‘The Gift that Starts a Home’: Marketing of the hope chest in the United States

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Abstract

Purpose – The paper presents a history of the marketing of hope chests in the United States, focusing in particular on one very successful sales promotion, the Lane Company’s Girl Graduate Plan. The Girl Graduate Plan is placed within its historical context in order to better understand the socioeconomic forces that contributed to its success for a considerable period of time but ultimately led to decreased demand for the product.

Design/methodology/approach – The history of the marketing of hope or marriage chests draws upon primary sources located in the Lane Company Collection at the Virginia Museum of History and Culture. Secondary sources and images of advertising culled from Google image searches provided additional insight into the operation of the company’s Girl Graduate Plan.

Findings – While the Lane Company benefitted in the form of increased sales, profit and brand awareness and loyalty from prevailing socio-economic trends which supported the success of its Girl Graduate Plan, including targeting the youth market, this promotion ultimately fell victim to the company’s failure to stay abreast of social changes related to the role of women in society.

Research limitations – Like all historical research, this research is dependent upon the historical sources which are accessible. We combined documents available from the Virginia Historical Society archives with online searches, but other data sources may well exist.

Practical implications – This history investigates how one manufacturer, a leader in the North American industry, collaborated with furniture dealers to promote their products to young women who were about to become the primary decision makers for the purchase of home furnishings. As such, it provides an historical example of the power of successful collaboration with channel partners. It also provides an example of innovation within an already crowded market.

Social implications – The hope chest as an object of material culture can be found in many cultures worldwide. It has variously represented a woman’s coming of age, the love relationship between a couple, and a family’s social status. It has also served as a woman’s store of wealth. This history details how changing social values influenced the popularity of the hope chest tradition in the United States.

Originality/value – The history of the marketing of hope chests is an area that has not been seriously considered in consumption histories or in histories of marketing practices to date, in spite of the continuing sentimental appeal for many consumers.

Keywords: Hope chest, glory box, dowry, cedar chest, history of marketing practices, Lane Company, Girl Graduate Plan

Article Classification: Research Paper
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Introduction

For many young women, receiving a chest in which to store items to furnish a future home was once a rite of passage. Known as a ‘hope chest’ in North America, a ‘glory box’ in Australia, a ‘bottom drawer’ in the United Kingdom, and a dowry or marriage chest in other regions, these objects of material culture were significant not only as a symbol of coming-of-age and romantic love, but also as markers of social status, for young women and their families. Further, in times and countries when women were legally denied the right to own property, “the bridal chest and its contents were often the only things a woman owned” (Schleining, 2001, p. 43), acting as a store of wealth. The hope chest has been called the “crossed fingers of the furniture world” (Fulford, 1989), and “a place for precious anticipations” (Lolley and Nachsen, 2007) in recognition of the wished-for future life the objects it holds represent. Although few young women today are familiar with the consumer practice of keeping a hope chest, there were once many companies manufacturing and marketing hope chests throughout the United States.

This research is part of a larger project examining the history of the marketing and consumption of household goods. In this paper, we look at the Lane Company’s Girl Graduate Plan, a sales promotion campaign which was extremely successful in promoting brand awareness and loyalty for the manufacturer, and in driving sales of household furnishings for the retailers who participated. The miniature chests at the heart of the promotion became very popular with the target audience – young women about to graduate from high school. The Lane Company provides not only an example of how innovation can be introduced into a crowded market (Levengood, 2009) – there
were already almost 30 companies producing cedar chests when Lane entered the market as the Standard Red Cedar Chest Company – but the Girl Graduate Plan promotion also provides an historical example of how socio-economic forces which originally sustained a marketing strategy can, in a relatively short period of time, reverse and lead to the demise of a product line. Working closely with channel members, Lane was able to target the youth market, an important market segment (Hollander and Germain, 1992). However, while it transitioned from a product to a sales orientation, it was the company’s failure to adopt a customer orientation that ultimately led to the demise of what had been a very successful promotion.

Next, we discuss our research methods followed by a discussion of the history of the hope or marriage chest in various cultures. We then focus on North American traditions, the history of the Lane Company as manufacturers of hope chests, and their most successful promotion, the Girl Graduate Plan. Our discussion of Lane’s promotional practices ends with their hostile takeover by Interco Co., in 1987. Subsequently, we discuss a number of socio-economic factors that worked for and against the firm, and help to explain why their most successful promotion eventually lost its marketplace impact. We conclude by discussing the paper’s contributions to marketing and consumption history research and offering suggestions for future research.

**Historiography**

This research was inspired by the authors’ experience while conducting a participant observation exercise at a local auction house. We saw fine china and crystal (traditional wedding related purchases) and, indeed, wedding and engagement rings being offered
for sale. Our thoughts about these objects revolved around the maintenance or loss of economic value and the potential for savings from consumers re-using precious gemstones – more cognitive, objective or detached reactions. It was when a hope chest full of treasured items came up for sale that we felt truly moved emotionally. How could anyone leave precious, hand-crafted items to be sold along with the chest? Our thoughts turned not only to the woman/women who had originally created them but also to those who had cherished and preserved them over the years and we were inspired to conduct this research.

The history of the hope or marriage chest in other countries and cultures has been documented in both scholarly and more mainstream sources. We consulted a wide range of sources but ultimately had to restrict our writing to a few illustrative cases. In terms of consumer practices related to the ‘glory box’ in Australia, we were fortunate that Dr. Moira McFadzean agreed to share her PhD dissertation with us.

