News* was printed weekly beginning in August 1918. Each issue contained a biographical sketch of one of the leaders at the Old Hickory Plant, articles about particular operations at the plant, personal notes such as marriages, YMCA and YWCA notes, and other social news. Obviously a company organ, the *Old Hickory News* made safety and company loyalty its resounding themes.

DuPont used the *Old Hickory News* in an effort to generate high spirits among the workers, emphasizing the positive and downplaying the negative. An example is its response to the influenza pandemic. In the October 5, 1918, issue the following article appears:

> NOTICE! You have probably all noticed in the papers recently that there is throughout the country, in military camps and cities, a large amount of what is known as Spanish influenza. This is simply another type of heavy cold or la grippe. . . . It is natural for the propagandists to use the precautions which we have taken as means of starting injurious rumors, such as stating that the plant would be closed or quarantined, etc.

The influenza is also mentioned in several other issues, but usually in the context of prevention — encouraging workers to avoid the influenza in order to stay on the job.[21]

As the *Old Hickory News* was playing down the significance of the influenza, Lou Cretia Owen wrote in her diary on October 4, 1918, that the influenza had taken the lives of thirty Old Hickory employees. She wrote:

> The influenza is raging here. A visit to the temporary hospital this morning revealed the tragedies that are following in the trail of the disease. A dormitory has been opened for a hospital for women and girls. To this building each day patients stricken during the night are brought. A woman doctor stays in the building and a nurse visits each patient frequently. The problem of caring for [the] large number that have developed the disease is great.[22]

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Many Old Hickory employees lost their lives to the influenza. Bodies were temporarily stored in the basement of the YMCA until they could be removed by truck loads to Nashville.[23]

As horrible as the influenza was, Owen attributed some of the opportunities for women to obtain executive positions to its results. "Department heads face the problem of filling vacancies made by those ill. Executive ability is being demonstrated to a surprising extent. Women are taking an important place in the program here."[24]

One female executive recognized in the *Old Hickory News* was Dorothy Morgan, Lou Cretia Owen's supervisor in the Woman's Work and Housing Department. In discussing Morgan's job description the article noted "The supervision of the dormitories alone might be considered a staggering proposition, when their number and size are considered. There will be nineteen dormitories when all are completed with an assignment of ninety-six girls to a dormitory." Morgan, a native of Lockhaven, Pennsylvania, studied psychology, sociology, and economics at Columbia University. Before coming to Old Hickory she was employed with the International Arms and Fuse Company. Although Morgan's background was not representative of the average woman, she revealed the future of women in the labor market. Under the leadership of such independent women as Morgan, Owen and the other women at Old Hickory had ample encouragement to broaden their goals to include post-war continuation of their careers.[25]

In addition to the increasing number of women in executive positions, the number of women in other jobs previously considered inappropriate for females were increasing rapidly. The first major breakthrough in gender stereotyping in the job market at Old Hickory was the acceptance of female employees in the box factory. The box factory created zinc lined boxes used to ship the powder produced at Old Hickory. An article in the *Old Hickory News* described the employment of women in the box factory as "an experiment which will be watched with interest throughout Old Hickory. . .

World War I not only created opportunities for working women on the assembly line, but opened some executive positions as well. Dorothy Morgan, shown here on horseback at the plant, was supervisor of the Woman's Work and Housing Department at Old Hickory. (Lou Owen Diary, Tennessee State Library and Archives)

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."[26] The boxes were waterproof and airtight; a hole as small as a pinhead made a box unacceptable. Owen reported that the production of the boxes was tedious, painstaking work, and that women were more accurate in performing this task than men.[27] The ability of women to move into this position freed men for heavier work and the armed services.

When the experiment with women employees in the box factory worked well, women were employed in other areas of production. As Owen toured the facilities she described some of the tasks performed by women. "Three girls went to each powder house. One stood by the tub that catches the macaroni-like powder that comes from the perforated machines and drops into the huge receptacle. The operators presses a lever that sends the tub in place. Across the room two other girls stand to operate their machine."[28]

The women who worked in the factories were required to wear a special uniform referred to as "womanalls." Womanalls consisted of a khaki blouse and knickers, a cap, and flat-heeled shoes similar to those worn in the army. The clothes were designed for the safety of women working with machinery. At the time of employment womanalls could be purchased from the company at half price. Thereafter, the cost was $3.85.[29]

"Changing houses" provided a place for women to store and don their uniforms. A matron oversaw each changing house. Owen recorded, "The girls first went to the change houses to change their dresses for the O. D. uniforms and left their clothes in the lockers in charge of a matron. Each girl has her locker number and key. One girl left her locker unlocked last night. She found her uniform gone. The matron searched each locker and found it."[30] The changing house also included areas where female employees could have lunch and lounge while on break.

