THAT DAME’S GOT GRIT: SELLING THE WOMEN’S LAND ARMY

by

Pamela Jo Pierce

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Approved:

Evelyn Funda
Major Professor

Melody Graulich
Committee Member

Steve Shively
Committee Member

Victoria Grieve
Committee Member

Byron R. Burnham
Dean of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

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ABSTRACT

That Dame’s Got Grit: Selling the Women’s Land Army

by

Pamela Jo Pierce, Master of Science
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Major Professor: Evelyn Funda
Department: English

This thesis analyzes the marketing of the Women’s Land Army (WLA) using archival sources. I explore how farmerettes, the name given to WLA members, used their patriotic work on the farm as a means of redefining femininity and interrogating the definition of “true womanhood.” “That Dame’s Got Grit” discusses how the WLA was sold in World War I and World War II. The first chapter describes the press book used to market Little Comrade, a 1919 film about a fashionable farmerette. The theme of uniforms, an idea that weaves throughout the thesis, emerges strongly in this chapter. “A Seductive Smile,” the second chapter, discusses the WLA posters in terms of the pin-up genre. The thesis concludes with an analysis of the Oregon State University Extension Service photos. In all of the chapters, farmerettes struggle with crafting an image based on hard work and an attractive appearance.

(104 pages)
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I dedicate this work to my mom, Cindy. She let me cash out my life insurance policy to travel around the country to various archives for WLA research. The roads I choose to take have never been easy. She continues to be there for me through every step.

Pamela Jo Pierce
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INTRODUCTION: FINDING FARMERETTES

When Bobbie saw Genevieve overcome every obstacle to milking that cow he said, “Gosh! That dame’s got grit. She’d make SOME sweetheart!” Sh! Girls! Maybe this picture has a hint for you. Come to see it anyway. All week.

—From an advertisement for the 1919 film Little Comrade

In 1919, when the film Little Comrade, starring screen siren Vivian Martin, was released in theaters, the marketing of the Women’s Land Army (WLA) was hitting a high point. Throughout World War I and later during World War II thousands of women joined the Land Army and worked on the nation’s farms—operating tractors, planting, caring for livestock, processing tobacco leaves for cigarettes, packing eggs for sale, and dressing chickens for market. The women who joined the WLA were often young college students with no farming experience. By pitching in and doing their part for the country, they proved their patriotism and showed that they could do the same work as a man.

The role the WLA played in the agricultural history of the US is only now being studied. For years, the United Kingdom chronicled the history of their Women’s Land Army, an organization that provided a model for the US organization. The UK Land Army was formed during World War I to guarantee that the demands for food production were met. In 1917, when the US entered the Great War, the US WLA was formed as a part of the “preparedness movement.” Working on the farms became a vital patriotic act—necessary for the survival of the country and the realization of victory. During the previous wars fought by the US, working on farms had always been necessary when men were called to battle. However, the WLA was the first time a group of women organized on an international level to work on farms outside of family
businesses. The “Cult of True Womanhood” was always a constructed image of femininity that refused to accept how historical circumstances and economic realities shaped the lives of women.

In the work of remembering and honoring the WLA members, England is still ahead of the US. On January 28, 2008 Britain’s Daily Telegraph ran an article with a headline that reads, “Tribute to a forgotten ‘girls’ army.” The article describes how the “Land Girls” and “Lumber Jills” are finally going to receive a special badge recognizing their efforts: “Wearing a uniform that included green jumpers and ties, brown breeches and brown felt hats, the Land Girls were often pictured smiling and joking as they worked in glorious sunshine. But this image hid a reality of grueling and monotonous work often undertaken by homesick raw recruits from industrial towns living miles from relatives and friends.” The same images can be seen of the US Land Girls. Smiles were essential in producing WLA propaganda that tried to sell a patriotic image of agricultural contentment. In the posters and photographs of the US Land Army, uniforms provided a means of positioning the group within nationalist rhetoric. In “The Uniform: A Sociological Perspective,” Nathan Joseph and Nicholas Alex write, “The uniform provides the symbol of a group toward which the public may demonstrate its attitudes” (721). For the Land Army, the public’s attitudes included patriotism and anxiety about seeing women in a new uniform usually worn by men. This tension can be seen throughout the cultural representations of the WLA.

Scholars in the US are beginning to recognize the WLA’s contributions to the US war effort, but the American government still does not recognize the group’s importance. As a result, the Land Army remains absent from any war memorials. Public
commemorations of the Land Army and the importance placed by England on women in agricultural labor inspired a number of books to be written in the UK. Gil Clarke’s The Women’s Land Army: A Portrait (2008) examines the paintings, posters, and cartoons that depicted the Land Army during World War I and II in Britain. Clarke also includes biographies of the artists who created the paintings and posters for the UK Land Army. The British have also started to depict the WLA within popular culture. A 1998 movie called The Land Girls told the story of three young women who work on a farm during World War II and the passionate romances that ensued. In 2009, to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the start of World War II, the BBC aired Land Girls, a miniseries following the lives of four young girls helping their country win the war by working on the farm.

In the United States, visual culture inspired those working the home front during World War I. In her introduction to Picture This: World War I Posters and Visual Culture (2009), Pearl James writes, “Posters nationalized, mobilized, and modernized civilian populations. Through the viewing of posters, factory work, [and] agricultural work … became emblematic of one’s national identity and one’s place within a collective effort to win the war” (2). The images within posters showed citizens happily fulfilling their duty to the nation; individual identity became secondary to mobilizing forces at home and on the battle front. In order to become a part of the new, modern US, each citizen needed to make sure their patriotic responsibilities were realized. Posters helped to define the most important values for a nation at war: hard work, determination, and always patriotism. During World War II, posters again played an essential role in the war effort. Throughout both conflicts well-known artists rallied to the cause and crafted ideal
images of a country supporting the valiant soldiers. James argues that propaganda defined the home front; “No one could ignore the war or imagine it only involved male soldiers. Posters everywhere insisted that women were both needed and threatened, that they themselves constituted the nation whose life was at stake” (275). The idea of women as threatened citizens was vital in maintaining masculinity. Yet in *Little Comrade*, a 1919 film that tells the story of a farmerette not suited for her chosen field, Genevieve successfully milks the cow and helps her country in need, yet Bobbie still sees her as a sweetheart in need of his protection. The posters crossed the difficult divide between depicting women as strong American citizens and as women in distress who the soldiers could save. Both depictions were necessary to inspire the actions of each gender. The images used in posters provided representations that women could replicate within their own lives. Women who saw the posters advertising the WLA could see themselves taking up the farmerette’s hat. As a result, the group flourished and continued to attract new members. By the end of World War II, millions of women took to the fields to help bring in the nation’s crops (Carpenter 152).

In World War I and World War II, the farm front was a vital part of the home front narrative, a narrative defined in contrast to the stories occurring on the war front. In the home front narrative, violent scenes of action are replaced with stories based on daily tasks such as, canning, growing vegetables, and producing machinery vital for victory. Although the home front may have lacked the glamour of battle, the work was no less important because farms occupied a place in the American imagination and provided more than just the food to feed a grateful nation. For instance, a radio talk, part of the Food for Freedom campaign, was given in Corvallis, Oregon on January 12 and 13, 1943
that describes how men and women met with USDA war boards to determine how much food could be produced from each farm, but patriotism becomes the central message. Secretary of Agriculture Claude R. Wickard states, “Farm production is war production” [underline in original]. The main writers of the radio address are not identified, but their goal is clear, “The farm front, then, is truly a war front.” Throughout the speech men and women are encouraged to do their part. An unidentified farmer is quoted as saying, “Farmers are loyal Americans, and a loyal American can do no less.” The term “farm front” showed that farming was a battle as challenging as the one the soldiers were facing.

While farmers played a crucial role in the war effort, they also embodied self-sufficiency in a way no other war time role did. Visual images of factories inundated the consciousness of any citizen and were contrasted against the independent farmer. The images connected to the farms represented a kind of labor invested in the soil, seasons, and a life apart from a growing industrial culture. Factories showed a nation dependent upon each other, while a farmer’s central relationship was always with the land. Marketers used this nostalgic image as a means of selling the WLA and the importance of agriculture. A 1942 advertisement from Farm Journal includes the following copy: “His weapon may be a plough, a milk pail, an axe—but every farmer is in the front line of America’s defense today” (qtd. in Jones 86). The use of “his” shows that farmers were still assumed to be masculine even during the second year of World War II. As the war progressed, the Women’s Land Army challenged this assumption.

Rosie the Riveter emerged as the iconic representation of women’s labor during the war, due to advertisers who tied Rosie to the larger idea of American interdependence
during a time of conflict. In America’s Women: 400 Years of Dolls, Drudges, Helpmates, and Heroines Gail Collins writes, “The idealized female employee of the 1940s was Rosie the Riveter, a mythic creature celebrated by Norman Rockwell … with a famous portrait that showed her perched on a steel beam, munching a sandwich and displaying her muscles while she casually ground Nazi propaganda under her heel” (381). Rosie’s mythological status enabled her to become the ultimate pin-up for the enjoyment of women, not men. She embodied the strength and willpower women wanted the public to know about. Accomplishing the same goal for the farmerettes proved more challenging, although marketers did shape the WLA’s image to encompass the self-sufficient farmer and the patriotic citizen working for the good of the nation. But the farmerette’s struggle to transgress the binary between independence and patriotism resulted in a complex image not as easily marketed as Rosie working industriously in the factory. In a nation founded on independence and the importance of land as a means of self-reliance, the “Land Girl” could have been the ultimate patriotic representation. However, factories offered a means of showing the nation’s citizens a modern, technological future. Nostalgia for the past sold the farmerette’s image while also preventing her from moving forward. While Rosie could prove herself successful in a fast paced nation based on machinery and ever increasing means of production. No one thought that Rosie should be immediately relegated to suburbia after the end of the war.

Elaine Weiss’s Fruits of Victory: The Woman’s Land Army of America in the Great War (2008) described the formation and success of the WLA during World War I. She explores the Land Army in connection to other Progressive Movements, specifically suffrage. Weiss meticulously searched archives across the country looking for documents
to trace the course of the Land Army’s emergence. The Schlesinger Library of the Radcliffe Institute, where I did my own research, introduced Weiss to many of the most important Land Army records. The last chapter of her book “Farmerette Redux: 1919 and Beyond” describes the impact the Land Girls had on popular culture, the starting point for my own study. Weiss also includes many of the poems and songs as a way of grounding the WLA within the culture of World War I. In contrast to Carpenter, she uses a descriptive style of writing that invites the reader into the story of the Land Army. Her book begins with the following sentence, “On a sunny afternoon in October 1918, President Woodrow Wilson marched down Fifth Avenue in the Liberty Day Parade, the largest war processional New York City had ever seen” (ix). Weiss’s use of details and her ability to set a scene using historical information provided an example for me to follow in my own writing. There has yet to be a book on the US Land Army that spans both world wars. My study will be the first to look at how the cultural expressions changed within that era of time.

Within the decade US scholars have only started paying attention to the WLA. Stephanie A. Carpenter’s 2003 work *On the Farm Front: The Women’s Land Army in World War II* places the Land Army within US labor history by showing the WLA’s influence during World War II. She describes the group’s emergence, the role of the federal government in structuring the WLA, and discusses how need for the group varied based on location. Extension Service photographs illustrate the hard work of the Land Army during the 1940s, a time usually perceived as only the era of WACS, WAVES, and Rosie the Riveter (Carpenter 11). She points to the relatively few studies that have focused on women working on farms as an important source of World War II labor.
Publications such as *Country Gentleman, Farm Journal*, and *Wallaces’ Farmer* are used to understand the nation’s attitude toward the WLA by showing how farmers perceived the women during the war. In her introduction, Carpenter states, “Although historical research and study have omitted the role of women in agriculture during the war, that has been reversed in recent years, bringing recognition to a group of women previously unseen by the academic, popular, and scholarly worlds” (11). Carpenter also writes that the lack of an iconic Rosie the Riveter-like image may have caused the Land Army to recede deep into the annals of history. However, she does not speculate on what may have caused the Land Army to disappear within popular culture. From World War I through World War II the Land Army held a place within the public’s imagination, a position that is resurfing today.

Pin-ups inspired male fantasies and offered women an opportunity to create a new public identity. Maria Elena Buszek’s *Pin-Up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture* (2006) provided me with a comprehensive history of the pin-up, a genre of visual culture essential to my analysis of the WLA posters. Buszek begins her discussion by describing the burlesque “leg shows” of the nineteenth century (35). During these shows, women performed the male and female roles, a transgression of gender not uncommon within the pin-up genre. Throughout the text Buszek reveals how pin-ups allowed women to cross various boundaries of class, gender, culture, and ultimately gave women the opportunity to redefine femininity. Pin-ups were not threatened women in need of protection; instead their country needed them. The role of pin-ups proved contradictory by reconfirming masculinity and simultaneously showing the artificial construction of femininity. She concludes her history with the postmodern feminist pin-
up. Her chapter titled “New Frontiers: Sex, Women, and World War II” is vital to my own discussion of wartime posters. Buszek includes a cartoon by Cy Hungerford depicting a sailor, a soldier, and an airman pointing to a poster of Rosie the Riveter; above Rosie stretches the words “War Worker;” the title of the cartoon is “Their Real Pin-Up Girl” (214). Although she does not directly address the Land Army, Buszek challenges and widens the definition of a pin-up.