‘Lane’ was the name that came first to mind when we set out to research hope chest traditions in North America. Thus, the printed version of a speech Edward Hudson Lane (1962) gave to the Newcomen Society in 1962, in celebration of the company’s 50th anniversary, was one of our first and also most foundational sources. A finding guide to the Lane Company records (Gilmour Stoner, 2009) was available for purchase. Prior to the lead author’s first visit to the archives of the Virginia Historical Society, we were able to highlight the files we would need to consult. Given time constraints, we photographed many documents so they could be consulted and re-read at a later time. A second visit to the archives allowed us to expand the range of our research, since the Lane Company fonds contain a large amount of material of interest to historical marketing researchers, including: records of operation as the
Standard Red Cedar Chest Company; samples of marketing and sales materials, including those used for the Girl Graduate Plan; furniture dealer mailings; correspondence regarding advertisements; furniture catalogs; patent and trademark information; marketing research reports; and dealer testimonials. We came to appreciate the foresight of Minnie B. Lane, and other family members, in acting to preserve the company’s records (Levengood, 2009).

We read these materials against the academic literature of the time and also in comparison with reports of the broader socio-economic context, such as US Census Bureau reports. This allowed us to place the marketing of hope chests by the Lane Company within the appropriate historical context.

A Brief History of the Hope or Marriage Chest

While our research focuses on marketing practices and consumer culture associated with the hope chest in the United States, it is important to an understanding of the historical context to acknowledge that the hope chest, in its various forms, has been a feature of many cultures over time.

Middle East

Among the more than 300,000 documents surviving from the Cairo Geniza [1] are numerous marriage contracts, spanning from the ninth to 19th centuries, almost all of which refer to a dowry chest. Two forms of chests are discussed, the muqaddama, which typically contained the bride’s personal possessions, and the sunduq, which came in matching pairs and contained other goods (Goitein, 1983).
[T]he *muqaddama*, the bridal trunk…contained the wife’s lingerie and main personal effects. The term appears in almost every complete trousseau list, usually, at the end… *Muqaddama* means put first, leading, probably because the donkey carrying it headed the procession that transported the outfit from the bride’s domicile to that of her future husband… In life, a wife’s most cherished possessions were properly placed in the bridal trunk (Goitein, 1983, p. 129-130).

These chests were traditionally made of wood and were decorated as richly as a family’s means would allow. They were typically fairly large and rectangular, with a flat top, to facilitate later use as a bench or table. They were sometimes constructed with a drawer at the bottom, or with a smaller compartment inside the lid, for holding valuables. A richly decorated dowry chest continued to serve as a status symbol, even after the bride reached her new home. “Across the Middle East, where houses were traditionally sparsely furnished, such a dowry chest would often be placed in the woman’s area, where it could quietly continue to announce its status and serve as an item of practical furniture” (Stone, 2015, p. 25).

**Germany**

In Germany, during the 13th to 15th centuries, small decorative chests, made from various materials, were used as courting gifts. A man hoping to court a woman would commission a box and present it to her as a token of affection. Later known as *minnekästchen*, these boxes were often decorated on the sides, top and inside with verses and “depictions of couples talking, symbols, and animals, occasionally scenes of an erotic kind – indicating a function as love gifts” (Wurst, 2003, p. 98). Measuring
approximately 8.3 cm in height by 22.5 cm in width and 9.9 cm in depth (3.25 inches x 8.85 inches x 3.9 inches), it is thought they would have been used to store tokens of affection, such as love letters or jewelry (Walters, 2012; Wurst, 2003). Their size would have limited their storage capacity, making them somewhat different from the *muqaddama*, which held a bride’s trousseau, or later hope chests, which were large enough to hold household goods. Walters (2012, p. 10) suggests that chests of this sort would have been kept in the personal chamber in the home, close to the owner, since they were intended as private pieces. Although originating in a courtly context, by the late Middle Ages, the emerging middle class had adopted their use (Wurst, 2003). Use of the *minnekästchen* seems to have ended in the late fifteenth century, along with the custom of the bridal procession (Wurst, 2003).

*Italy*

In Italy, chests originally known as *forzieri*, but more commonly discussed as *cassone* today, were placed in halls, corridors and bedrooms and used to hold household goods (Walters, 2012). The custom seems to have been that two large, elaborately painted wedding chests would accompany the bride on her way through the city to the home of her future husband. These large chests contained the bride’s dowry and her marriage gifts, including sheets, shirts and other linen goods made by the bride and the female members of her family (Gloag, 1966). *Forzieri* would often be made in pairs, with one intended for the groom and the other for the bride (Baskins, 1998).

In addition to their practical use for storage, *forzieri* also served a symbolic purpose, reflecting the status of the bride, especially when put on display during the wedding ceremony. Thus, they were often considered to be the most valuable and most
treasured of the gifts given to the bride (Walters, 2012). The father of the bride would commission the creation of the *forzieri* months in advance of the wedding. The artwork painted on the exterior of the box would be quite elaborate, usually featuring a love scene or the coats of arms of the families being joined. The pieces could be identical in decoration, or complementary, with the first featuring one half of a scene and the second completing the picture (Baskins, 1998; Walters, 2012). Since a pair of painted chests could cost as much as the annual salary of a skilled labourer, the acquisition and use of marriage chests was restricted to the elite (Baskins, 1998). Historian Richard Goldthwaite (1993) argues that an increase in both the number of wealthy families in Italy’s major cities, between 1300 and 1600, and the wealth held by those families, was reflected in increased demand for ‘art’, broadly defined to include consumer goods such a decorated wedding chests.

**Australia**

The glory box tradition in Australia was most prominent from the 1930s to the 1950s, according to researcher Moya McFadzean (2010). She uses the glory box tradition to examine changing consumption patterns, the interplay between handmade and mass produced goods, shifting notions of ‘essential’ versus ‘luxury’ items, and the impact of waged labour on the consumption activity of unmarried women. She identifies working- and lower middle-class Australian women of British ancestry as the primary participants in and mediators of the glory box tradition in Australia during this time period. However, other researchers have established that the collection of items for a daughter’s dowry box was also extremely important for Italian and Greek immigrant families who settled in New South Wales and South Australia, post WWII (Grace and
Gandolfo, 2011; Palakgtsoglou et al., 2013-14; Tully, 1962). In contrast to some of the examples discussed above, glory boxes, during this period of time were typically purchased as mass-produced items of furniture.