With the large number of employees at Old Hickory, multiple eating facilities were required. Owen reported on October 7, 1918: "There are five Virginia mess halls, three Jersey mess halls and three short orders in addition to the woman's cafeteria, hotel and kitchen in the housing area . . . . From 24,000 to 37,000 meals are served each day. . . . It requires about 700 waitresses to serve the food."[31] Women could choose to dine in segregated facilities open only to females, or to enjoy the company of both genders and different cultures in the general public dining rooms. Owen told of going with some friends to one of the mess halls open to all employees. "A waitress served the dinner and just as we started to eat, four Indians wrapped in blankets slipped into the room and took stools next to us. One of our party lost her appetite suddenly. She turned her head and moved. Two of us accustomed to the colorful parade of the nations here enjoyed our dinner."[32]

THE WOMEN WHO WORKED WITH MACHINERY AT THE PLANT WORE "WOMANALLS." DESIGNED FOR SAFETY, THE MASCULINE UNIFORM INCLUDED A KHAKI BLOUSE AND KNICKERS, CAP, AND FLAT-HEELED SHOES.
(FROM OLD HICKORY NEWS, *TENNESSEE STATE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES)*

Housing at Old Hickory was segregated both by gender and race. Separate "camps" were available for African-American, Native-American, and Mexican employees. According to Owen, on October 1, 1918, there were 5,375 African Americans living at Old Hickory. "Residences are provided for 58 Negro families and bachelor quarters for 176 single girls. The houses rent in the camp for seventy-five cents a week with lights and water provided. The Negroes are quartered in houses first occupied by white labor. In the early history of the camp, colored labor lived in tents that dotted the hillside."[33] Owen spoke of the invaluable service

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provided by the African-American and Mexican employees. "By August 24, there were 1,300 Mexicans in camp. . . . There are now in the village 200 rooms in bachelor quarters and two new buildings of 24 rooms each being constructed." Owen reported that the Mexicans were loyal employees. This is significant considering the administration's ever-watchful eye for espionage, and recent bad feelings between the United States and Mexico.[34]

There was an ongoing fear of infiltration by German spies at the Old Hickory plant. Owen told of two female employees who were suspected of being spies.

> Early this morning [October 30, 1918], the matron of Rye Hall reported that a girl in that building had acted so that she is being suspected of being a spy. I reported the matter to Mr. Vester, chief inspector, who immediately entered the girl's name in his black book. Her name was written in red and she was placed under the heading of 'Spy Suspects.'[35]

This woman had apparently never unpacked her suitcase, giving the impression that she might intend on leaving quickly. Some of her personal belongings were also found hidden in the attic of the dormitory.

The second spy suspect, Virginia DuPont — believed by the authorities to be an assumed name, "is a beautiful girl, charming and cultured. She appears to have plenty of money to spend and seems free to leave the plant when she wishes. This together with the report given by her roommate has caused her name to be entered in the list of suspects."[36] Female employees were given no exception in the wartime scrutiny of motives. In dealing with DuPont's case, investigators asked for her letters to be monitored and all applicable information be turned over to the authorities. Owen notes: "The machinery has started to apprehend a spy and a net has been set to catch her if she is in the pay of the German government. Many dark and devious methods are used to trap German agents who are a menace to an industrial plant."[37] An evaluation of the Old Hickory Munitions Plant after its closing showed no evidence of "enemy agents and saboteurs."[38] The accusations against the young women were obviously unfounded.