WLA members struggled to define themselves as skilled and attractive women. “That Dame’s Got Grit: Selling the Women’s Land Army” will be largely based upon primary research found in archives across the US. The title of my thesis comes from the *Little Comrade* quote that introduces this chapter. The use of the term “dame” in contrast to “grit” shows the boundary farmerettes and the Land Army had to cross within popular culture. They had to be dames, the object of male attraction, and still show their aptitude and determination on the farm. If women successfully displayed their skills then they would no longer need to be rescued by men. In October 2008, I interviewed Jeanne Flann, a member of the British Women’s Land Army during World War II. She described working on a farm with 2,400 sheep; tasks included dipping the sheep, operating the plow, and riding the tractor. Jeanne truly understands the meaning of “grit.”

During the course of my research, I visited archives across the country to explore the primary sources of the Land Army. Oregon State University in Corvallis, a former training center for the WLA, holds a large collection of Extension Service photographs. The collection showed the way Oregon, a state that had one of the most active Land Armies, documented the group’s efforts as a means of propaganda and historical evidence. In addition, the OSU archives possesses a few of the original Land Army
posters which were essential to the marketing of the group. The Library of Congress’s collection of Land Army documents included the papers and ephemera from Emma George, an active promoter of the WLA. George’s papers included handwritten Land Army poems, songs, and a newspaper clipping showing the World War I era farmerette uniforms. The Emma George Collection shows how the WLA was perceived during World War I, when the poems and songs were written. The Library of Congress also contains the press book for *Little Comrade*. The information on how the film was marketed provided a valuable glimpse into the popular perceptions of the WLA.

Radcliffe’s Schlesinger Library holds the *Handbook of Standards for the Women’s Land Army of America*, and the papers of Thérèse Bonney, the most well-known photographer of the Land Army. The Handbook reveals the kinds of work and the requirements for potential WLA members. I am one of a few people who have ever looked at these materials, and to the best of my knowledge no one else has ever analyzed the *Little Comrade* pressbook or the comic book depicting the intrepid, *Indiana Jones*-like adventures of Bonney.

The first chapter, “Fashioning an Image,” analyzes the press book for *Little Comrade*, a film depicting the misadventures of a romantic Land Army member. The methods used to market the film show many of the obstacles WLA promoters faced. Genevieve, *Little Comrade*’s heroine, appears to be simply trying on the costume of the WLA. *The Farmerette*, a 1921 operetta, shows a Cinderella of the soil, with her shoe caked in mud. *The Farmerette* and *Little Comrade* reveal the performance of femininity at work within Land Army marketing.
In chapter 2 “A Seductive Smile: An Agricultural Pin-Up” I discuss the World War I and World War II Land Army posters as agricultural pin-ups. Charles Dana Gibson’s Land Army poster is interpreted as an early precursor to the more explicit pin-ups of World War II. I explore several specific pin-ups including a young woman falling back into the hay, a girl being chased by a bull, and a country girl leaning up against a simple wooden fence.

Chapter 3 “Truth-Telling” describes how the World War II photos of the Oregon State Extension Service show the “truth” of the Land Army in the US. The photos depict women industriously working in the fields, yet the images were still employed as propaganda, with the captions reinforcing that purpose.

In chapter 4 “Posing the Mannequin” Extension Service photos show a Miller’s Department Store window display featuring posters and a mannequin wearing the farmerette costume. Two women ponder the display and consider whether to take up the Land Army fashion and the accompanying expectations.

The thesis makes the following claims about the representations of the Women’s Land Army:

- Marketers represented the women as searching for romance and husbands as a means of reaffirming masculinity through the preservation of traditional womanhood, an artificial construction with lasting power in US popular culture.
- Uniforms provided women with a means of questioning femininity and the division of gender roles.
- Wartime patriotism inspired women to leave the home while also placing limits on how long these newly discovered roles would last.
- When women left the domestic sphere, a place created within the public’s imagination to constrain women’s agency, anxieties regarding their sexuality increased. Pin-ups provided a fantasy of innocence masking sexual experience. The WLA struggled to use this same style of image in marketing the group to women, a goal that appears contradictory.
- The captions of Land Army photographs are essential in crafting a WLA narrative based on hard work instead of merely an attractive image.

The marketing of the Women’s Land Army reveals the cultural intersection of agricultural nostalgia, traditional femininity, and a new brand of womanhood emerging through patriotic war efforts. The unique position of the farm as a particularly American ideal of self-sufficiency and connection to a nearly utopian history played a vital role in the visual culture used to sell the WLA. Marketers capitalized on the public’s perception of the farm as a means to sell the Land Army to potential members and gain acceptance for the group within popular culture. However, the WLA struggled to craft an image for the farmerette that successfully collapsed the boundary between traditional womanhood and true grit.
At the start of World War I, the Women’s Land Army was a valuable part of the war effort with a carefully marketed image. “The Two Benjamins: Story of a Farmerette Victory,” a short story written by Juliet Wilbor Tompkins, was published in *McCall’s Magazine* in August of 1918, precisely when the WLA was at a high point. In “Two Benjamins,” Genevieve Rutherford Hale is a plucky farmerette with perfect fashion and an indomitable spirit. By that time more than 15,000 women were working on the farms as a way to support the US war effort (Weiss 107).

In Tompkins’ story, clothes seem to matter just as much or more than the farm work. In a nearly mocking tone, the first paragraph of the story places an emphasis on fashion over a sincere devotion to the cause:

> Genevieve Rutherford Hale sincerely wanted to serve her country; and with equal sincerity she wanted to wear overalls and be called a farmerette and have her photograph taken leaning on a hoe. Such additional motives are not necessarily ignoble; even man, enlisting, may spare a thought or two for himself in uniform. Genevieve Rutherford had designed her overalls herself with an eye to line and hang, and also a Bakst concoction in smocks to go over them, and a mushroom hat worked in blue and purple worsted. The other recruits wore the ungainly products of the department stores and hid in sunbonnets the smiles that Genevieve’s *art-nouveau* little person provoked. (11; italics in original)

In every fold of her clothes Genevieve is ready for public and romantic attention, a project of appearances that separates her from her peers within the story. As an “*art-nouveau* little person in a Bakst concoction,” Tompkins places Genevieve squarely within
a visual culture based on costumes and performance that was receding by the start of the
Great War. In a nostalgic gesture, Tompkins connects Genevieve’s fashion to Leon
Bakst, another creator of identities through clothing. He gained fame for his elaborate
costumes that were used by the Russian ballet. In a November 2009 *New York Times*
article Bakst was also credited with inventing the fashion designer’s idea of the Orient as
a place that was exotic and sensual.¹ For Genevieve the farm can remain something of an
exotic mystery, because she never actually works the land. Any actual experience would
make this constructed illusion of the farm impossible. Genevieve is a performer on the
farm, complete with high fashion costumes that would make actual farm labor difficult.
She is also positioned within the art-nouveau movement, especially popular during the
1890s. As a decorative movement it was known for its “whimsical invention,” a side that
seems to represent Genevieve’s personality perfectly. Plant motifs also characterized art-
nouveau, before the plants were overtaken by “iron and steel supports” (Hunter 60).
Genevieve attempts to move decorative fashion into a world of plants and soil, a goal that
proves challenging.

Smiling photos of girls leaning on hoes and rakes, perched atop tractors, and
milking cows were published in magazines to promote the Land Army and show the
group’s patriotic efforts to the US population. Genevieve’s desire to have her picture
taken “leaning on a hoe” shows that being a member of the Land Army was a way to be
part of a cultural image in the same way that five years later wearing the right skirt,
cutting hair into a stylish bob, and having the correct long beads could make one a
flapper. Just as men “spared a thought or two” for their own uniform, farmerettes used
their clothing as a means of defining identity. Women needed uniforms as a visible
means of stating their participation in a group outside of the home. While *Little Comrade* was being produced, the WLA finally approved their official uniform. The uniform actually included two different outfits: one for farm work and another for evenings out on the town. Weiss describes the ensemble, “The field uniform adopted a clever ‘convertible’ design, where the form fitting bib overalls could be transformed into a chic, after-work outfit” (252). Underneath their hardworking exterior, any farmerette could turn into Genevieve at a moment’s notice. The uniform for public appearances featured a bronze Land Army insignia of a sheaf of wheat. Anyone who ordered the two uniforms received a fashion brochure and a contract to sign, because adopting the Land Army uniform was a binding commitment. The contract included several stipulations, “I agree to wear sensible brown shoes and dark hosiery with this uniform” (qtd. in Weiss 252). Farmerettes also promised to wear a “medium high turn-over collar” and to guarantee that the insignia “does not come into the possession of any one not entitled to wear it” (Weiss 252). According to sociology scholars Nathan Joseph and Nicholas Alex, “The uniform assumes the properties of a totemic emblem and embodies the attributes of a group” (720). By making sure that farmerettes wore “sensible brown shoes and dark hosiery” the WLA was making sure their group represented hard labor over fashion. The insignia provided a way for group members to possess an agricultural symbol that unified them. In addition, each time they looked at their lapel they would be reminded of their main goal of helping to produce amber waves of grain.

By the conclusion of the story, Genevieve’s fellow farmerettes force her to leave high fashion behind in order to stay with them. Belonging can only be had through a change in clothes, and Genevieve’s costumes are temporary. Uniforms symbolized a
commitment of time; farmerettes were in the battle for its entire duration. “We’ve decided that if you stay here, you’ve got to dress like the rest of us. We won’t have any more of this picture-poster business. It hurts our standing. If you are really in earnest about wanting to serve your country, you can do it without looking like a soubrette. It’s wear these or get out” (29). The other farmerettes are forced to remind Genevieve that being a member of the WLA isn’t about fashion or uniforms, it’s about hard work. By forcing Genevieve to change clothes, the other farmerettes impose the reality of farm labor and a far different image than Genevieve had in mind. Tossed at her feet is a bundle of clothes that includes a bulky male shirt, large overalls, and a well-worn sunbonnet, but instead of wearing the clothes Genevieve retrieves a “creamy white” Sunday suit from beneath her bunk. While the girls are eating breakfast, she tells them that she’s staying for the summer, but that she won’t put on those clothes—evidence that she isn’t willing to surrender the farming fantasy concocted by advertisers. WLA marketers created posters showing that women could be adept in the fields while also maintaining a beautiful and well-crafted appearance. Dirt and sweat had no place in this fantasy. Genevieve does not picture her creamy white suit covered in mud because she believes that her experience should conform to the expectations created by advertisers.

The emphasis on fashion within “Two Benjamins” is reflected in the actual Women’s Land Army history. Patriotism and femininity were in conflict within the WLA. In order to be patriotic women put aside their home front uniform of long skirts and dresses and picked up bloomers. Farmerettes and the farmers struggled with the tension between what society valued in a “proper” woman and what the war required. The war needed women to pursue roles outside of the home, however, a “proper” woman
would need men to defend her in a time of conflict. This double standard was earlier evoked in John Greenleaf Whittier’s poem “Maud Muller” which describes a beautiful, young maiden working in the fields, but she wants more than the farm can offer her. “But, when she glanced to the far-off town, / White from its hill-slope looking down, / The sweet song died, and a vague unrest / And a nameless longing filled her breast” (Poetry Archive). In the poem the Judge decides not to marry Maud and she never escapes from her life of toil, and Mrs. Tate is represented as a “wiry little woman,” a description that gives her the stubborn determination necessary to work the fields, without any thoughts of escape. The editor of Prairie Farmer wrote, “I expected to see Maud Muller in overettes or bloomerettes and a starched sunbonnet raking hay. What I saw was Mrs. Tate, a wiry little woman whose husband is fighting in France, out in the field, in a pair of blue overalls and a ten-cent straw hat, her face streaked with dirt from an afternoon of honest toil” (qtd. in Weiss 158). Maud represents the Genevieves of the fields, the women who devoted their energy to beauty and appearances, instead of the state of the crops. However, farmerettes could resist the advertiser’s fantasies and work like Mrs. Tate. The farmerettes who embody Mrs. Tate choose a cheap straw hat and overalls as their “uniform.”