There is likewise evidence of a shift in how the contents of the glory box were produced. Traditional Italian and Greek customs dictated the number and type of items that were to be included in a young woman’s dowry, with some regional variations. Palakgtsoglou and colleagues (2013-14) reported that for both Italian and Greek families, 6 to 24 double sheets and matching pillowcases, 6 to 12 towels, 12 tea towels, tablecloths, napkins, blankets for summer and winter, and 1 or 2 quilts were seen as the necessary complement of goods to equip the future household. Some items and fabrics had to be purchased, and thus, required a certain level of family affluence. However, creating many of the items was seen to be part of a young woman’s training for her future role as wife and mother. The quality of the items she produced would reflect on her abilities as a seamstress and specialist in needlework (Tence and Triarico, 1999). Thus it is perhaps not surprising that within the Italian-Australian community described by Tully (1962), the tradition of hand-crafted lace, embroidery and drawn-thread work remained a matter of community and individual pride. However, from the 1950s onward it became more common to purchase at least some of the items (Palakgtsoglou et al., 2013-14). Contents of the glory box during this time period reflect the shift in the roles of women.

Australian women who owned glory boxes were simultaneously producers and consumers, for they often themselves made the things that they later consumed, but they also consumed the produce of others (both the mass produced and the
handmade), and they labored to pay for the items they purchased (McFadzean, 2010 p. 158).

As women entered the paid labour force, they both gained the financial wherewithal to purchase, and lost the time to hand produce, many of the items for their glory boxes.

The process of collecting items was pleasurable for many women, who saw their glory box as the start of their home and saw themselves as contributing to a future economic and romantic partnership. The selection of items for a glory box was an exercise in taste, and for some, an aspirational purchase which would hopefully lead to an improvement in their standard of living. Highlighting that the practice of collecting items to be kept in a glory box involved planning, saving, and the deferral of pleasure, McFadzean (2010, p. 158) argues that delayed gratification “for a future married state was the very essence of the desire the glory box embodied as a commodity.” Importantly, McFadzean (2010, p. 167) also points out that even though the ‘outcome’ of a glory box project was socially sanctioned and defined (heterosexual marriage), “[t]he glory box was their property, over which they had ultimate control”.

Thus, we see that across time and cultures, wooden chests of various sizes were part of courtship and marriage rituals. These chests and some of their contents were often given as gifts and were cherished and highly prized possessions. In the process of filling the chest, bonds among female members of the family were strengthened, as mothers showed daughters how to perform the creative tasks necessary to make fine lace, linen garments, etc. Extended family members would also contribute, by gifting a young woman with household items on special occasions, like birthdays. As women entered the work force, a shift occurred – items for their hope chests, and indeed the
hope chests themselves, were increasingly purchased rather than homemade. We turn now to a discussion of the hope chest tradition in the United States.

**The Hope Chest in the United States**

As in the Australian example just discussed, immigrants to the U.S. brought many of their traditions associated with bridal or marriage chests with them. In his history of ‘treasure chests’, Schleining (2001) mentions, for example, the brightly painted chests of both the Scandinavians, who settled in the northern Midwest, and the German- and Swiss-born settlers in Pennsylvania. In the United States, the terms ‘hope chest’, ‘marriage chest’ and ‘cedar chest’ are often used interchangeably since many marriage or hope chests were wooden chests lined with cedar. In the early years of the settlement of the U.S., the marriage chest was often made by the bride’s father or her fiancé, rather than commissioned from a craftsman, as were the earlier Italian *forzieri*. Frequently given as a gift from her parents, a bride’s marriage chest was often customized with her initials and wedding date painted on the front. While Schleining (2001, p. 45) argues that “the bridal chest tradition crossed economic as well as cultural boundaries and was found in all levels of society”, the quality of workmanship and materials used in construction could vary widely, reflecting a family’s socioeconomic status.

In the spring of 1907, the Caswell-Runyan Company [2] opened a factory in Huntington, Indiana. There appears to be agreement across sources that this was the first commercial concern in the U.S. to manufacture cedar chests (Huntington County Honors, 2018; Huntington County TAB, 2010). By 1925, Caswell-Runyan’s work force of 30 to 40 people had expanded to 700 and it claimed to be the largest cedar chest manufacturer in the world (Huntington County Historical Society, p. 132). Its
cedar chests were being sold across the U.S., the cedar chest having become recognized as a ‘standard piece’ of household furniture (The History of the Caswell-Runyan Company, 1924; Wikicollecting, 2015).

Supporting the idea that the hope chest had become a household ‘standard’, is a brochure entitled ‘The Hope Chest’, published by Royal Society (manufacturers of embroidery floss) in 1917. The brochure suggested that, “it is not right that a bride bring nothing to the new home but her own charming self and her apparel” (p. 3). It went on to argue that a marriage between equals was the most appropriate way to think of marriage, and thus it should not be only the man who brought ‘earthly goods’ into the union, but the young woman should also do her share towards equipping the new home. The brochure then provided detailed instructions on the use of monograms, presumably stitched using Royal Society embroidery floss and stored in the hope chest. Here we see introduced the idea of men and women as equal partners, plus the necessity for a young woman to start preparing for marriage by accumulating household goods.

Although some sources suggest that the Caswell-Runyan company did not use advertising to promote its products (Wikicollecting, 2015); ads featuring the company’s ‘treasure chests’ have been found as part of our research. Thus, it seems likely that while they did not use print advertising to promote the product initially, they did adopt this marketing practice eventually, positioning their product as a place to store one’s treasure.