The young female spy suspects were only two of the many women who lived in dormitories on the main white campus of Old Hickory. Nineteen residence halls were built to accommodate women. There were ten dormitories with fifty double-occupancy rooms, and nine dormitories containing ninety-five single rooms. The dormitories had a reception room furnished with sofas, chairs and tables used for socializing, as well as kitchenettes, laundry rooms, and lavatories for the women's convenience. Each woman's room was furnished with a single bed, chair, writing table, bureau, and individual clothes closet.[39] Owen recorded information in her diary about the opening of the first single room dormitory. "It was named Wilson Hall in honor of President Wilson. Teachers and clerical workers will have a dormitory separate from the machine operators and waitresses because they have regular hours. The operators were assigned to the new building. . . . The single rooms rent for $6 a month and the double rooms for $4 a month."[40] Every effort was made to make the dormitories as homelike and appealing as possible.

Not all women who worked at the Old Hickory Munitions Plant lived on campus. Thirty-two passenger trains were in operation daily, transporting over 17,000 employees to and from the Old Hickory Plant. One of the best-remembered trains was exclusively for women, thus acquiring the nickname of the "Powder Puff Special." It ran forty-five minutes each way to and from Nashville daily. Amenities were provided for women to knit during the commute. Their products were donated to the convalescent hospital in Chattanooga.[41]

The employees at Old Hickory were strongly encouraged to participate in volunteer war work. Owen told of receptacles in public areas for the collection of nuts, seeds, and shells used in the production of gas masks. "Apparently an effort is being made to conserve everything that may be used in winning the war."[42] Besides conservation, Old Hickory employees were urged to participate generously in purchasing Liberty Bonds. The *Old Hickory News* published a table showing the amount that an individual should spend on Liberty Bonds based on their yearly income. They proposed that a person with an income of $850 per year should spend $99 on Liberty Bonds.[43] On October

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26, 1918, the *Old Hickory News* headline read "Old Hickory went over the top with nearly a million to spare."[44] The goal for the fourth Liberty Bond drive at the Old Hickory Plant was $3,000,000, but nearly $4,000,000 was raised.

Employees of the Old Hickory Munitions Plant participated in war-related work and volunteer work. The YMCA and YWCA assisted them. Unlike soldiers on the battlefield, munitions workers appeared to have very positive feelings toward the Y and its employees. The Y facilities located at Old Hickory served a variety of purposes, including a temporary hospital during the influenza outbreak, a place for socialization, and a sanctuary for religious services.

The YWCA was designed specifically for women. The *Old Hickory News* reported, "The YWCA has an especially important part to perform at Old Hickory. Among the widely varied phases of life at the Powder Plant, it is the social leaven which makes for unity and solidarity among the women residents. . . . It virtually establishes a Service Club for women in industry. . . ."[45]

The "YWCA News" was a weekly column in the *Old Hickory News*. The following weekly schedule of YWCA events, published in the September 14, 1918, issue seems typical.

YWCA Program

Week of September 16 to 23

Monday, September 16
2:30-8:30 — Social afternoon for older women of the dormitories, 709 Hadley Avenue.
8:00-10:00 — Music, dancing, games; 709 Hadley Avenue.

Tuesday, September 17
10:00-11:00 — Red Cross knitting; 708 Hadley Avenue.
4:00-6:00 — Community tea for married women; 709 Hadley Avenue.
8:00 — Community singing; open air theatre. Chorus, Y.M.C.A.

Wednesday, September 18
9:30-12:00 — Surgical dressing class; plant hospital.
10:00-11:30 — Morning party for night-shift workers; 709 Hadley Avenue.
3:00-5:00 — Social afternoon for Mothers and babies; 709 Hadley Avenue.
7:30 — Military drill for girls and women; porch of dormitory No. 3.

Thursday, September 19
10:00-11:30 — Military drill for girls and women; porch of dormitory No. 3.
3:00-5:00 — Dancing classes; 709 Hadley Avenue.
6:00 — Supper and party for guests of YWCA: 709 Hadley Avenue.

Friday, September 20
10:00-11:30 — Singing and folk dancing for children; 709 Hadley Avenue.
2:00-3:30 — Open house; 709 Hadley Avenue
8:00-11:00 — Community dance, YMCA and YWCA; YMCA

Saturday, September 21
8:00-10:00 — Music and games; 709 Hadley Avenue.

Sunday, September 22
10:00-11:00 — Sunday school; YMCA
11:00 — Church; YMCA
4:00-5:30 — Song Service for young women; 709 Hadley Avenue.
8:00-10:00 — Open house; 709 Hadley Avenue.