The attention to uniforms stayed consistent throughout World War I. At the Wellesley Camp, a training center for the WLA, manager Edith Diehl, designed a uniform that combined the styles of the English Land Army with a French army uniform, a woman’s figure was considered during the design process (Weiss 204). A picture appeared in the newspaper Forum of two farmerettes modeling rejected Land Army costumes. The caption reads, “Farmerettes of the Land Army, spent several hours
yesterday afternoon to pick out a suitable suit, a uniform, or something like that, but with no agreement, although living models paraded up and down before the 200 delegates to select something ‘fit’ for farm work.” The farmerettes needed to find a uniform that it was possible to work in and yet still let them maintain their femininity, the same conflict that is at the center of “The Two Benjamins.” Genevieve’s attention to clothes is so exaggerated that Hopkins may have been lampooning the debate over the Land Army that she saw occurring within the press. Early in the story when Genevieve does not appear for dinner, her fellow farmerettes think “she’s probably designing some little futurist plowing costume or a hoeing-corn negligee” (11). A negligee would allow Genevieve to enter the pin-up genre by visibly expressing sex with a piece of clothing usually worn to tempt men in the bedroom. True to her soubrette label, Genevieve is a “pert, coquettish, intriguing character” usually seen in a play or opera (OED). The fashions are considered dangerous because they emphasize her sexuality. Genevieve is a temptation. Farmerettes were supposed to maintain the standards of proper ladies, and working in the fields near men could awaken a variety of desires that could compromise traditional femininity.

In 1919, “The Two Benjamins” was made into a film starring Vivian Martin. By 1919 the Great War was already over for the US, but the Land Army was still influencing popular culture. The central tension within the Little Comrade marketing materials embodies a larger conflict within the marketing of the Land Army—the divide between a fashionable image and the realities of farm labor. Genevieve is the ultimate pampered city girl. Martin played Genevieve in Little Comrade, a silent film that no longer survives; however, the Library of Congress still holds the press book that was used to promote the movie. According to the Wisconsin Center for Theater Research, press books
with specific information on performers, producers, and directors were commonly used by studios as a way to distribute promotional information to theater owners. The lengthy *Little Comrade* press book requires directions for its use; “The successful use of a press book can be properly likened to the selection of a delectable meal. You eat from ‘soup to nuts’ according to a definite plan. Break up that plan, eat your cheese before you drink your cocktail, and you’re in for indigestion” (*How to Use a Press Book*). Theater owners could choose to start their meal with a brief biography of Tompkins included in the section on important facts for exhibitors. The screenwriter of the film, Alice Eyton, is only briefly described as a new talent for film fans to discover. Tompkins is a known product connected to marketable ideas; she’s described as a frequent magazine writer and the author of several books. Tompkins is identified as a Californian, and “her stories are distinguished by a deeply sympathetic touch, and a wholesomeness of ideals and treatment.” The “sympathetic touch” seems to be most evident in the treatment of Genevieve’s emotions. A brief plot summary describes the key emotional scene in the potato patch when Genevieve is crying and Bob Hubbard (no longer Bobbie Pratt because maturity must be expressed even within a name) stumbles upon her. In this representation of the Land Army, a potato patch isn’t for working. Instead it’s a place far enough away from the watchful eye of Bob’s parents for feminine emotions to be displayed. If women were perceived as emotional their strength and skill as farm labor would be questioned, because any display of emotions would make women be perceived as “weak” and too feminine. The balance was impossible to maintain.

The film reminds women that although they may be working in the fields for their country, their real work remains the labor of the heart. When the film was released the
war was over and women needed to retreat back into the home. Harvesting the crops is not enough to define success on the farm. Planting the seeds for a potential marriage is still seen as the most reliable way for women to guarantee their future.

The potato patch continues to get its fair share of attention throughout the marketing materials. A *Motion Picture News* article from April 26, 1919 lists a series of catch lines from the movie. Among them are: “A story of farmerettes who found that silk overalls weren’t practical in digging in a potato patch,” and “It wasn’t planted there but she found love in a potato patch! See *Little Comrade* Vivian Martin’s latest Paramount picture.” For urban moviegoers the potato patch could be a place for love. In the fantasies concocted by filmmakers, love has the power to transform even the lowly and ordinary potato patch into a location where women could experience the changing power of forming a lasting relationship with the man of their dreams. Their distance from any actual potatoes made this fantasy possible.

The menu of the press book offers a buffet of options for selling the film, and in the background, the Land Army. The three illustrations that could be selected for inclusion in a news column show Genevieve in her usual fashionable attire. The most elegant image shows her with bobbed hair in tight curls and a long string of pearls draping her neck, a fashion choice more suitable for a glamorous evening on the town. Genevieve’s fashion also makes her a precursor to the post-war flapper, a style based on glamour and urban sophistication—the very elements Genevieve tries to bring to the farm. Her farmerette uniform is white and starched, and the folds of the fabric emphasize her femininity. According to the press book menu, *Little Comrade* is a “comedy-drama of timely interest.” In an interview Martin states, “Although laid in war time, *Little
Comrade is not a war story. That ought to please. Don’t you think so?” The Women’s Land Army redefined the definition of battlefield to include the home front. No longer was the war only about politics on foreign lands. The conflict now centered on how the WLA shaped the image of femininity and what the women were capable of contributing to society.

In the marketing materials for the film, Genevieve’s high class ideas and Martin’s glamorous screen siren with a wholesome outlook seem to become one. Beneath the pictures the “true” story of “The Two Benjamins” is told: “Genevieve Rutherford Hale thought that pumpkins grew on trees—till she had to pick them! But Genevieve knew that the whole world needed her to pick pumpkins, peas and peppers—Genevieve picked lots o’ pumpkins, peas and peppers—including Bobbie, who had pounds o’ PEP. See her do it any day this week.” The tongue twister of an advertisement represents the realization of the two most important goals for young women at this moment—devotion to country and at the same time, if one is lucky, a handsome young man might be discovered. A woman must prove herself worthy in order to win a dashing suitor. With the end of World War I and the loss of non-domestic labor, marriage once again became necessary for women to achieve financial stability.

Promoters of the movie were encouraged to sell the comedic aspects of Little Comrade. The juxtaposition between proper femininity and the hard labor of farming possessed a great potential for widely appealing humor. This contrast would have been much more marketable than discussing the more serious issues of how the construction of femininity was being revolutionized in the fields. Martin’s name was flashed in bright lights, a name with immediate impact to those with the time and extra money to see
movies, “You immediately designate the type of entertainment; you have to offer: light, amusing pretty,” a description that references Martin but could also apply to Genevieve.\textsuperscript{3} It’s more difficult to picture bright neon lights flashing Martin’s name outside of a small, rural theater. Visualizing the display set up inside of a theater in a small country town becomes comedic in itself. Humor is again found through incongruity. In an agricultural community, putting an amusing farm display inside a lobby appears ridiculous and creates more of a distance between the reality of farm labor and evening entertainment. This time the juxtaposition is between the daily reality of the farming audience and the decorations that are marketing their cinematic escape. A farmer may walk into the lobby and chuckle at the paper pumpkins and the girls posing for pictures with their rakes. The farm tools that he’s spent all day working with are now props for photos. The comedy begins before the house lights even start to dim.

The conflict between rural and urban does not seem to be a source of tension for the producers of the \textit{Little Comrade} press book. They simply choose to largely ignore the rural areas, the actual setting of the short story and the movie. \textit{Motion Picture News} offers a variety of suggestions for marketing the film to the nation’s city dwellers. Instructions are as follows: “If you are in a city where there has been any considerable attention paid to war gardens or in a section where there have been girls who have been giving their services in raising food you may be able to pull over an unusually good publicity stunt in the newspapers by interviewing some of these local girls about the experiences they had on the farm.” An important part of the interview would be talking to the girls about how they overcame their limited agricultural knowledge in relation to the role played by Martin. Just as in the displays, the reality of farming is contrasted against a
carefully crafted construction. This “good publicity stunt” would provide a way to promote the Land Army but in the terms of a movie that represents the very stereotypes the WLA was trying to overcome within the popular press by publishing capable photos of women working in the fields and operating tractors. While listening to stories of women contributing to the war effort, reporters would be seeking true stories of love in the potato patch and packing silk dresses for the farm. Stories such as this would get visitors into the red velvet seats just before the curtain rose.

Marketing the film in terms of intrepid women doing their part for the country and finding independence away from the home was an approach to be avoided. “As we have already said, do not get too serious about this, because you are likely to leave the impression that this play hinges on some big problem or something of the sort and this is just what you need to avoid. Unless you are committed to letters to your patrons we would pass this one up for that and devote the additional money to newspaper advertising” (Special Service Section in Press Book). As the men returned home and women reentered the domestic sphere, it became more important to emphasize the work of falling in love rather than the labor of the farm. Advertisers were encouraged to emphasize “strong pretty pictures of Miss Martin in her farmerette garb.” The tension between strong and pretty was difficult to balance within the traditional construction of femininity. “Pretty” implied a girlish kind of womanhood in direct opposition to the grit represented by the farmerettes in the fields. Photos of Miss Martin toiling in her fashionable farmerette duds should be flashed in neon lights. The pictures would maintain the smiling image of the farmerette, not a hair out of place. Images of Martin
would be the most appealing for an audience looking for the kind of escape only a movie can offer.

In the end, *Motion Picture News* comes through with some advice for “smaller communities”: “It will probably pay you to ‘kid’ along with the idea of a big city girl thinking she knows anything about farming.” The marketing challenges faced by the Women’s Land Army grew more difficult, without even a potato patch refuge in sight.

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The performance of femininity takes on a musical twist in Claire Chapman’s 1921 musical play, *The Farmerette*. Costumed in white tarlatan, with yellow trimmings, a talking potato plays a Cinderella-like role in the children’s musical. The operetta’s plot follows a farmerette as she helps the vegetables get ready for an exhibit. The homely potato weeps in the field until fairies arrive who clothe the spud in the “fairest garments of all.” As in “The Two Benjamins,” a change in clothes is necessary for transformation to occur.

By 1921 when the play was produced, the US was experiencing a post war recession, and in February 1920 the WLA Corporation had been formally dissolved, “There was no fanfare, just a small notice in the newspapers” (Weiss 269). Although not an explicit form of propaganda, Chapman’s agricultural interpretation of Cinderella reflects tensions that surrounded the farmerette even after the demise of the WLA. Unlike the classic fairy tale, vegetables are the main characters instead of the means of transportation. In the fairy tale, Cinderella’s Fairy Godmother turns a pumpkin into a coach, and Cinderella is whisked off to meet her prince and escape domestic drudgery. The farmerette does not possess a wand, but her most important instrument may be her
watch: “Attention, Class; (taps) now listen carefully to what I tell you. There is a great deal to do, and it is already, (looks at her watch,) seven o’clock.” From the late nineteenth century, around the time of the wristwatch’s invention, until World War I, the wristwatch was considered effeminate. During the war, the wristwatch proved vital in coordinating attacks. Flexible leather straps and metal “shrapnel guards” demonstrated its usefulness on the battle field. When the soldiers returned home, they wore the watches as a souvenir (Brozek). War transformed the soldiers into battle tested men capable of survival in even the harshest of circumstances. Upon their return home, the soldiers confronted the fear of changing into men subservient to the newly visible powers of women. The watch provided a way to demonstrate their masculinity as returning soldiers; they survived the war and may now search for just the right wife. As a result, the wristwatch was no longer a ladies only accessory. By consulting her watch, the farmerette lays claim to the status of the masculine soldier, and fashion again provided a means of redefining femininity in terms of post-war definitions of gender. Although women were now supposed to take up the loving role of wife, they could still transgress gender boundaries with a check of the time. The fears of men only increased.

Song lyrics featured later in the operetta show an industrious version of the hard working agricultural Fairy Godmother, “O the Farmerette, she tends us fair, / And cultivates us daily-O; / She pulls our weeds, and clips our hair, / And sprinkles us so gaily-O.” By maintaining an efficient schedule the farmerette is able to make any transformation through hard work and determination—essential values in selling the Women’s Land Army to children. By placing a WLA soldier within a children’s musical, the contributions of the Land Army are questioned. The farmerette sings to vegetables
and contends with fairy-tale-level acts of magic. Like the far less innocent pin-up genre, the children’s musical also operates as a way of placing women back in traditionally feminine roles. In the musical the farmerette is a maternal figure caring for her conversational crop. Women in pin-ups have the opportunity to redefine their sexuality. However, the very innocence of the children’s musical leaves no room for negotiation. Land Army members are forced to surrender their hoes and take up the apron instead.

Lettuce takes the stage wearing a dress featuring scalloped ruffles of green crepe paper and a cap to match. The Radish pin-up sings of the Horticultural Show in a short crimson dress, cut in points at the bottom, over a fluffy white skirt. In orange and yellow tarlatan, the Sunshine Fairies assist the farmerette, “This combination gives the best effect of sunshine.” As in Little Comrade, clothes are used to represent the tension between maintaining femininity and being able to work in the fields. Like Cinderella, they can only become the ideal version of femininity when wearing the most glamorous ensembles. In the description of costumes, far more attention is given to the vegetables. The description of the farmerette’s costume is precise, “‘Farmerette’ suits, or colored overalls.” Later in the operetta the hard working farmerette’s image is further enhanced within the song lyrics, “She works in jeans, Her actions like a Queen’s; And when the sun is / high above the hill, Though feeling slack, she bends her back And works on still.”

When bending over the crops and pulling weeds in her jeans, the actions of the farmerette appear to be far from the femininity expressed by a queen. However, within the musical the farmerette is the queen of the plants and is responsible for their survival. In the end, there’s no ball for her and no waiting prince. The only shoe present is caked in the soil of
the farm. However, the ultimate question is if the shoe truly fits or if she still remains out of her element.