The Lane Company

The Lane Company of Altavista, Virginia began manufacturing cedar chests in 1912, eventually taking over from Caswell-Runyan as the largest manufacturer of cedar
chests in the world (Lane, 1963, p. 11). Edward Lane’s father got the idea to enter the cedar chest market from another businessman whose furniture manufacturing business had set up in Altavista and gone bankrupt. Apparently, the man told him that if he’d been able to keep manufacturing cedar chests, he might have been able to avoid bankruptcy since they were his most profitable item. Although Edward (1891-1973) had no previous business experience and didn’t know what a cedar chest was, his father turned the business over to him to run. Since the family wasn’t sure this new cedar chest business would be a success, they didn’t want to use the Lane name, calling the business Standard Red Cedar Chest Company instead.

At the time Lane set up shop, there were already 25 or 30 manufacturers making chests in sizeable numbers, including the aforementioned Caswell-Runyan of Huntington, Indiana; Roos Manufacturing of Chicago; Ferguson Brothers Manufacturing of Hoboken, New Jersey; Klein Brothers of Long Island City, NY; West Branch Novelty Company of Milton, Pennsylvania and the Piedmont Red Cedar Chest Company of Statesville, North Carolina (Lane, 1963, p. 48). Piedmont Red Cedar was purchasing chests from Caswell-Runyan and selling via a direct-to-consumer model, facilitated by a small, one-column ad in the Saturday Evening Post.

The Lane Company, while operating as the Standard Red Cedar Chest Company, was quite production oriented. Their plan called for them to manufacture 10 to 15 chests per day, although they did not know at the time if they could sell that many (Lane, 1963, p. 26). In order to establish themselves against their competition, including the industry leading Caswell-Runyan, the company focused on making “as good a product as we could and …sell(ing) it just as cheap as possible” (Lane, 1963, p. 48). By 1930, the plant was making between 250 and 300 chests per day.
While Lane chests would later be distinguished by a special hidden corner joint, “a locking miter that slides together [and] provides great strength and security” (Schleining, 2001, p. 54), during the first 10 years of manufacture, the company’s product was crude by comparison. Their early chests were made from solid red cedar, nailed together (Lane, 1963, p. 45). Metal bands were riveted along the edges and around the body of the chest.

Referring to their product as a ‘Hall and Bedroom Chest’, the company’s ads suggested that, “A Cedar chest is the one piece of useful furniture no home should be without.” The ad copy emphasized the versatility and elegance of their products, saying, “Our Standard Chests are not built for usefulness alone. They are handsome enough to adorn the most elegant homes” (Lane, 1963 p. 57). Ads targeted at ‘professional, business [and] college men’, suggested “the Standard Chest is the most artistic piece of furniture a business or literary man can secure for his den or office” (Lane, 1963, p. 57).

Over the years, the company experimented with both materials and production methods to improve manufacturing efficiency and product quality. The development of an air-tight dust-proof lid increased the effectiveness of the chest for storage and the removal of the metal bands in favour of polished round corners enhanced its looks (Lane, 1963, p. 58). By the time Helen Hughes Lane wrote the history of the company’s first 50 years in business in 1963, chests were being constructed with an interior core of ¾ inch red cedar and encased in a wide variety of hardwood veneers, to help them fit in with contemporary décor. Chests were tested for their ‘aroma-tightness’, allowing
the firm to offer an insurance policy of up to $1000 for mothproofing (Lane, 1963, p. 11). By the 1980s, company brochures indicate that over 100 styles of cedar chests were available, including: traditional, country and contemporary styles; painted and stenciled chests, and chests with padded tops which could be used as seating.

In the early years, the company did not have its own sales force, relying instead on commission furniture, or window and door, salesmen to represent them. The results were uneven, at best. The company tried partnering with a mail-order firm, but that also did not work out. Edward Lane himself brought in early sales orders, in addition to his managerial duties. During one sales trip that had been very unsuccessful, Lane came up with an idea for a store window display which would use cedar shaving, cedar logs, small green cedar trees, cedar chests and display cards which described and showed the many uses of cedar chests. Armed with my idea…I left the hotel and went out and sold twenty-five chests to a dealer who had already turned me down. On the strength of this success, I doubled back to Buffalo, where I’d previously had a refusal, and sold fifty chests… That lesson stayed with me through fifty years of being in business… you’ve got to sell with an idea! (Lane, 1963, p. 52).

In addition to his revelation regarding ‘selling with an idea’, Lane became convinced that the company must develop a well-trained sales force to represent their product exclusively. Before this could occur, World War I intervened; the government placed embargoes on freight deemed non-essential, including cedar chests. Rather than go out of business, the company secured a government contract to make pine ammunition boxes.
After WWI, the company resumed manufacturing cedar chests. In 1922, the company experimented with its first national advertising campaign, putting up billboards on the Pennsylvania and B&O railroads between Washington and New York. Lane (1962) reported that dealer reaction to the billboards was good, so the firm decided to expand the campaign into newspaper advertising, running ads prior to Christmas in Richmond, Washington, Baltimore and Philadelphia, their biggest distribution points. The firm asked N.W. Ayer to prepare the ads.

…Ayer recommended that two one-half pages in black and white could be had in the *Saturday Evening Post*, the mass publication of that day, for the same amount of money involved in running of the proposed local newspaper ads. They also suggested we rename our firm The Lane Company. So it was, that The Lane Company, as we have been called ever since, embarked on a program of national advertising to bring our product to the attention of the consumer public through mass media (Lane, 1962, p. 13).