The YWCA attempted to serve the social needs of women in all stages of life.

The YMCA, although created for men, offered facilities and entertainment for women as well. Owen wrote:

> Two lady secretaries take time about in the YMCA. They act as hostesses, making it possible for women to feel free to take advantage of the social and religious life of the building. A room is set aside for these hostesses who receive the girls and answer questions, giving advice to them. Thousands stream in and out of the Y in a single day. It is the rendezvous for young people, the reading room for literary lovers, a home for lonesome men and a resort for the disabled.[46]

Movies shown at the YMCA were also available for women. Owen wrote, "A [motion picture] show is

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held each Tuesday and Friday evening. The entertainments held free draw hundreds of men and women. . . . The Y gets some of the best pictures available and this is the most popular form of entertainment."[47]

The African-American community at Old Hickory had their own YMCA. The "Colored YMCA" columns in the *Old Hickory News* placed more emphasis on religious services than entertainment, although mention is made of pool tables and other recreational facilities. The November 16, 1918, issue of the *Old Hickory News* announced, "There is rejoicing on all sides that there is to be a Colored YWCA in Old Hickory."[48] Owen reported, "A colored YWCA for the Negro women was opened today [November 18, 1918]. Helen Moore of Columbus, Ohio, wife of a prominent colored minister there is here to serve as secretary. She is working under the supervision of the National War Work Council and has worked in Glasgow Scotland and in Washington D.C."[49] The war work performed by African Americans demonstrated their skills and abilities in leadership positions, but did not overcome the attitudes of white supremacy that led to segregation. Owen disingenuously wrote, "We went to a Negro rally held at the colored YMCA tonight. A large crowd of negores [sic] crowded the auditorium but special seats were arranged for the white guests."[50]

Unlike the situation with racial inhibitions, the frequent social occasions that included both sexes alleviated some of the formality that restricted male-female relationships before World War I. Owen stated, "Two hundred and fifty couples crowded the YMCA [dance] floors tonight. . . When we entered a hostess pinned a slip of paper containing our names on our left shoulder. This is our introduction card. . . . A young man looks at the girl's name, addresses her by it and then requests a dance. This is war-time formality and conventions are crashed. The American freedom in society is prevailing."[51]

Another change in gender relations came when men were presented with women as co-workers. Although the types of jobs women were allowed to hold expanded greatly during World War I, women's work was still considered as secondary in importance. Massive female employment was considered a war-induced, temporary "sacrifice." An article in the *Old Hickory News* shows how female employees were often perceived differently than male co-workers: "Make room, boys, for the women in industry, and let us be doubly careful that THEY ARE NOT HURT through any thoughtlessness of our own or others. LET US WELCOME THEM to work with us to end this war"[52]

Women at Old Hickory had more social freedom than females enjoyed in most communities, but certain paternalistic restrictions were still legislated by the DuPont administration. Immorality was often grounds for job termination. Owen revealed in her diary, "A young girl reeled into the dormitory in an intoxicated state tonight. She said she had taken her 'boyfriend' home and he was drunk. The matron put the girl in her room, sent for the officer and made a charge against her. Her little spree cost her $5, and her job."[53] DuPont barred alcohol at the Old Hickory plant.[54]

Sexual misconduct was also not taken lightly. In a daily report filed by Owen on January 2, 1919, she told of a female employee who worked as a live-in housekeeper. "I went to see Mrs. Gilbert [the mistress of the household]. . . and she stated that Mrs. Billings [the housekeeper] had received her friend, Mr. Evans in her bedroom and had been seen conducting herself improperly on the front steps. . . ."[55] Billings lost her position because of this scandalous behavior. Owen became involved in this situation because the woman needed a place to stay until arrangements could be made to send her away.

Female employees often contracted venereal diseases as the result of ill-chosen sexual liaisons. Owen stated, "We have this moral problem and have to recognize this fact."[56] The Livingston Street Hospital contained two isolated rooms reserved specifically for girls with venereal diseases. According to Owen, the Women's Work department "handles these cases with care and siscretion [sic] when a girl is found to be in this condition, we send her to the isolated ward, take her clothes there. . . .The doctors hesitate to write the name of the disease against the girl's report. He simply puts X and we understand."[57] Once the disease was treated, the woman was not allowed to return to the dormitory, but was given her clothes and sent away.