In November 1917, farmerettes found a glamorous temporary setting. A musical revue titled *Miss 1917* opened at New York’s Century Theater. Under Dillingham-Ziegfeld management the production was “stupendous: and there is no square foot (or pointed toe) in its vast and multitudinous regions that does not show intelligent tasteful study brought to a happy issue.”5 In a moving ode to the beauty of landscape, a stage revolved slowly while dancers performed a carefully choreographed number amongst leafless trees. With typical satirical humor, P.G. Wodehouse, one of *Miss 1917*’s writers, contributed a ditty called “The Society Farmerettes.” Sung by Vivienne Segal and Farmerettes, the lyrics are a parody of the traditional love plot seen in “The Two Benjamins.” Instead of learning to farm and falling in love with the solider the patriotic farmerette learns “to sow and to reap / They get more chummy with the cow, / And their love grows more deep for the sheep.” As in the marketing for *Little Comrade* humor is again seen as a way to mask any anxiety regarding young women working in the fields.

Instead of using humor to hide concerns, in the poem “Wanted” a bachelor simply lists the attributes his ideal war-time bride should possess. They include someone who is “Willing to wear a Khaki suit, to plant the garden and pick the fruit; Willing to eat what the garden yields, and not be longing for other fields.” The “other fields” may be a reference to the bachelor’s desire for a faithful wife. However, the “other fields” can also be interpreted as a demand that a prospective bride should be content with her position on the farm and not long for any adventures or any kind of life outside the boundaries of the field. WLA members must remember that their “real” work is making a romantic match
that results in marriage. Women can’t yet be economically independent. During the war, their country needed them, but with the return of the soldiers women retreated back into the role of protected wives. Maud Muller was never able to escape her lot in life. Fashion embodies the tension between being patriotic and feminine. The bachelor goes on to describe the ideal uniform for his prospective bride, “Willing to dress in war-time style and not let Vogue her thoughts beguile; Willing to wear a war-time hat with a good wide brim and cheap at that.” WLA members were expected to temporarily leave the feminine hat behind and take up the war time worker hat only while the men were away. However, the expectations for each role were not so easily changed. Farmerettes were constrained by both sets of expectations simultaneously.

A handwritten note scrawled at the top of a series of typed out WLA work songs reads, “Parodies composed by Emma Holdzkom and Anna Franz while hoeing in a blackberry patch just full of tall weeds. This was the way we kept our spirits up.”

Farmerettes sang, boosted their patriotic morale, and told anyone who heard them what the WLA was capable of accomplishing. In “The Blackberry Doom” sung to the tune of “Blest to be a Blessing” the farmerettes sang of their challenges: “I was doomed to hoe the blackberries, / I was made for hard farm work, / While the boys are fighting overseas, / Not a duty will I shirk.” This song leaves no doubt in the listener’s mind that the women working in the fields are not merely city girls in their fashionable clothes on a short escape from the urban environment. Unlike Genevieve who simply wants to pose with a hoe, these women must actually learn to use the tool. Yet the extent of their stay on the farm is in doubt. Will they stay on the farm when the boys come back?
Like Wodehouse’s “The Society Farmerettes,” the members of the WLA used work songs as a means of bidding farewell to the city. To the tune of “Good-Bye Broadway, Hello France,” they sang, “We are going for Uncle Sam in our uniforms, so good-bye City, Hello Farm, now for hoeing in the corn” (Farmerette Songs). The song seems to represent the same patriotic image shown in a number of Land Army posters. A brave farmerette in a perfectly starched uniform marches into the field, an American flag unfurling behind her.
Notes


2. The clipping from *Forum* was in the Emma George Papers at the Library of Congress. Handwritten at the top of the clipping is October, no year is given.

3. This description is categorized under “Suggestions” in the April 26, 1919 *Motion Picture News* article.

4. Chapman’s operetta is housed in the Performing Arts Reading Room of the Library of Congress.

5. “‘Miss 1917’ a Hit at the Century.” *New York Times* 6 November 1917.

6. I studied this handwritten document in Emma George’s papers at the Library of Congress. The name of the author is difficult to make out.
During World War II, the “pin-up” emerged as a way to boost soldiers’ spirits and confirm femininity. The typical pin-up stretches her long legs for all to see, tight uniforms or scanty lingerie accentuate her breasts, and she often poses with naughty puppies that suggestively grab her skirt in their mouths. Pin-ups provided a fantasy image of American womanhood. In *Pin-Up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture*, Maria Elena Buszek describes the cultural impact of the images: “The government campaign … promoted the notion that it was not only necessary but also fashionable, and even sexy for women to enter the workforce” (213). Joining groups like the WLA would not compromise their position as sexually desirable women. Instead women could adopt an image based on determination and patriotism. As a result, women gained new confidence and belief in their own desirability. WLA artists realized the impact of pin-up style images; “The Girl He Left Behind figures in the popular art forms that served to back the war effort in their own way. In World War II it is likely that the greatest emotional weight was carried by just that on-the-fringe art … These were cute, sexy charmors, visibly *willing* to do their all” (Banta 562, italics in original). Pin-ups may have once been “on-the-fringe,” but during the war they quickly became a mainstream mode of expression, one that sold women who would still be *willing* once the men returned. Land Army poster artists subverted the traditional pin-up representation by incorporating the newfound strengths of WLA members, but the resulting images struggled to empower women while also ensuring that men would not be completely replaced in the fields or in their beds, two areas where men traditionally expressed their agency.
Buszek provides a framework for analyzing the cultural position of the pin-up, writing, “The genre is a slippery one: it does not represent sex so much as suggest it, and these politely suggestive qualities have as a result always lent it to a commercial culture of which feminists have justifiably been wary for its need to cultivate the kind of desire and dissatisfaction that leads to consumption” (5). The pin-up genre allowed women to market their own identities as desirable yet distinct from the domestic sphere by showing that “home” as a proper place for women was a fantasy as concocted by marketers just as the pin-up was an imagined image of femininity. By posing in aprons with ovens in the background, the home was kept at a distance through its construction as another pin-up fantasy. Women could experiment by trying on whatever role they chose.

The suggestion of sex is an essential characteristic of the pin-up. A mere suggestion instead of an open sexual declaration left room for women to negotiate their own freedoms and still attract the male gaze, a source of power for women that only increased with the visibility of entering the public world. Even if all the boys were gone, women could still rest assured that they were inspiring male fantasies. Planes used in World War II featured seductive women, and soldiers even clutched pin-ups as they went into battle (Buszek 211). In the midst of great fear, pin-ups may have provided men a way of reaffirming masculinity at their weakest moment. Buszek traces the origin of the pin-up to nineteenth century stage actresses. Women who chose to play the roles of the stage faced a clearly defined binary: “the idealized domestic ‘true woman’ or the vilified ‘public woman’” (Buszek 27). Pin-ups provided a means of negotiating the divide between public and private. Women could enter the public sphere by redefining the domestic “true woman” as sexual and desirable. Pin-ups often featured women posing
seductively in settings such as the kitchen or while hanging clothes to dry. Men could fantasize about their wives transgressing the division without actually compromising the morality of the women in their lives. However, women employed the new medium of photography as a way to market their stage productions and their own public identity (Buszek 43). Buszek discusses Adah Isaacs Menken, an actress in the 1860s, who demanded control over her own poses and costumes as a condition of allowing herself to be photographed. She often posed in traditionally masculine poses and costumes such as the uniform of a soldier (47).

In the never ending quest to reconfirm masculinity, men welcomed the rhetoric of sexually active women as an explanation for why they were willing to leave the home. Collins examines how sex was used to question women’s wartime impact; “Nurses also suffered from a torrent of rumors that they were promiscuous. There was a mean streak in the national character that presumed women who willingly went to live among thousands of soldiers could be after only one thing” (378). Nurses could save soldier’s lives but instead of emerging as a powerful image nurses became one of the most sexualized images of femininity. Farmerettes were making sure the nation did not go hungry, but their choices in fashion played more of a role in their public representation. While pin-ups assisted women in collapsing the artificial division of public and private spheres, pin-up images also used sexual desire as a means of guaranteeing that women’s hopes for an independent career would not be the element most emphasized in the press. The empowerment of the early theater pin-ups transitioned in 1893 at the Chicago World’s Fair. On “A Street in Cairo,” part of the fair’s midway, a woman called Little Egypt performed a seductive belly dance. The attraction was one of the most visited parts of the
fair and the accompanying souvenir postcards of Little Egypt achieved enormous 
popularity (Buszek 70). The postcards transcended “suggestion” and entered a realm of 
visible sexuality. The photos of Little Egypt showcased her bare stomach, an enticing 
glimpse of skin characteristic of many later pin-ups. As a performer, Little Egypt 
possessed a kind of agency not yet possessed by the majority of US women. The buyers 
of Little Egypt’s postcards were men interested in taking home a form of sexuality that 
remained appealing due to its exotic nature. Their decorous and well-mannered wives 
were likely not familiar with Little Egypt’s highly crafted movements. Little Egypt 
allowed men to reconfirm their masculine desires while still maintaining an image of 
“True Womanhood” for the women in their homes.

During World War II, the pin-up provided visual evidence for the power and 
sexual agency women started to possess when they left the private, domestic sphere. The 
beginnings of this transformation were found within the World War I images, but reached 
their full fruition during the 1940s. Buszek writes, “With women’s entry en masse to the 
workforce came firsthand experience with collective, productive, and economic power 
that generations of men had taken for granted … It meant for more women than ever 
meeting and dealing with men in a role that was neither domestic nor submissive” (186). 
The government encouraged women to discover their own ambitions outside of the home 
as a means of fueling the war effort. The emphasis on independence also gave women the 
chance to form new kinds of relationships with men. Women were no longer pious and 
submissive females waiting expectantly at home. As a result, men also needed uniforms 
as a means of enhancing their own sex appeal. In “He Wears a Pair of Silver Wings,” a 
popular 1942 song, Kay Kyser sings, “An ordinary fellow in a uniform I love / He wears
a pair of silver wings” (Kyser). The uniform and the silver wings become the object of her affection. Although Kyser sang the song, the words were written by Eric Maschwitz, a screenwriter and creator of well-known 1940s songs such as “These Foolish Things” and “A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square,” both romantic odes to the importance of love. However, the real romance for men may have been with their uniform. Maschwitz’s songs place men back in their traditional role as seducers of women with a uniform to help their cause. According to Collins the uniform was essential to masculinity; “The idea that American men were fighting to protect the women back home was extremely powerful during the war, and many servicemen felt diminished by having women in the military. The only thing that identified them as defenders of the homeland was their uniform, and now women wanted to wear that, too” (375). Men needed their uniforms to believe in the fantasy that women were waiting to be rescued even as they did the work on farms, in factories, and on the battlefield that would make sure the soldiers survived.

Alberto Vargas y Chávez emerged as the most iconic pin-up artist, partly because of his ability to craft images of empowered women, sophisticated, urban women instead of “country girls gone wrong.” Buzek discusses the central boundary within pin-ups: “This juxtaposition of fantasy and reality in Vargas’s work reflected American propaganda campaigns that encouraged women to emulate and men to idolize female types normally vilified during peacetime and actively discouraged during the depression—powerful, productive women in professions and the military, whose beauty and bravery resulted in large part from their very entrance into the sphere” (185). Propaganda provided women with the images necessary for challenging a fantasy of womanhood based on the role of mother and homemaker.
The pin-up falls back into the hay (Appendix, Figure 1). Accidents magically happen on a farm in such a way as to show a young girl’s legs off in the best angle possible. One leg stretches out into the air, displaying the muscles she likely gained from hours spent toiling in the fields. She wears dainty white socks with red strapped shoes that match her dress. The white dots on the dress add to her innocent, child-like appearance. She wears a wide brimmed hat that preserves her lily white skin, and in her left hand she clutches a rake. The rake fulfills the same purpose as the hoe Genevieve wants to use in her photos, but in the pin-up the rake also creates a suggestion of naughtiness lurking just beneath the innocent exterior. As a farmer, the young girl clearly fails. This is the message WLA marketers tried to avoid. The image illustrates her lack of skill with the rake, but the picture suggests that she may have feminine skills not suggested by the artist. She may be similar to the classic nubile milkmaid, a fantasy used by 1920s Hollywood to market its female stars. Buszek quotes a 1921 article by Mary Winship on the marketability of “the ordinary career girl in the film industry.” Winship writes, “She’s as seductive as any Parsienne but, as it were, she’s a country girl gone wrong. A sophisticated milkmaid. A Follies beauty in a gingham gown” (178). She is still positioned along the cultural border between the seemingly liberated lifestyle of the farm and the urban sophistication of the city. Her seductiveness rests in her seemingly open and available sexuality, a fantasy concocted by artists. Country girls were perceived as innocent females, sheltered from the free sexuality of the city. Jokes about the farmer’s daughter also exploited the division between experience and naiveté. The corruption of innocence is an essential ingredient in many male fantasies, leading to the appeal of the “country girl gone wrong.” However, farmers constantly confronted the results of sex on
a basic animal level separate from pin-up level fantasies. Part of the attraction to the farm girl is that her innocence may mask a high level of experience. The Women’s Land Army struggled to reinforce the idea that member’s experience was based on actually using the rake. The juxtaposition between fantasy and reality is incorporated into the images used to represent the farm. However, the images do not provide empowering examples for women to emulate. Common farm girl fantasies are reinforced.