Lane would later estimate that between 1922 and 1962, the company spent “in the neighborhood of $20 million on advertising and promotion”, crediting this with the fact that “a Lane cedar chest ranks along with the fraternity pin and engagement ring as a token of serious romantic intentions” (1962, p. 13). Along with suggesting a name change for the company, Ayer was influential in partially re-positioning the product in terms of ‘romance’. While the company’s ads continued to emphasize benefits such as protecting woolen clothing from moths, the tag line ‘The Gift That Starts a Home’ “endeared the company to the public” (Gilmour Stoner, 2009, p. 5) and allowed them to target both men and women in their advertising [3] [4]. In addition to its adoption of advertising techniques, the company began organizing and training a “hard-hitting,
exclusive sales force, experienced in the techniques of promotion” (Lane, 1962, p. 13).

It is this sales orientation that, perhaps, most distinguishes the company from this point forward.

**The Girl Graduate Plan**

One of the most successful sales promotion ideas the Lane Company adopted had them targeting what they felt was an untapped market – the young woman graduating from high school. The idea behind the plan was to foster brand loyalty early in a young woman’s life because “the woman of the house was seen as the decision maker in the purchase of home furnishings” (Gilmour Stoner, 2009, p. 6). In the 1930s, 50 percent of all female high school graduates were married within 18 months of graduation and, therefore, were likely to need furniture (Gilmour Stoner, 2009). Lane Company employees had for some time been making little miniature cedar chests as a hobby or ‘end of day’ project. Many of these chests were given as gifts to female family members and became very popular. Most of them had a lock and key and, thus, were used as jewelry boxes or to save love letters, recalling the *minnekästchen* discussed above. The company’s sales manager, J. Arthur Krauss, developed an idea using these small miniatures which became what Edward Lane (1962, p. 14) described as “one of the greatest promotionary plans the furniture industry has ever had.”

Krauss initially had difficulty convincing the company’s Vice President and Treasurer of the plan’s viability, so he had the miniature chests manufactured by an outside firm. They paid a small amount for the miniatures, $1.35 in 1922 dollars ($20.93 in 2019 dollars) [5] and resold them to furniture dealers. Initially, the company tried appealing to local newspapers to secure their assistance in compiling a list of
graduates. The response was reported to be “very poor and in some cases … very sarcastic” (Krauss, 1929). Many newspapers insisted that the company pay for advertising space. Next, the company sent letters out to school secretaries in all cities with a population of more than 100,000 and to class secretaries in smaller cities and towns, advising them that they would give a miniature chest, free of charge, to each young woman graduating that year, if they could obtain a list of their names. Krauss noted that response to this request was “very successful”. While many school secretaries, especially those in larger cities, replied that providing such a list was against Board of Education policy (Krauss, 1929), class secretaries in medium-sized and smaller towns responded quite favorably. Each young woman whose name was received by the company was mailed a letter or brochure which enclosed a card she could take to her local furniture store and exchange for a miniature chest. The program appears to have been a winner from the start. Manufacturing of the miniatures was moved in house, with the company eventually devoting an entire division to their manufacture. In 1929, it was credited as a major source of the company’s success; a night shift had to be added just to catch up with demand (Lane, 1929).

The Girl Graduate Plan officially launched in 1930, and with this came years of close collaboration among distribution channel partners. In 1934, there was some concern that the promotional program had run its course, with very few dealers buying in. However, in 1935, the plan was reported to be working well. Its decline in 1934 was attributed to “business conditions” and the fact that “salesmen were not pushing it as
well as they were [in 1935]” (Lane, 1935). In 1936, the plan was even more successful. This was attributed to three factors: 1) producing a better miniature chest; 2) burning the name of the dealer into the lid of the miniature (literally, branding the piece); and 3) mailing a follow-up letter to girl graduates in the fall of the year (Lane 1936). Sales materials for 1937 designed to recruit more furniture dealers to join the Plan included endorsements from other dealers across the US, extolling the good will the plan had engendered with ‘the brides of tomorrow’ and their parents. The booklet entitled, ‘Win the Brides of 1938 Now! With the new Improved Girl Graduate Plan’, emphasized in large, bold letters, “Statistics show that 28% of the girls who graduate in 1937 will be married by July, 1938 – three-fourths by 1940!” (Lane Company, 1938). Dealers purchased the miniature chests at cost price and were responsible for providing the names of girl graduates. Lane bore the cost of postage, imprinting the invitation with the furniture dealer’s name and address, providing a special window display and two brochures, one to accompany the congratulatory letter/invitation mailed in the spring and a second sent as a follow-up mailing in December. Figures 3 and 4 provide an example of the brochure mailed out to young women.

Insert Figures 3 & 4 about here

Dealers were encouraged to make the occasion of receiving the miniature chest a festive one by hanging school pennants behind the Lane Cedar Chests on display in their stores and wrapping the miniature gift chests in cellophane matching the local school colours. Many dealers provided food and drink for the young women and their parents; some hosted fashion shows or hired DJs to play music during the event. The
program developed over time, often by sharing and implementing suggestions made by
one dealer across the whole network. For example, a dealer came up with the idea of
having the young woman write down the style of hope chest she liked best on a card
where she also provided her parents’ names and address. The card could then be used
by the retailer’s sales personnel to follow-up with her parents, suggesting the selected
hope chest would make an ideal graduation gift. Lane began producing these cards, and
inserted them into the miniature chests (see Figure 5).

Insert Figure 5 about here

The brochures sent to the young women also became more comprehensive over time.
In addition to providing tips for how to pick a hope chest, they detailed what Good
Housekeeping magazine recommended as ‘inventory’ for a well-stocked hope chest, as
can be seen in Figure 3, an invitation from circa 1938. The inventory bears a striking
similarity to traditional Italian and Greek customs discussed earlier – several sets of
bedsheets, blankets, spreads, multiple bath and kitchen towels, and table linens, with
the noted addition of coloured linens in addition to the traditional white.