Female residents at Old Hickory lived under circumstances somewhat similar to students in today's conservative colleges. They could explore new roles in society with company limitations and dormitory "matrons" to make sure they did not stray too far. Because of high paying jobs, Old Hickory

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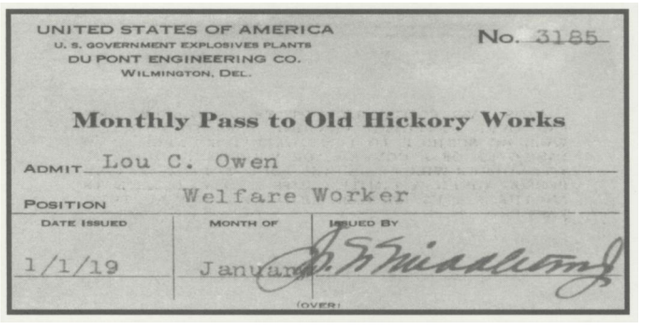
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
U. S. GOVERNMENT EXPLOSIVES PLANTS
DU PONT ENGINEERING CO.
WILMINGTON, DEL.

No. 3185

Monthly Pass to Old Hickory Works

ADMIT Lou C. Owen

POSITION Welfare Worker

DATE ISSUED	MONTH OF	ISSUED BY
1/1/19	January	J. T. Middleton

(OVER)

WITH THE WAR WON, THE OLD HICKORY PLANT CLOSED IN JANUARY 1919, WHEN OWEN'S LAST MONTHLY PASS WAS ISSUED. ALTHOUGH OPPORTUNITIES FOR WORKING WOMEN QUICKLY RETURNED TO PRE-WAR LEVELS, OWEN WAS ABLE TO CONTINUE HER CAREER IN PUBLIC SERVICE THROUGHOUT HER LIFE. (LOU OWEN DIARY, TENNESSEE STATE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES)

women had no fear of economic disability. Women were offered the possibility of making a better living at a more prestigious job than ever before.

Lou Cretia Owen's diary shows how women working at the Old Hickory plant found an opportunity for adventure with security. Women were brought together from various geographic areas, races, and socio-economic groups, providing the opportunity for them to make comparisons and discuss new ideas concerning the roles being performed by their gender. War related excitement extolled a heady sense of the ability to take on the world and change societal injustices. This experience was perhaps influential in Owen's career choices and independent lifestyle.

Owen's life after Old Hickory is a collage of public service. While engaged once, according to friends, she never married, but dedicated her life to the good of others. She held positions with the Tennessee Department of Employment Services in Knoxville, and the Tennessee Department of Welfare in Nashville. Owen was also employed as a teacher in Henry, Montgomery, and Anderson counties, Tennessee. While living in Carroll County, Tennessee, she worked as news editor for WHDM radio station and as a news correspondent for several large newspapers — the *Nashville Tennessean*, the Clarksville *Leaf-Chronicle*, and the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*.[58]

Besides her altruistic work through her employment, Owen was active in civic organizations. According to her friends, the American Red Cross was the object of her life-long devotion. In her last will and testament she left funds designated for Red Cross work, and specifically stipulated what should happen to her Red Cross plaques and awards. Lou Cretia Owen died September 3, 1986, and is buried at the Memorial Gardens in Franklin, Tennessee. Her tombstone simply reads "Lou Owen, She Loved People."[59]

The participation of women in war work, such as that of Lou Cretia Owen and the women she wrote about, did have its effect. Female employment trends moved away from domestic servitude to "pink collar" or service categories, such as store clerks. Women were also granted the vote in state, local, and national elections in 1920. However, the post-war changes in the woman's role in society were not as great as anticipated by some. When American soldiers came home and reclaimed their jobs, many women either did not pursue or could not obtain another job. The percentage of women working in 1920 is nearly identical to the percentage of women working in 1910. But in time, Owen's prediction was fulfilled: "The arousing of a desire in women to be independent to make their way, live their own lives and scoff at conventions will leave its effect."[60]