The girl rolling in the hay was created by pin-up artist Al Buell. During World War II, the draft rejected Buell, preventing him from realizing the masculine role of a soldier. He instead chose to paint pin-ups such as WAVE, WAC, Nurse (1944) and They’re All Tops (1945) which were used on posters and calendars (Martignette and Meisel 126). Buell’s images would have been used to promote the idea “that it was not only necessary but also fashionable, and even sexy for women to enter the workforce” (Buzek 213). Another Buell image shows a young woman surrounded by six different hats (Figure 2). The young woman holds her hand up to her face in a thoughtful manner that also shows her red polished nails. The modern woman still makes time to take care of her appearance. Her skirt comes just to her knees. As a result, her long legs are showcased in high heels, a genre tradition in 1940s pin-ups. The hats represent the possible wartime careers she can choose including the Navy, Coast Guard, or Army. Large capital letters above her head read simply “Join.” The hat of the Women’s Land Army is not represented. Within the popular imagination, farming was a field still worked by men. Pin-ups tried to make masculine professions more acceptable during World War II.
As a popular icon, pin-up artist George Petty reconfirmed a masculinity based on escaping the urban area for adventures in the great outdoors, but a real man always returns to the city to appreciate the beauty of the nation’s most meticulously crafted women. Petty’s representation of ambitious women are significantly less flattering than the image of masculinity he attempted to sell for himself. Buszek writes, “The military women of George Petty—still contributing the occasional pin-up to the magazine—were predictably represented as charmingly gullible girls playing dress-up in masculine drag” (209). As with the early stage actresses, trying on masculinity was the first step for pin-ups in transgressing the gender binary. In addition to the farm girl, Petty painted pin-ups to represent the following career paths: ballerina, cowgirl, and mechanic. The mechanic perches on a wrench, seductively surrounded by nuts and phallic bolts (Martignette and Meisel 343). She is the ultimate gullible girl trying on a masculine costume. Petty’s girls achieved a ubiquity not seen by the posters of the Land Army. His pin-ups were used on calendars, magazine centerfolds, advertisements, posters, billboards, and specialty products (Martignette and Meisel 329). As a result, the Land Army posters were competing for literal and psychic space in the public consciousness with images based on attracting male attention, although the Land Army posters were supposed to recruit women. The images may have provided a way for women to redefine their sexuality identity in light of their increasingly visible role in society, but women still constantly confronted the contradiction of their sexuality as also being a way of reconfirming their dependent relationship with men.

Petty’s farm girl emphasizes a visible form of sexuality that could have placed her at the same level of desirability as Little Egypt. The farm girl leans up against the top rail
of a fence (Figure 3). The rest of the fence is not visible, and there is no agricultural background in the image. Cut-off jean overalls and a wide brimmed straw hat mark this girl as a country girl with a smile as big as her hat. Although Petty’s pin-up is not specifically representing the WLA, his country girl still shows the value of a seductive appearance in contrast to strenuous farm labor. A red bandanna is tucked in her back pocket, drawing attention to her curves. For some mysterious reason, she holds an empty can with one of her fingers. Usually farm girls hold a rake or a hoe, never an empty can. She twists around to face the camera so that the shape of her breast can be seen beneath her overalls. This farm girl successfully completes her job of looking beautiful while holding a can and leaning up against a fence.

In another farm pin-up by Edward Runci, a young lady daintily hops the fence, crossing the border between proper and natural sexuality, a line that became increasingly thin as the war progressed (Figure 4). Runci’s images are colorfully vibrant fantasies. He does not attempt to paint career women. His pin-ups stare into a goldfish bowl, feed birds, swim with fish, and blow out the candle on a cake—all behaviors that offer no larger public identity. The farm girl pin-up features a menacing bull positioned on one side of the fence. By selecting a bull instead of a steer the artist emphasizes an uncastrated and therefore unpredictable form of male sexuality. The opposite side of the fence is not seen in the pin-up, but viewers can assume a continuance of the organized pasture that can be glimpsed on the bull’s side. This country girl wears white high heels that would instantly sink into any field besides a sexual one. In this image, the shoe does not appear to fit if successful farm work is the goal. Instead she’s dressed for a potential lover to rescue her from the threatening bull. Her red skirt catches on the barb wire,
making a quick escape nearly impossible. Instead, she straddles the fence, refusing to cross the border.

The Women’s Land Army incorporated the visual imagery of pin-ups into their marketing campaign in a bid to reassure men that women weren’t forsaking their place in society and to attract women with a brand of womanhood based on sexual agency and attractiveness. No longer would women’s sexuality rest solely in the domestic sphere with the production of children and the rearing of future American patriots, a fantasy of femininity quickly being replaced by the challenging mythology of Rosie the Riveter. Wartime labor granted women the chance to view their sexuality as an empowering part of their femininity, a source of strength discovered through their new and exciting roles outside the home. However, WLA members struggled to pose in their own uniforms while still being perceived as traditional women. Wearing the Land Army uniform was seen as a kind of temporary posing. If women expected to fit seamlessly back into society at the end of the war, the dresses and skirts of traditional womanhood couldn’t be forgotten. Although the transformation that occurred to the roles women could play would forever change the way they perceived their own identities.

By drawing upon the style and motifs of typical pin-up art, these posters created a hybrid form, a kind of agricultural pin-up which reveals the sexualized role of the farm within the popular imagination, an image concocted by artists and marketers. The farm represents a location where physical labor and the accompanying agricultural knowledge are more emphasized than the “politely suggestive qualities” of social interactions in the city. Within the urban environment, upper-class young women were subject to a high degree of supervision as they formed romantic relationships, creating a moral appearance
that adhered to traditional social conventions. In agricultural settings, these same standards of proper behavior had to be negotiated even as glimpses of bare flesh within the pages of magazines became ubiquitous. Lustful feelings needed to be kept at bay even while enjoying the apparent freedoms of life on the farm.

Agricultural pin-ups and the posters of the Women’s Land Army entered the public imagination simultaneously. The use of pin-up imagery in WLA marketing initially seems to contradict the representations of female empowerment the Land Army was attempting to sell. However, pin-ups straddled the difficult boundary of attracting men while also offering women new freedoms to negotiate sexuality and a newly found public image. WLA posters offered beautiful yet sexually empowered women as a means of appealing to both genders, but women were constantly reminded that they couldn’t get too comfortable in their new roles and that their masculine uniforms were just to be tried on for the length of the war. Fear centered on what could happen if women fully embraced their change in position; “A Seattle paper told them to avoid going ‘berserk over the new opportunities for masculine clothing and mannish actions’ ” (Collins 387). Clothing could be just the beginning, followed by actions that would cause women to fully cross over into the masculine realm—a choice to be feared. To the popular press dominated by male writers, women going “berserk” appeared to be the only possible result.

The posters of the WLA combine the images of pin-ups with rhetoric designed to encourage women’s participation. Hubert Morley’s 1944 poster invites women to “pitch in and help” while showing a pin-up style figure with the trademark hourglass figure modeling overalls with the WLA insignia. One of the most challenging aspects of
interpreting the posters from World War I and World War II is the lack of information about audience. In addition to reaching men and women, poster artists also had to recruit a variety of workers from different social backgrounds and locations. They reached a general audience by using a broad message: work for the home front and fulfill your patriotic duty. Yet during World War II, the message for women shifted from one of patriotism to a new and exciting identity with the accompanying freedoms. In Picture This: World War I Posters and Visual Culture, Pearl James writes, “The images are left to speak for themselves, raising more questions than they answer. Even when volumes provide impressive numbers of high-quality images, they often provide scanty accounts of the posters’ production, distribution, and reception.” (3). Reading the WLA images in terms of the information known about pin-ups provides a way to answer the question of importance to the viewers of the posters.

Information did survive on how the posters were created and the goals of the advertisers. During World War I, Charles Dana Gibson spearheaded the US poster campaign in a bid to maintain his relevancy as a definer of US womanhood. Scholar Elaine Weiss describes the distribution of his images: “The artworks were published in the nation’s magazines and newspapers, with publishing companies donating space, and were mass-produced as posters, even appearing in the native language of the ethnic immigrant neighborhoods where they were hung” (105). The use of visual images allowed the posters’ creators to communicate a message efficiently with the highest symbolic content. In Picture This, Jay Winter asserts that “In wartime, images overwhelm words” (24). Advertisers long realized the power of using images to appeal to
the desires of a potential audience. Images could sell an ideal life or fantasy beyond the capacity of written language.

Gibson’s iconic Gibson Girl images in the late 1890s, just a few years after Little Egypt shimmied at the World’s Fair, contributed to the growing popularity of the “New Woman.” Gibson negotiated the fine boundary between depicting the sexuality of women and showing them as traditional women with domestic goals. Buszek writes, “Many popular images of the New Woman reflected cultural anxieties over this new—and newly politicized—strategy by which ordinary women were expanding their roles in society. The pin-up would both respond and contribute to this proliferation of imagery as it applied to the increasingly politicized and sexualized image of the New Woman” (79).

The political aspect of the New Woman posed risks to time-honored divisions constructed within the popular imagination to dictate the roles of each gender. Buszek argues that Gibson’s early illustrations were precursors to pin-ups because his images were distributed as full-page illustrations that could be easily ripped out and tacked up in the manner of a pin-up (91). In addition, “The Gibson Girl’s contribution to the continuum of the feminist pin-up is the fact that her subversive behavior is made appealing by its appearance in the figure of an otherwise ordinary bourgeois young woman” (Buszek 94). Gibson responded to the anxieties of the New Woman image by ensuring that his images still maintained their femininity even in the midst of cultural upheaval.

During World War I, the WLA adopted the characteristics of the New Woman invented in part by the Gibson Girl. The New Woman’s interest in sex contributed to popular fears regarding the WLA. Gibson depicts his girls in athletic poses that show
their physical prowess (Buszek 88). However, the athleticism of the Gibson Girls did transition into an expression of sexuality; “Whereas Punch’s New Woman was grotesquely, perversely oversexed when sexualized at all, the Gibson Girl was held up as not just an actively desiring, but an abundantly desired sexual subject—a fact that would inevitably lead to her gradual evolution from illustration to pin-up” (Buszek 91). The Gibson Girl showed the farmerettes of World War I that traditional femininity and activity outside the home could be successfully combined.

Gibson’s World War I era Land Army poster depicts a meeting not between a farmerette and a handsome young man, but instead shows her introduction to Uncle Sam (Figure 5). The farmerette and Uncle Sam shake hands, signifying the beginning of a new union, one based on mutual benefits rather than sexuality. The relationship between the WLA and patriotism would prove to be a long term connection. Land Army members gained an official status for their work by becoming a vital part of the home front war effort. Under the seal of patriotism, women could enter the fields, redefine their sexuality, and leave the myth of the “domestic sphere” behind. The poster does not emphasize the blatant sexuality usually seen in pin-ups or the implied sexuality of a typical Gibson girl. However, Gibson Girls did not always conform to the image of a well-mannered, traditional woman. In the ironically titled image Gibson called, “The Weaker Sex II” four giant women wearing negligees, like the one Genevieve may have designed, use a sewing needle to poke at a tiny man (Figure 6). Buszek interprets the image as a way of dramatizing the time honored belief that women’s highest power rests in her ability to manipulate men through their desire for sex (98). The intelligence of the Gibson Girl gives her a kind of influence that makes her dangerous to men. Men may have felt
equally threatened by the farmerette. If women could work in the fields what else were they capable of accomplishing? The role of men as strong, caretakers became questionable. The desire for sex and beautiful women became more vital as a part of proving masculinity. However, this very desire could render men powerless. Pin-ups inspired the desires and anxieties of men, resulting in an irresistible attraction.

Gibson’s farmerette appears to be an All-American girl ready to take on the challenges of war by working in the fields. Although the poster is not a traditional pin-up in the sense that it does not entice a male viewer through sexuality, the poster still fulfills one of the genre’s central goals, reassuring men that proper masculinity will be maintained. The farmerette is not posing solo as a strong and independent woman. Her relationship with Sam is necessary to accomplish the job. Sam is a courtly gentleman while at the same time clearly masculine. Muscles bulge in his arm as he firmly grips her pale, white hand. In an ironic reversal of “The Weaker Sex,” the farmerette appears diminutive in comparison to Uncle Sam. The poster does not depict the farmerette as an image of empowerment. Even in her Land Army uniform she is still the image of a traditional woman. Her agricultural skills are needed, but she still embodies a threatened nation that men must defend. Gibson presents no evidence for newfound strength or agency by joining the WLA. By comparing her femininity with Uncle Sam’s masculine strength it appears that she can just as easily slip back into the parlor.