Consumer practices in the USA in the 1940s also paralleled those discussed
above from other countries:

Parents bought hope chests when their daughters were about fourteen-years-
old. At the same time the family began collecting items to store in the chest.
Mothers, daughters, godmothers and aunts crocheted, embroidered, or tatted
linens, anticipating the day the girl would marry. Years of labor went into
handcrafted goods essential for dream homes (Baldino, 2013).
When young girls got together, it was not uncommon for them to take items out of their chest to look at while they talked about what their imagined future married life would be like. The hope chest would accompany the young women into the marital home, providing storage in homes which did not have many closets at the time (Baldino, 2013).

The 1950s ushered in a new era of mass consumption, “A full employment economy and a shortage of consumer goods meant that at the end of the war the general public had disposable income and the urge to spend it” (Staton, Fine-Meyer and Gibson, 2004, p. 115). Women’s magazines of the time emphasized traditional family values, including the return of women to the home from the factory. Staton and colleagues (2004, p. 115, 117) conclude that “during the 1950s, there was enormous pressure on women to be successful housekeepers”, noting that McCall’s magazine featured advertisements for hope chests and silverware for “that special day ‘when the white graduation gown is replaced by another white gown as you walk down another aisle’.” Lane kept pace with an ad featuring a young woman in a white graduation gown being presented with a cedar chest by her parents, accompanied by the slogan, “Give her the graduation gift that gathers more gifts…” The first sentence in the body text of the ad suggests the girl graduate could be either “trousseau-gathering or just sweater-collecting.”

As part of their efforts to measure the success of the Girl Graduate Plan, Lane encouraged dealers to report back to them, supported by an incentive program offered to Lane salesmen – letters from dealers were rewarded with a $5 bonus, ‘good’ letters with $10. In April 1951, the manager of the Bradley Hall furniture store in New Castle, Indiana wrote to say that not only had they sold many Lane chests and pieces of luggage
during their first year in the program, but they had had two young couples return to the store to purchase additional furniture – one for $600 and the other for $1300 ($5,988 and $12,974 respectively in 2019 dollars). In each case, the young woman of the couple had received a miniature chest as a gift from the store (Hern, 1951). Michaels & Co. of Brooklyn, NY reported that in their first year in the program (1952), they sold more hope chests during the promotion than they had in the previous six months. Turnout at their event was reported to be, “seven times greater than that which we would regard as good average pull.” The company president concluded his letter by saying, “…we see cumulative benefits which we don’t want to be without, for we know of no other means (even at far greater cost) by which we could achieve contact in our own stores with so many girls, all of whom will so soon be furnishing their own homes” (Michaels, 1952). The General Manager of the Byrd-Walker Company of Windsor, NC, relayed to his Lane Company salesman that company records over a period of six years showed 85% of the young women given miniature chests had returned to the store to purchase furniture. In his opinion, “…this is the best advertisement for money that we possibly could spend for we believe that from mouth to ear beats all other advertising” (Byrd, 1955).

Praise was received not only from participating furniture dealers. In 1955, the Principal of Mineola High School in Mineola, NY, wrote, “Our senior girls were delighted with the beautiful jewelry chests they received … I know each girl will treasure the gift as long as she lives” (Sloat, 1955). Mirman’s Furniture of Wausau, Wisconsin sent miniature chests to the principals of schools that partnered with them, noting that this allowed them to capitalize on the relationship later, “Some of these principals have also stated they appreciated our remembering them, and as a result,
were in to see us when they wanted furniture” (Mirman, 1950). As Lane successfully expanded its product lines, moving into occasional tables in 1951, case goods in 1956 and accent pieces in 1965 (Lane Home Furnishing, 2020), the company benefited more directly from sales stimulated by its graduation gift, if former ‘girl graduates’ purchased Lane brand items when they returned to the retailer.

By 1962, the plan had grown to the extent that, between one-half and two-thirds of all girls graduating from high school in the U.S. were presented with a Lane miniature chest. It was estimated that approximately seven million girls had received them since the start of the promotion (Lane, 1962, p. 14). In 1968, the plan was supported by prime time television advertising over the ABC network. During eight consecutive days of advertising in April on American Bandstand, Peyton Place, The Dating Game, That Girl and other programs, the audience was told to consult the May 11th issue of TV Guide to determine where they could get their free Keepsake Chest. Participating stores would have their name, and the schools they covered, printed in this issue (Lane Company, 1968).

A research study by Herbert Otto and Robert Andersen (1967), entitled, “The Hope Chest and Dowry: American Custom?” provides some insight from the consumer’s perspective. In 1964, Otto and Anderson surveyed female university students, most aged between 18 and 24 years, from families with high socio-economic status. Their results showed that 38% of respondents maintained a hope chest at the time of the survey. Others indicated they had at one time maintained a hope chest but had discontinued the practice, bringing the total proportion who had been involved with the custom to 46%. For those who maintained a hope chest, 41.9% reported that the items being saved in the chest came from friends and family; 35.3% said friends, family
and their own purchases; and 22.8% indicated only one source – relatives. The authors concluded, “In a sense, the hope chest represents on a symbolical level a young woman's aspirations and on a reality level her concrete investment in the marital estate prior to its onset” (Otto and Andersen, 1967, p.19). In the 1970s, archival records show that a network of 1500 furniture dealers gave away 500,000 miniature chests per year (Hicks Furniture Company, 1972). To help secure follow-on sales, Lane offered all purchasers of Hope Chests a discount certificate worth 10% off the regular retail price of all Lane furniture purchased from the store, up to the entire purchase price of the ‘Sweetheart Chest’, not to exceed a maximum of $200 (Lane Company, n.d.)