1. A. Elizabeth Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee* (New York, 1957), 11-12; Wilma Dykeman, *Tennessee Women Past and Present* (Memphis, 1977), 25; Tennessee Federation of Women's Clubs, *Woman's Work in Tennessee* (Memphis, 1916), 77.
2. Carole Stanford Bucy, *Tennessee Women: A Guide for Teachers* (Nashville, 1995), 55. Seven workers at home were required to support one boy at the front.
3. Carroll Van West, "Old Hickory," *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, Carroll Van West, ed. (Nashville, 1998), 707-708.
4. Don Harrison Doyle, *Nashville in the New South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville, 1985), 188.
5. Lou Cretia Owen, "Diary, 1918-1919," Manuscripts Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, 10; Manuscript of the 1900 Population Census for Henry County, Tennessee, Microfilm, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville; Telephone interviews with friends

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of Lou Cretia Owen: Mary Colwell, Herb and Mary Donna Barksdale, and Pam Eichorn.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 28.
8. Ibid., 36.
9. Merle Crowell, "Eight Months Ago a Corn Field: To-day a City of 27,000," *The American Magazine* 80 (December 1915):17-21; Owen, 52-53.
10. Ibid., 57.
11. Ibid., 53. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970, Part 1, Bicentennial Edition* (Washington, DC, 1975), 17.
12. Owen, 16.
13. Ibid., 121.
14. Ibid., 16.
15. Ibid., 3-4.
16. Owen, 6; Based on Davidson County death certificates, it is likely that the women was Sallie Dabney. She is the only married, white female who has a death certificate from Old Hickory on October 4, 1918. Her home is listed as Westville, Florida, and her maiden name is listed as Crosby.
17. Owen, 57.
18. Ibid., 17.
19. Ibid., 2-5.
20. This was printed as a byline on the front page of each issue.
21. "Authorized Statement as to our Local Influenza," *Old Hickory News*, 5 October 1918, 2.
22. Owen, 3.
23. Margaret Tootle, "A History of Old Hickory, Tennessee," Master's thesis, George Peabody University, 1953, 14.
24. Owen, 8.
25. Friends of Owen report that Morgan had a very positive impact on Owen, who often spoke of Morgan's stately character and determination. *Old Hickory News*, 2 November 1918, 16;According to the census 23.2 percent of women in Tennessee were employed in 1910.
26. Employing Women at Old Hickory," *Old Hickory News*, 12 October 1918, 7-8.
27. Owen, 32.
28. Ibid., 116.
29. Ibid., memo.
30. Ibid., 116.
31. Ibid., 12.
32. Ibid., 78.
33. Ibid., 79.
34. During 1914-1916 Mexican rebels invaded the southwest border of the United States, stealing livestock and murdering residents. The Mexican government did not claim responsibility for these raids. The United States called out the National Guard to defend the border as the regular army pursued bandits such as Pancho Villa. Another reason for potential suspicion was an intercepted coded message from Germany, urging Mexico to join forces with them in the war effort. They promised Mexico financial aid and territory from the southwestern United States.
35. Owen, 35.
36. Ibid., 46.
37. Ibid.
38. David E. Brand, "Fill the Empty Shell: The Story of the Government Munitions Project at Old Hickory, Tennessee, 1918-1919," Master's thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1971.
39. "Dormitory Facilities at Old Hickory," *Old Hickory News*, 7 December 1918, 12.
40. Owen, 26.
41. *Old Hickory News*, 28 September 1918, 2.
42. Owen, 15.
43. "What is My Share," *Old Hickory News*, 28 September 1918, 2.
44. *Old Hickory News*, 26 October 1918, 1.
45. *Old Hickory News,* 28 September 1918, 3.
46. Owen, 109.
47. Ibid.
48. *Old Hickory News*, 16 November 1918, 10.
49. Owen, 79.
50. Ibid., 100.
51. Ibid., 67.
52. *Old Hickory News*, 17 August 1918, 3.
53. Owen, 127.
54. Brand, "Fill the Empty Shell," 68.
55. Owen, Daily Report, 2 January 1919.
56. Owen, 120.
57. Ibid.
58. Interviews; Obituary, *The* (Nashville) *Tennessean*, 4 September 1986, 7-B.
59. Interviews; Last Will and Testament of Lou Owen, Davidson County, Tennessee, Probate Records, 1986.
60. Owen, 104.

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