Smaller text, positioned between the boots of Uncle Sam and the Land Girl, states “Until the boys come back.” As soon as the boys return the women should immediately vacate the fields and replace the hoe with a spatula. Wartime pin-ups operated as a way of reminding women that their newfound professions may not be long lasting, “These
campaigns often pointedly glorified the American housewife, praising homemaking as either a current or future ‘profession’ for women … These campaigns also overtly stressed the notion of ‘the duration’ to the women that they were recruiting” (Buszek 215). Heroines of the WLA and other female wartime workers created an anxiety in society by filling the place of men. Their positions had to remain temporary for the status quo to be maintained. In Creating Rosie the Riveter, Maureen Honey writes, “One of the benefits of studying propaganda is that it articulates ideas that are deeply rooted in American mythology” (216). Gibson’s poster shows a series of American symbols. In the background, a light blue sketch shows a soldier victoriously waving the flag as he stampedes to victory. He tosses his hat in the air and a wide smile spreads across his face. In the foreground, a neatly plowed row of crops is directly in front of the soldiers showing that the farm and the Land Army are essential for the battle. However, the masculine soldier is still the one realizing victory.

In another poster from 1918, Gibson again shows an intrepid young woman being introduced to Uncle Sam (Figure 7). This poster is for the National League for Woman’s Service. Although the poster is not recruiting for the WLA, Gibson still creates a similar representation of womanhood. In this picture Gibson recasts Uncle Sam. He reaches his hand out to a woman, but in this image she does not actually shake it, because one hand is saluting and the other is held rigidly at her side. With her sensible button down coat, tight belt, and long skirt she represents an ordinary, yet still sexual young woman. Her belt accentuates her small, feminine waist. However, the text of this poster gives her an identity she does not have in Gibson’s WLA image. The writing directly above her head reads, “Miss America reports for service, Sir.” In 1918, three years before the start of the
Miss America Pageant, Gibson’s choice of label for his intrepid young woman represents a marketer’s need to create a female equivalent of Uncle Sam. Using the term “Miss America” was an efficient way to express patriotism, femininity, and youth. In addition, “Miss” shows that she still has a few years to work before marrying and likely exiting the workplace. The bottom of the poster includes a numbered list of what the National League for Woman’s Service does. Tasks include: running social clubs, operating trucks, teaching food conservation, training women, and supplying secretaries. Women are also charged with spreading patriotic propaganda. Their tasks challenge and reconfirm the traditional ideology of femininity. Women can drive trucks and train new female drivers, but they also need to maintain social clubs. Gibson was trying to maintain his relevancy by moving the Gibson Girl into a new era. Yet he was not ready to express the sexual empowerment women were beginning to realize, except for the paranoid vision seen in “The Weaker Sex.”

Herbert Paus’s 1918 poster shows the ultimate American fantasy of endless food and beautiful girls. The poster depicts an abundance of food resulting from the WLA’s hard work in the fields (Figure 8). The poster is an advertisement for the training school at the University of Virginia, a public university that did not fully accept women until the late 1960s. Courses were offered for two weeks, tuition was free, and board was $5.00 per week. “The Women’s Land Army of America” is written across the top of the poster. Images tell the rest of the story. The poster is unique because for the first time we see a member of the WLA riding a horse, and she rides in the western style, straddling the saddle. Farm work elevates women above the toil of the soil if patriotism is carried in mind and spirit. She rides beneath a huge US flag and claims her own patriotic status.
outside of a relationship with Uncle Sam. As in Buell’s pin-up, Gibson’s poster shows a belt tightly cinching in the waist of the farmerette, drawing attention to her highly feminine figure. In Paus’ poster, however the uniform sags on the women. The real shape of their bodies remains a mystery. Sexuality remains largely absent from this poster. In *Imaging American Women: Ideas and Ideals in Cultural History*, Martha Banta describes the representation of women during World War I. “Their uniforms are utilitarian and do little to enhance their appearance, but they do indicate that the women are doing their ‘bit.’ Limited in physical and imaginative scale, such real women are safe and therefore usable as public symbols” (573). Paus succeeds in creating a “safe” image of the WLA that refuses to challenge the myth of “traditional womanhood” and as a result would be easily marketed to a general audience. However, the women touch and hold their tools instead of any man. Men may find themselves supplanted by a love of work when they return home. In this image, the productivity of the WLA is emphasized. The women walking in front of the horse carry an overflowing basket of fruits and vegetables.

The poster also shows a sense of depth. At first glance, it appears that rows of wheat recede into the background, adding to the bountiful nature of the harvest. However, a closer look reveals that the stalks of wheat are actually farmerettes marching behind the woman riding the horse. By conflating women as amber waves of grain, Paus positions the Land Army as a vital American symbol and simultaneously challenges the image of strong and independent women that the WLA was trying to market. The US is a country that can produce bountiful crops and endless fields of beautiful women who appear to be another kind of crop. Since the farmerettes appear in the distant background their individuality cannot be seen. They are a unified group working toward a patriotic goal.
As with the farmerettes in the foreground, their uniforms are likely identical. During a time of war a united group was more essential than an individual identity. In their discussion of the uniform’s sociological role, Joseph and Alex write, “Since the conformity imposed by a uniform stems from its symbolization, deviations are much more visible when the individual is in uniform” (723). Within Paus’ poster, the idea of a problematic farmerette like Genevieve seems nearly impossible. He presents an image of a group supporting a common patriotic cause. Yet the belief that women could form an identity independent of their families inspired women to join the WLA. As a nation, the US struggled to depict itself and American citizens as a cohesive country of individuals.

“Get behind the girl he left behind him. Join the land army,” reads the 1918 poster by Lambert Guenther (Figure 9). Guenther’s image is telling the same story Gibson told through his handshake with Uncle Sam. However, in Guenther’s image the woman is positioned directly in front of a lighter sketch of a soldier in the midst of battle. The way her stance in the field echoes his stance on the battlefield positions her to literally be taking his place and emphasizes that the farm front is equal to the fronts where soldiers violently fight. It also reinforces the idea that her place on the farm is temporary. The soldier stands right behind her, ready to retake his masculine position as farmer and husband. She will retreat back into the house once the soldier returns home.

The farmerette’s smile shows that farm work is enjoyable and fulfilling. Men in war posters were depicted as grim and frowning figures, doggedly fighting evil in foreign countries. This representation was necessary to show that war truly was hell and that only men were capable of suffering through its ordeals. The more men were shown as tortured figures, the more masculine they would appear. Women on the other hand had to smile in
order to create an open and inviting image. They happily did their duty while men were away and would gladly welcome them back into their hearts, fields, and, if lucky, their beds. While women occupied many of the roles formally filled by men, images of the battlefront maintained an area where only men could still enter.

Guenther’s poster does not offer women sexual empowerment or adventure. As a pin-up, the image does reconfirm masculinity by reminding viewers that the girl working the field is still a soldier’s girlfriend or wife. In the case of a wife, sex was implied rather than explicit. As a result, boundaries between the public and private spheres are reinforced.

Morley’s poster entitled “Pitch in and Help. Join the Women’s Land Army of the U.S. Crop Corps” markets an active WLA (Figure 10). Women are skillfully working the land. These are women who could successfully use their hoes. Patriotism was no longer a vital means of explaining why women were entering traditionally masculine spheres. The Land Army’s relationship with Uncle Sam was already confirmed and negotiated. They are empowered women with agency of their own. The poster does not mention the men who are away fighting; the women’s new role seems permanent.

Yet pin-up imagery is still used in Morley’s poster. The poster features the same vivid color palette used in pin-ups. As a result, viewers immediately connect the poster to images of women based on beauty instead of skill. A woman with the classic small waist hoists a bucket almost as if she is a department store mannequin. She is modeling as a farm worker instead of actually working the land. However, this poster is the most successful at selling an image of the WLA based on activity and labor instead of seductive poses. Even while wearing the Land Army uniform women can still retain their
sexuality and attractive appearance. They are no longer forced to choose between their “night on the town” ensemble and their farm labor uniform. The woman hoisting the bucket is surrounded by a collage of women accomplishing various activities: picking tomatoes, milking a cow, riding a tractor, and feeding the chickens. The woman riding the tractor is the smallest part of the poster; her face cannot even be seen. The only woman who looks directly at the viewer is the farmerette hoisting the bucket. She is a lone pin-up seducing the viewer with her gaze. Morley’s poster represents the transition from desirability based solely on beauty to knowledge being an additional means of attracting male attention. The image of traditional femininity expressed by Gibson during World War I was no longer marketable in the 1940s. Men and women were drawn to images of agency, power, and self-confidence.

“Harvest war crops” declares a brightly colored poster with a smiling woman reaching for a perfect orange (Figure 11). The Oregon State University Archives includes this poster on their website with a caption reading, “Posters such as this one produced by the US Department of Agriculture were used to recruit urban women into the farm labor ranks.” The artist is not known, but it was used for recruitment during World War II. The poster complicates the image of the WLA as a productive group. By featuring a woman posing with a bucket, the poster connects to earlier Land Army images where beauty was more emphasized than skill. Like the women in Morley’s poster, this farmerette is industrious and sexually empowered. Her clothes are tightly tucked in accentuating her waist, again one of the few areas of a woman’s body that artists could safely highlight. By emphasizing the curves of her body, the artist connects her to agricultural pin-ups. Visible sexuality becomes a way of expressing the independence her work gives her.
Although the WLA member is engaged in the activity of picking oranges she still seems frozen in time; viewers of the poster do not see a basket overflowing with citrus. The badge on her shirt says WLA, but she could be any woman reaching for a tempting fruit. Unlike Eve, the farmerette’s decision to pick the fruit is based on self-awareness and an active desire for change to occur.

Although pin-ups were created to inspire male desire, they also offered women the chance to attain previously unrealized agency outside of the home. As a result, sexuality became an even more important means of defining womanhood for both genders. However, with their newfound independence and ambition, sex became part of the exciting adventure. Women could form relationships with men on their own terms. Joining the Land Army would allow women to wear two hats: desirable woman and skilled worker.
TRUTH TELLING: OREGON EXTENSION SERVICE PHOTOS

Pin-ups and photographs each offered an idealized reality crafted by their creators to appeal to a specific audience. However, the relationship between the creator and the audience becomes more complex when the agency of the subject is considered. Within the pin-up genre women could try on different costumes and the accompanying identities. By agreeing to pose for a photo or a painting, women were leaving the private sphere behind and entering a realm where potential audience members could contribute to their own self-perception. Women were no longer dressing and creating an appearance for themselves and their husbands. Now they were performing for a much larger group. As the level of public visibility increased women also began to appear as more sexually available (Buszek 29). During the Industrial Revolution when women first started working outside the home in large numbers and pin-up photographs proliferated, the literature of the time period created the idea of the sexually pure woman, lacking in lust and with no interest in carnal pursuits (Buszek 30). The division between the pure woman and the fallen female, susceptible to immorality influenced later depictions of femininity. Women may have taken the greatest pleasure, not from their public sexuality, but instead from their status as wage earners. Economic independence equaled the ability to shape their destinies in and out of the bedroom.

Costumes have been a vital characteristic of pin-ups throughout the genre’s history. Women posed with theatrical boas, lavish Civil War era ensembles, and later in the uniforms of mechanics, airmen, and occasionally in merely an apron. The line between costumes and uniforms became thin for the World War II pin-ups. They were no longer simply trying to impress a male audience. Women now wanted to truly occupy
those positions, not just try the uniforms on for a time. The difference between costumes and uniforms became one of duration; costumes were tried on for a brief time and then put back in the closet. Uniforms could be a permanent hallmark of a woman’s identity.

The idealized reality of the Extension Service photos departed from using sex as a means of inspiring fantasies. Instead photographers represented the Land Army as hard working contributors to American agriculture and the greater war effort. The goal of the photos was not to inspire enrollment or to brand a new style of womanhood. Instead Extension Service photographers tried to document the “real” experience of working on a farm. According to the photos, spending time in the Land Army could be composed of a number of different tasks, including: using the tractor, picking hops, packing crates, and of course posing for photos. In contrast to the pin-up genre, these items were no longer props used to enhance costumes. The very nature of photographs is that they appear to represent a reality that mere words cannot fully describe. However, what’s missing from the photos is knowledge of the directions photographers probably gave to their subjects. As part of creating a reality for the Land Army, farmerettes were likely told to smile and look happy. Photographers balanced the self-conscious impulse to document history with the need to sell their own photos. Producing images that successfully captured a historical moment could lead to lasting fame and financial gain for photographers. The desire to create images with artistic merit was always balanced against economic demand and the need to fulfill what the public wanted to see. In the WLA’s case, the public wanted to view photos of happy and contented women working the fields. Photographs of orderly rows of crops and beautiful women reassured the public that the home front was in capable hands even as chaos reigned in the war front images.
Photographs marketed the Land Army, the photographer’s work, and eventually a specific magazine that also wanted to sell issues. Extension photos were published in a variety of locations. At first the Extension Service used national publications to promote the WLA (Carpenter 77). Photos produced by the Land Army to market the group appeared in Independent Woman, Ladies Home Journal, and McCall’s (Carpenter 6). Popular magazines such as these reached a wide audience, especially the urban women who remained the target recruitment group. By the middle of 1943, the government obtained the funds necessary for creating more recruitment materials. The Extension Service photos were mainly used in brochures to attract additional workers (Carpenter 77). However, photographers also took the images with the ultimate goal of creating an archive of agricultural photos representing this particular period of labor history.