Seeds of Change

While all of this sounds very positive, the seeds of a major change had been planted. The 8 percent of college women who had stopped keeping a hope chest in Otto’s and Andersen’s (1967) study were at the leading edge of social change [6]. By the early 1980s serious questions were being raised by Lane’s salesmen. An internal document entitled simply ‘The Girl Graduate Plan’ acknowledges these doubts. It highlighted several environmental influences that were thought to be having a detrimental effect:

…girls wait[ing] longer to marry, fewer of them remain[ing] in the home town after high school graduation, more go[ing] to college or get[ting] jobs in other cities. Of those who do marry shortly after high school, some follow their husbands to other environs. We live in a mobile society (Lane Company, 1983, p. 1).
In defense of the program, the report’s author pointed to the success enjoyed by large furniture stores who prospered from their participation in the program, arguing, “These are all keen merchants. They dominate their trading areas. The plan must work for them” (p.1). The author goes on to note that all of these companies had exclusive rights to participate in the program within their geographic markets, and that they used the plan ‘on a large scale.’ He suggests the Lane Company may have erred in its selling strategy, by seeking to limit the number of schools covered by any one dealer.

The idea behind the original strategy was that by dealing with more dealers, the company would benefit from more sales opportunities and the individual firms would incur less expense (from purchasing miniature chests for only a small number of schools). The problem with this strategy appears to have been one of scale, resulting in promotions with no impact on the local market, disappointed dealers, and dispirited salesmen. A revised sales strategy was recommended, one where the salesman would go after the best merchants in their area and offer them exclusive access to the Plan. The writer then went further, suggesting a national network of affiliated dealers, each covering a separate trading area, but collectively agreeing to offer special consideration (e.g., price reductions) to a young woman who could provide evidence of having received a chest from any store in the network. Unfortunately, the archival sources don’t tell us if attempts were made to establish such a network.

What we do know is that the Lane Company began to distance itself from the use of the term ‘hope chest’ in the late 1980s, preferring instead the term ‘cedar chest’. “Hope’ has connotations of love. It’s really outmoded to think that a woman who gets one is hoping that a white knight is going to come” (Douglas Lane, quoted in Fulford, 1989). While the company still targeted high school and college graduates as well as
women who got married in their 20s, they looked to the 60s generation as their new
target market. “They may be in their 40s now and think, yes, that’s a great piece of
furniture. The married woman might drop a hint to her husband. A woman with a
boyfriend might do the same. But then we get the woman who is not involved, someone
who is going to drop $400 on herself. We call it the self-purchase market” (Douglas
Lane, quoted in Fulford, 1989). As the Girl Graduate Plan was wound down, the
company continued to produce small boxes, but they were linked to sales promotion
programs for Disney, NASCAR, JC Penny and others (Hilkemeier in Oeltjenbruns,
2016). During the life of the Girl Graduate Plan, it is estimated that over 27 million
miniature chests were distributed as graduation gifts by the retailers involved in the
promotion campaign (Hilkemeier in Oeltjenbruns, 2016).

In 1987, the Lane Company was purchased by Interco Corporation in a hostile
takeover. In 1992, Interco’s successor, Furniture Brands International, filed for
bankruptcy. The September 11th attack on the World Trade Centre produced a minor
pickup in business for some retailers. A Chicago retailer suggested, “[I]t has to do with
family traditions…People are again interested in passing down an heirloom” (Arends,
2002). Nevertheless, the last Lane cedar chest to be manufactured in the USA was
produced in 2001, and after that, the plant at Altavista closed for good (Virginia
Museum of History & Culture, n.d.) Today, Lane Furniture (the former Action
Industries) is owned by United Furniture Industries and manufactures upholstery and
case goods [7]. The firm traces its history back to the 1912 cedar chest factory
established by Edward Lane.
Discussion

The Girl Graduate Plan was, for a time, an extremely successful sales promotion whether measured in terms of creating good will and brand loyalty or increased retail sales. What made it so and why did it eventually fail to produce the same positive results? In this section we discuss socio-economic trends that positively and negatively influenced the success of the plan.

Positive Influences

There were several longer- and medium-term socio-economic trends that made the market more receptive to the Girl Graduate Plan. These included: the trend to joint decision-making, or female-dominant from male-dominant decision making; the focus of retailers on the youth market; the growth in the number of young women attending secondary school and thus able to be reached by the promotion; a shift in consumer perceptions of who constituted an ‘influencer’ when it came to purchasing; and, the growth in the furniture market overall.

Household Purchase Decision Making.

Researchers disagree on the extent to which women have traditionally participated in and/or dominated household decision making in the United States. Gordon and McArthur (1985) suggest that for the first 250 years or so of American history, most consumption decisions were made by men. They note that, “It was not uncommon for either the husband or the father of the bride to provide a young wife with a completely furnished house” (Gordon and McArthur, 1985, p. 36), suggesting that decisions regarding the style and quality of furnishings were, thus, not made by the bride.
Witkowski (1999, p. 112), however, disagrees, proposing instead that, “as early as 200 years ago, American society already had begun to concede that the acquisition and use of domestic goods was within a woman’s sphere of responsibility”. The disagreement may be a matter of degree – the distinction between participation and domination – or the result of researchers focusing their efforts on different sources, time periods or geographies [8]. There does seem to be agreement that a rather dramatic change occurred between 1850 and 1870, with female-dominant consumer agency having come into its own by 1870 (Witkowski, 2004). A number of factors are thought to have contributed to this shift. Witkowski (2004) identifies increasing industrialization, growing urbanization and the monetization of commerce (as opposed to barter or trading of goods) as factors, along with increased literacy among American women, “an important skill for reading ads and otherwise negotiating the marketplace” (Witkowski 2004, p. 265). Gordon and McArthur (1985, p. 43) also point to the influence of the industrial revolution, suggesting that as “as men left for work outside the home, women became the chief domestic consumers.” In the post-Civil War years, as men became pre-occupied with the expansion of business away from the home it became necessary to divide labour (Witkowski, 2004) – leaving women to attend to household purchasing; “it was the duty of American men to make the money and the right of American women to spend it” (Gordon and McArthur, 1985, p. 40).