As in pin-ups, the fantasy of the farm remained essential in selling the images. The OSU Extension Service’s four principal photographers, Fred Shideler, John C. Burtner, Harry Whitten, and Robert G. Fowler Jr., approached their work invested in promoting the best aspects of agriculture (OSU brochure). For the Extension Service, the fantasy was based on patriotic wartime needs and a much earlier American romance with the farm as a place of self-sufficiency. Viewers of the photos could escape the endless routine of the urban areas and factories and experience the fulfillment of living off the land.

The captions of the Extension Service photos are a useful text for interpreting the images. In On Photography, Susan Sontag writes, “Reality itself has started to be understood as a kind of writing, which has to be decoded—even as photographed images were themselves first compared to writing” (160). Sontag goes on to write that the
concepts of reality and image are complementary. When one changes so does the other. For the Extension Service photos, writing operates as a way of imposing a constructed image of reality. Captions mediate and shape our experience. They tell a narrative of the photo crafted by the writer of the caption, the photographer, and the experiences of the viewer. The photographer can take a photo with a particular story in mind, however, if someone different writes the caption then the narrative of the image is forever changed. Photographer John Szarkowski writes, “Photography is a system of visual editing. Like chess, or writing, it is a matter of choosing from among given possibilities, but in the case of photography the number of possibilities is not finite but infinite” (qtd. in Sontag 192). Yet writing can be used as a way to select a specific story out of the infinite possibilities within a photo. Without captions, each photograph would be more directly shaped by the viewer. Those who perceive photos bring their own fantasies, histories, and storylines to bear on each image. Captions operate as a way of enforcing a particular story onto the viewer.

The captions of the Extension photos were vital in creating an identity for the WLA founded on industrious labor. The writers of the Extension captions remain unknown. However, WLA organizers may have used the captions to overcome the perception that the women within the group were simply fun-loving people looking for a good time on the farm, while also still inspiring women to join the group. In Everyone Had Cameras: Photography and Farmworkers in California, 1850–2000, a state with a WLA as active as Oregon’s, Richard Street writes, “Photographers had a field day documenting young girls attired in new boots and dresses or trousers and blouses, giggling as they held up clusters of grapes, posed with hoes, and squirted one another
with hoses in camp. None ever seemed to sweat or get dirty” (109). By using words such as “giggling” and “squirted” Street emphasizes the youthful appearance of the farmerettes and places the women within a pin-up style narrative. However, the narrative is one where sexual enjoyment can occur without men. The sexually promiscuous war worker takes a turn that the men did not predict. This may represent the ultimate realization of the fears that inspired returning soldiers to take up their wristwatches to reaffirm masculinity. The same words are usually used to describe the activities of girls at a sleepover. Photographers were creating a fantasy of a group of wet, beautiful women having a good time in the fields without men. During their days on the farm, women could enjoy “innocent” fun. Like pin-ups, the sexual appeal of farmerettes rested in their ability to appear innocent while hinting at experience just under the surface. Street continues to place WLA members within a sexual framework writing, “At day’s end they were always good for at least one nice swimming shot when they retired to a nearby irrigation canal before a shower. After washing their hair and putting on nice clothes to head into town for a Saturday night dance, the women harvesters were indistinguishable from local school girls” (109). Although the women never actually “got dirty,” an evening shower gave photographers an ideal opportunity to further document the innocence of an after-work lark in the canal. By changing into their evening uniform and heading to the dance, the women cross from representing naïveté to actual seduction. However, even while attending the dance, Street still describes the farmerettes as “school girls,” the ultimate fantasy of an innocent appearance masking a world of sexual experience.
The images Street describes crossed the line from strictly documentary into pin-up. Photos such as these would have made captions the only way for the WLA to tell the competing story of industrious labor. The Extension Service photos and captions balance the competing goals between creating an archive of the Land Army’s activities, showing the fulfillment of WLA labor, and still using word choice as a means of maintaining the fantasy. The historical record of Land Army images was inevitably shaped by the contemporary fantasies regarding women working in traditionally masculine occupations. In addition to documenting the historical role of the Land Army, the Extension Service showed the way photos are influenced by shared cultural fantasies.

Oregon supported one of the most successful WLA programs in the entire country. During the Emergency Farm Labor Program, 1943–1945, 78,000 WLA members would work in Oregon alone. The farmers of Oregon always welcomed women into the fields; however, it was clearly understood that once the men returned women would vacate the farms (Carpenter 116). Although the WLA was a national organization, the involvement of various locations differed based on agricultural need. WLA scholar Stephanie Carpenter writes, “Along the Pacific coast, the use of female labor had been a tradition before the organization of the Women’s Land Army. Because of this, little was needed to sway California, Oregon, or Washington producers that women made ideal agricultural laborers” (116). All three states supported large groups of farmerettes.

OSU was the training center for the WLA. In August 1917, extension agents were first hired to reach people off-campus with new agricultural information that could improve the communities they served: “They, their staff, and their programs were the ‘backbone of America’ making available ‘service education for every last man and
woman, son and daughter” (qtd. in Holt 25). The OSU Extension Service collection includes 1,320 black-and-white prints, and many of the images show Extension Service activities including farm equipment trials, harvesting techniques, weed control, and irrigation. The essential role of the Extension Service continued during World War II.

According to the captions, the women working on the Oregon farms definitely seemed to invest themselves in farm labor. One caption reads, “Dorothy and Olgo Brutke of Amity averaged better than $11.00 a day picking hops at the Fred Viesko hop yards west of Gervais.” In the photo, Dorothy and Olgo are surrounded by vines of hops (Figure 12). They wear gloves and long-sleeved shirts with the sleeves pushed up. They do not appear to be merely posing with the hops because the large bucket in front of them is overflowing with what they have already picked. However, the image of hard labor is heightened by the caption which tells the viewer that these women were truly capable of being productive on the farm. The language attached to the photo, establishing an actual monetary value for their labor, appears to be more trustworthy. By stating exactly how much money the women made each day on the farm, agricultural labor becomes based on a financial reality outside of the abstract ideas of patriotism, national duty, and sexual fantasy. The photo is grounded in an economy that the audience for the photo would trust and understand, because they faced the same financial issues in their own lives.

In a photograph of the Women’s Land Army included in Street’s book, WLA members stand in a line in a field (Figure 13). The caption reads, “Women’s Land Army hoeing a field near Bakersfield, ca. 1916, photographer unknown” (110). The caption shows the women as capable workers, not interested in marketing their own appearance. However, the photo reveals different perspectives on representing womanhood. From left
to right the women wear three different uniforms: overalls, shirt waist, and a white dress. Their choice in clothing shows various expressions of femininity within the fields. The women wearing the shirt waist and white dress reveal their desire to retain at least a part of “traditional womanhood.” In contrast, the woman in overalls fully embraces the fashion freedom farm work gives her. The faces of the women cannot be seen. Their hats cover their faces in shadow, lending a sense of almost grim realism to the photo. What most defines the photo in Street’s book is the way the women lean on their hoes. In contrast to the posters, they seem exhausted and instead of operating as an instrument of patriotic victory, the hoe is the only thing keeping them standing. Within this photo, fulfillment through farm work is a fantasy. The row of hats emphasizes the persistent heat of the sun, a reality not usually highlighted in farm girl fantasies. According to Street, “Although many of these photographers produced images with residual documentary value, none ever attempted to analyze work motion, focus on physical strength and prowess … Photographers knew that there was no market for such images. As always, they were after images that sold produce and glorified an industry. When their work appeared in promotional pamphlets … viewers had no idea that farmworkers were not anything but eternally happy” (94). The goal of producing usable propaganda overcame that of creating a historical record. In propaganda, efficiency and strength were less important than representing an image of fulfillment. However, Street’s photo challenges the depiction of farm labor as fulfilling. No information is given regarding whether this photo ever found a wide audience.

Street analyzes the objectives of Los Angeles agricultural photographers, ambitions similar to what is represented within some of the Oregon photos. He writes,
“Leading photographers around Los Angeles went to great lengths to concoct an endless stream of images that placed farmworkers at the center of what was essentially an industrial landscape of ordered productivity and overwhelming beauty. Following a standard formula, these photographers typically arranged dozens of pickers in an orchard to produce an image titled *World’s Largest Lemon Grove* or *Sunny Orchards beneath Snow Capped Peaks*” (94). When women could be arranged in an orchard, the image became even more novel and marketable by appealing to the public’s fantasy of farm life. This fantasy was manufactured by photographers in a bid to market their own work and the WLA. The Land Army constantly struggled between contributing to the fantasy as a means of increasing enrollment and representing the reality of the group’s hard work. The reality of the WLA changed based on the goals of the photographer and public perception. Photographers balanced the desire to document history with the desire to reach the public through images of agricultural fulfillment.

In a photo similar to the images described by Street, six smiling women in plaid and striped shirts hold their hoes and rakes up in the air (Figure 14). These farmerettes fulfill Genevieve’s goal of wanting to pose with her hoe. They seem ready for work, yet right now their job is to pose for the camera and promote the farm labor that is taking place in Oregon. This is the only photo of the Oregon Land Army images that I studied that shows the women posing in place of working. Posing for photographs appears to be a job that gives the women additional fulfillment. Instead of showing the women actually working the fields, the photo shows them happily prepared for labor. The reality of actual farm work could never match this crafted image of contentment. The photographer chose to represent the agricultural fantasy instead of trying to prove that the women could do
the same amount of labor as the men they were replacing. Perhaps taking a moment to pose for photos comprised part of the job description for WLA members. In addition to harvesting the crops, women working in the fields also needed to attract new workers.

The caption for the photo featured in the brochure reads, “OSC Coeds recruited by College’s Experimental Hop farm for the hurry-up job of hoeing, 1944.” Their photo would be used as a means of recruiting additional women, showing potential workers that women just like them were also taking to the fields and fulfilling their patriotic duty. The brochure also includes a brief history:

The Oregon State College (now University) Extension Service administered the Oregon farm labor program that continued until 1947. During those five years, women, school children, migrant workers, and even German prisoners of war worked side-by-side to rescue the harvest in the name of the war effort. The Emergency Farm Labor Service was the agricultural equivalent of ‘Rosie the Riveter,’ utilizing nontraditional agricultural workers (OSU brochure).

In addition to featuring beautiful women, the fantasy of the home front also showed that work could unite people from a variety of backgrounds and social classes. Farm labor allowed workers to cross boundaries they never would have attempted to transgress within traditional society. The women posing with the rakes and the hoes also market an image that WLA organizers wished would become as iconic as Rosie industriously working amidst the grime and pollution of the factory.

If the Oregon Extension Service was trying to craft an identity for the Women’s Land Army based on hard work and skill, taking photos of women working on the tractors would have been one of the easiest ways to accomplish that goal (Figure 15).
When WLA members operated tractors they showed farmers and the general public that they were capable of anything, even using machinery. Technical skills were a point of pride for the WLA. Carpenter titles her introduction “We Can Drive Tractors” and begins with a quote from a 1942 letter to the *New York Times* written by Charlotte Goodwin. “We can drive tractors. We can milk cows. We want to join up quickly in the farm production army” (3). By emphasizing their ability to drive tractors, Goodwin challenges the often inept appearance of pin-ups and reveals that the WLA can enter even the most traditionally masculine areas of farm labor. In the photo, one woman operates the tractor, while another woman stands on the machinery behind her. Their faces cannot be seen, and the caption offers no further identity stating only, “Women harvesting peas.” What the caption does not emphasize is that the women are operating heavy machinery. A date of the photo is not given, but if it was late enough in the war perhaps this was too common an event to be of note. This photo counteracts the stereotypical ‘glamour girls’ seen in some of the WLA propaganda, and instead offers a picture of agricultural aptitude and skill. The tractor represents masculine power, like the bull in Runci’s pin-up, but now women control that power.

The Extension Service photos provided one of the most effective means of Land Army propaganda. Any documentary goals were secondary to producing images that would sell the Land Army to potential recruits and the American public. The captions of the photos replicate the desires of marketing the WLA while still accurately recording the reality of the experience. Photography represented one of the most powerful means of crafting an image for the Land Army. Sontag writes, “That photographs are often praised for their candor, their honesty, indicates that most photographs, of course are not candid.
The history of photography could be recapitulated as the struggle between two different imperatives: beautification, which comes from the fine arts, and truth-telling” (86). For the WLA, truth-telling through photos became a means of representing the group’s highest ambitions of productivity and patriotism. Photographic images offered a way to visually form the Land Army’s objectives.
POising the mannequin

Posters offered the ideal medium for creating a vivid fantasy of agricultural life; photography still had to ground itself in at least a representation of reality. The photos of a department store window display reveal a combination of the goals of posters and photography, which often intersected. Like the other Extension Service photos, the images of the displays are invested in documenting history and showing a particular fantasy of life before joining the WLA. In this fantasy, two women could see a window display of posters, a mannequin, and a bag of beans, and be inspired to leave their daily lives to join a group of women picking crops. For women who fantasized about adventure and leaving home, the Women’s Land Army offered the opportunity to realize that ambition, even if it was a dream concocted by artists and marketers.

An Oregon State Extension Service photograph from Salem, Oregon shows a Miller’s Department Store window display with a grinning mannequin in full Land Army attire (Figure 16). A WLA arm band wraps around her left arm, and the insignia for the group is near her heart, emphasizing her loyalty to the cause. The clothes appear bulky, comfortable for working on the farm, and a cap makes her appear ready for anything. The loose fit of the clothes reinforce the idea that fashion and physical appearance aren’t what matters on the farm. The mannequin isn’t a pin-up with long legs and the curves of her body highlighted. However, she does replicate pin-up characteristics through her desire to sample different costumes. Like Buell’s pin-up, this farmerette experimented by trying on different hats. She has tried on the Land Army hat and found it to be a role she enjoys. The mannequin is posed as the intrepid model farmerette, a representation of the happy and content farm workers found in the posters selling a fantasy of agricultural labor. Two
women in suburban attire with their hair tightly coiled and purses gripped under their arms look in at the window display, peering closely at the mannequin. Their facial expressions cannot be seen. Perhaps they are thinking about the best way they can help out on the farm or they are wondering why anybody would want to join the Land Army. Their long dresses contrast against the pants of the WLA mannequin, showing the transformation that can take place on the farm.

Department stores traditionally use their window displays to sell an array of consumer goods, including clothes and accessories; however during World War II, patriotic citizens were supposed to be investing money in the purchase of war bonds that would help the troops rather than in corsets or dishware. During the war, the textile industry was devoted to the production of uniforms, fatigues, battle gear, and parachutes (Jones 114). In the absence of new fashions to market, advertisers turned to creating ads explaining how to make clothes last longer. In *All-Out For Victory: Magazine Advertising and the World War II Home Front*, John Bush Jones writes, “Mojud Hosiery described how to get the longest wear from its rayon stockings in an ad in *Life* … except on the Black Market nylon was long gone by then for military uses, primarily parachutes” (117). Without nylons, the women who gaze at the farmerette mannequin may not be as properly dressed as they seem. In their long skirts, they are wearing the uniform of the home front even without the essential undergarments. By making sure the image of a “proper” woman lasted, the women were guaranteeing themselves a place in society even after the war ended. When the soldiers returned home, window displays with farmerettes would be gone and in their place would be mannequins wearing the domestic uniform of the 1950s. Since the accessories and clothing that define femininity were gone at least
during the war, women could search for items to create a new identity outside of skirts and dresses.

Out of necessity, Miller’s replaced their usual goal of selling fashion with selling wartime patriotism. Like the Extension Service photos that show farm labor, these two photos are also balanced between representing a fantasy and fulfilling a patriotic goal of showing the war effort at work even in department stores. The Land Army display is marketing the fantasy that women could leave the domestic role behind and take up the uniform of the farmerette. In reality, entering the public sphere of work would take more than wearing the correct uniform. The women pondering the outfit of the mannequin cannot actually purchase the clothes inside the store. Instead the mannequin offers a way for them to see how the clothes might look on themselves. If the women do decide to “purchase” the Land Army, they will be temporarily surrendering their status as consumers. By joining the WLA, the women will earn wages that they can later reinvest in the economy by purchasing items such as dresses, bras, and nylons—the uniform of the home.

Jones discusses how advertisements for additional farm volunteers produced by Dole, Kraft, and Pillsbury do not actually sell any goods while they are trying to inspire potential workers. Only the Pillsbury ad directly mentions the Victory Farm Volunteers and the WLA, and the Dole’s advertisement is unique for mentioning that workers would receive “regular wages for full and part-time work” (95). Advertising for farm volunteers was a way for companies to keep their name in the public consciousness while also appearing patriotic and devoted to the war effort. Ads that showed women at work either were honoring their accomplishments or calling for additional volunteers. Many ads
showed women working, but were actually trying to sell other products (Jones 221). During the war, advertisers struggled to sell consumer goods to citizens who were supposed to be devoting their money and time to causes outside boosting the economy. Wages were essential for women in forming an identity outside of the home yet they were also regarded as an additional bonus to be gained while fulfilling patriotic duty. Pillsbury did specifically decide to highlight the WLA. They advertised spending time in the group as a short term break. Readers were advised to “plan your vacation now” (95). Companies needed to remind readers that the war would end and eventually they would be shopping for Pillsbury biscuits and cans of Dole fruit again. During the war, department stores and large companies were willing to put the actual selling of wares temporarily aside and operate on a “delayed gratification” approach. However, “when the boys come back” women would be expected to purchase a wide variety of new and innovative domestic items. Any outfits they might wear outside the home would no longer be relevant.

Advertisers devoted far more ads to promoting Victory Gardens than recruiting farm volunteers (Jones 96). Although joining the Land Army might be appealing to young women or to those looking for an escape from domestic life, most citizens preferred to do their patriotic effort from home. Jones describes the reasons Victory Garden advertisements outgrew the calls for farm volunteers: “It was simply fun playing amateur ‘farmers’ and providing one’s family, friends, and neighbors with homegrown vegetables. The second reason … is that people didn’t have to range far afield to support the war” (96). By raising Victory Gardens in suburban lots and urban areas, citizens
could embody the self-sufficiency of farmers while still relying on the great variety of opportunities and goods that could be purchased in the city.

A different Extension Service photograph depicts the same Miller’s window display. In this image the mannequin is absent, and the caption states that the display was carefully arranged by Mrs. Gladys Turnbull of the Marion County farm labor office (Figure 17). Although Mrs. Turnbull cannot be seen in the photo, the caption meticulously gives her credit, perhaps as a means of reinforcing the important role of individual community members. Victory on the home front could only be won if every individual did their part. Instead of creating a specific identity, the naming of Mrs. Turnbull in the caption highlights the absence of people, creates a representation of each woman doing their part for the war effort, and places her firmly in the category of “wife” instead of independent wage earner. By not showing people gazing at the display or the mannequin, the photo places emphasis on the posters and the potential recruits the display could inspire. Anyone could see the display and be motivated to join up.

The photograph also shows a sign declaring, “Bean Pickers Wanted!” At the center of the display are posters with farmerettes planting crops asking people to “Pitch in and Help!” Both photos of the display feature Morley’s poster that uses this slogan. The poster features a pin-up style WLA member holding a bucket like a department store mannequin. The farmerette within the poster is fulfilling the same general function as the mannequin in the display. They both represent an image of beauty and invite women to try on what they are wearing. However, the pin-up in the poster offers a much more glamorous representation of WLA life. She has the perfect hourglass figure and her clothes are tightly fit in contrast to the window mannequin. The woman in the window
presents a more approachable image of a farmerette. Anyone, even without an hourglass figure, can purchase a role in the WLA. Instead of involving an exchange of money, buying into the Land Army included an exchange of social roles symbolized through a shift in fashion. If women bought into the Land Army, then the uniform of proper femininity could be left behind as long as women were needed on the home front.

A burlap bag full of beans decorates the bottom of the display. The beans give the display a sense of reality that photos cannot give. For those who saw the display, the beans may have been freshly picked from the fields. The message of the display echoes Street’s analysis of the Land Army photos, “Join the WLA and you will be eternally happy.” The photo of the display ironically comments on the images used in the posters by creating an additional layer of distance from the actual farm. By taking a photo of an artist’s Land Army picture, the sack of beans becomes by far the most real thing in the display. They are a tangible agricultural product.

The images represented within the posters showed a patriotic and glamorous image of the WLA that would become more marketable than the hardworking Land Army member that the Extension Service tried so hard to sell. Yet the Extension Service, a group trying to market the opposite representation, incorporates these images into their photographs. Perhaps the Extension Service recognized the propaganda purposes of these images as a means of initially attracting women. Once their attention was grabbed, then they could see the more realistic images of hard work. The popular WLA image would most often be seen within publications such as Farm Journal and Farmer’s Wife, a widely read magazine marketed to an agricultural audience during World War II. Farmer’s Wife gave women an opportunity to discuss the circumstances of their lives
(Holt 197). This was especially vital for rural women who may have lacked the chance to connect with others facing similar challenges and issues. According to the message of the window display, anybody could help on the farm. The poster closest to the overfilling bag of beans shows a boy and a girl in overalls. The girl tightly grips a pitchfork, and she seems ready for anything. The text at the bottom of the poster reads “Your job is here in your community.” “Here” is written in large block, capital letters. Instead of leaving rural life to pursue the freedoms an urban area may offer, the pitchfork makes the location where help is most needed perfectly clear. In order to be a vital member of the community, you should pitch in and help on the farm. However, after the war women would be expected to return to their role as consumers with the newfound agency and money earned from working in the fields.
CONCLUSION: CAPTURING THE TRUTH

American photographer Thérèse Bonney journeyed into Europe at the height of World War II to document wartime horrors and photograph the British Women’s Land Army. A comic book from the 1940s, *Photo Fighter*, tells of her Indiana Jones-style exploits, “Often faced with great danger in her eagerness to get true photographic accounts of World War II, Thérèse Bonney [bold in original comic] fearlessly set off on what she called “truth raids” into warring Europe. ‘The shells are coming closer you’d better run for cover, Miss Bonney.’ ‘Why should I? I’d rather help you.’”

*Photo Fighter* was part of the “True Comics” a series published by *Parents’ Magazine* as an educational alternative to the traditional superhero adventures. “True Comics” featured the following slogan on the cover of each issue, “TRUTH is stranger and a thousand times more thrilling than FICTION.” Although Superman was born on a farm, real adventure always waited far from his home fields. “True Comics” succeeded in offering an educational choice, but adventure still did not occur on the US home front. The European front was where epic tales could emerge.

Bonney’s comic climaxes with her accused of being a Nazi parachutist spying with the aid of her camera. Throughout the comic she wears the ultimate masculine uniform: a bulky black jacket, sensible pants, and combat boots. She is a photo warrior, with the camera as her only weapon. Just after she’s accused of being a Nazi, she thanks the mayor for saving her and says, “I must get my photos to America where they will tell my people the truth about this awful war.” Although Bonney gained fame for her “truth raids” and the resulting book *Europe’s Children* which documented the impact of a “fascist-ravaged Europe” on the youngest citizens, she also documented the British
Women’s Land Army. The photos can be interpreted as an extension of her Nazi “truth raids,” only in this case the truth Bonney brings back to the US is shaped by her own status as an American invested in promoting the cause of the US WLA, a group fighting the same farm-front battle on their own soil. Bonney was invested in promoting the idea that victory on the home front was only possible if women did their part.

On September 23, 1943 Bonney received a letter from Natalie Latham, a *New York Times* reporter and Director of Women’s Programs. The letter invited Bonney to take part in a large discussion featuring women from various home front organizations, including the American Women’s Voluntary Services, a group connected to the Land Army. Latham writes, “We are in our second year of war. We are further from Victory [capitalization in original letter] than people seem to realize. Oratory and pep talks just are not going to change the terrifying lethargy into which we have sunk.” Perhaps, Bonney brought some of her farm photos with her to the meeting as a way of illustrating that home front victory was also possible in the US.

In 1948, Montgomery Clift starred in *The Search*, a major motion picture event based on Bonney’s “truth raids.” No longer would Bonney’s exploits be confined to the pages of a comic book. Bonney was also much more than an adventurous photographer. According to Downes, she was a writer, and in her own photography she saw herself as a historian. In the Downes article Bonney describes the intent of her photos, “The curious thing about my work, and it sounds peculiar to say it, is this. That the camera is incidental. My own aim is in fact to forget I have a camera. I use no filters nor tripods. I am interested only in conveying my impressions.” Bonney’s decision to represent her
photos as “incidental” is a means of making her work appear natural and therefore closer to the truth.

Bonney fashioned herself into an adventurous woman capable of reaching any goal, no matter how dangerous. By doing so she conformed to one of the two images for women wartime workers, “They were either portrayed as superheroes, who drove through enemy fire to deliver vitamins to men on the front, or as fluffy little things intent on keeping their noses powdered” (Collins 380). Even after decades of working to collapse the artificial divisions that shaped femininity women were still forced to choose between only two options: be like the puppies often seen in pin-ups or be a mythological hero like Rosie. These “choices” fail to take into consideration the complexities that shape women’s lives.

The stories of the photographers who captured the US WLA remain unknown. However, the competing goals that influenced their work and the artists who created the posters are revealed through their images. Genevieve Rutherford Hale failed as a farmerette, but she would have made an excellent pin-up. Hale possessed beauty, fashion sense, and pluck in abundance, only the grit necessary for farm labor was lacking. Artists, photographers, moviemakers, and writers combined to create an image of the farmerette based on patriotism and competing representations of femininity. Ultimately, their efforts wilted under Rosie’s withering gaze and America’s need for the interdependence of the factory. The solitary farmerette gripped her plough, smiled, and wiped the sweat from her brow before marching onward into the field.


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