During the 1880s and 1890s, the newly coined term ‘homemaker’ appeared in the newer women’s magazines. The homemaker “was responsible for the proper management of her household as [her husband] was responsible for the direction of his business” (Gordon and McArthur, 1985, p. 41). Throughout much of the 20th century, this seems to have been the prevailing attitude. Research conducted in the mid-1950s
revealed that the selection of a new residence was most likely to be the joint responsibility of both spouses (Sharp and Mott, 149, p. 153) and that “Decisions to purchase household goods are made jointly or by wives singly” (Wolgast, 1958, p. 152). Fortunately for this research many of the previous studies investigating the role of husbands and wives in family consumption decision making used used automobile and furniture purchasing as example products (Davis, 1970; Davis and Rigaux, 1974; Ford, LaTour & Henthorne, 1995; Green et al., 1983; Sharp and Mott, 1956; Shuptrine and Samuelson, 1976; Wolgast, 1958). In late 1960s Chicago, Davis (1970) reported that the decision on where to buy furniture was made jointly by husbands and wives, although wives tended to dominate questions of when to purchase, how much to spend, and what brand, model and colour to buy. By the 1970s, Shuptrine and Samuelson (1976, p. 88) noted an increase in the sharing of power and duties between marital partners, concluding that, “Neither spouse is completely dominant in the purchase decision. Instead, each spouse is dominant in certain aspects of the purchase decision” (cf. Ford, LaTour and Henthorne, 1995). The task of information search was characterized by more role specialization – calling upon the spouse with more time available, greater competence with the specific product category or a vested interest (Davis and Rigaux, 1974). “[T]he partner who is dominant for most pre-purchase decision components [problem awareness, internal & external info search] also tends to make the real decision to purchase” (Shuptrine & Samuelson, 1976, p. 91).

Part of the genius of the Girl Graduate Plan was that it introduced a young woman to the sales staff and the brands carried by her local furniture store, at a time when she was open to discussions of product features and quality. As the testimonial letters cited earlier attest, the ‘girl graduate’ often returned to the store that had gifted
her a miniature chest with her fiancé or new husband to make furniture purchases. The Lane Hope Chest may have been the ‘Gift That Starts a Home” in the sense that what was inside the hope chest provided ‘start up’ tools for the newly married couple, but it may also have provided a couple with one of their first opportunities to engage in consumer decision making as a couple.

Targeting the Youth Market.

In their book, *Was There a Pepsi Generation Before Pepsi Discovered It?*, Hollander and Germain (1992, p. xiv) argue that many firms targeted the youth market (defined as those between 15 and 24 years of age) as early as the late 19th century and that the practice grew throughout the 20th century such that it was firmly established by the beginning of World War II. Youth were targeted for products that appealed specifically to the young (toys, amusements) (Ballard, 1919), but also because the idea of youth as ‘customers of tomorrow’ seems to have been fairly well established (Hollander and Germain, 1922; Printers’ Ink, 1924) and because purchase preferences once formed tended to be retained. [9]

The extent to which the youth market was important to furniture manufacturers like Lane can be seen in industry studies. In 1922, *Photoplay* magazine reported on a study conducted by Barton, Durstine & Osborn of retail merchants in seven USA cities. Merchants were asked what proportion of sales were accounted for by various age groups. Furniture merchants reported that those under 18 accounted for 3% of sales, those aged 18 to 30 accounted for 40% of sales, those aged 30 to 44 accounted for 36% of sales, and those over 44 years accounted for 21% of sales (Photoplay, 1922, p. 17). At the time, those aged 18 to 30 represented 23% of the USA population (Hollander
and Germain 1992, p. 14). In 1964, Ziff-Davis, publishers of *Modern Bride* magazine, pulled together data from multiple industry sources and reported that “the bridal market, comprising less than 3% of all households, accounts for a highly disproportionate share of total retail sales. For instance, the bridal market accounts for 29% of total retail sales of living room furniture [and]...30% of total sales of linens and blankets” (p. 3).

Eugene Gilbert, President of Gilbert Youth Research, a marketing research firm, conducted research during the 1950s for Lane Company, Oneida Community Ltd. and *Seventeen* magazine, all interested in targeting the youth market. With reference to the latter, he noted “In 1946 only 18.4 pages were devoted to advertising on household equipment and furnishings. In 1956 advertisers used 164.3 pages to appeal to the expanding market of young girls interested in marriage and homemaking” (Gilbert, 1957, p. 70). Gilbert commented on the ‘fact’ that women were marrying at a younger age suggesting, “Introducing the girl graduating from school to hope-chest items, for example, is almost effortlessly achieved if the promotion is geared to her special needs.”

Although Hollander and Germain (1992, p. 35) concluded that, with the exception of the *Photoplay* magazine 1922 article just mentioned, “home furnishings makers did not exploit the youth market” between 1880 and 1940, this research shows something quite different. Lane tapped into an under-served market – the young woman about to become a major consumption decision maker – and it did so in a way that updated a custom which pre-dated the company by several centuries. Although our collection of Lane advertisements is admittedly incomplete, nowhere in the text of the ads we’ve been able to download and analyze does the word ‘dowry’ appear [10].
Instead, the company positioned their products as an appropriate graduation gift, when targeting the young woman’s parents, and as a demonstration of romantic love, when targeting young couples.

*Increasing number of young women staying in school.* The increasing number of young women (17-18 years of age) attending and graduating from secondary school was crucial to the plan’s success, given that it hinged on being able to reach these consumers via their educational institution. Table 1 below shows the increase from 1910 to 1990.

Insert Table 1 about here

Increasing literacy levels in general were important for knowledgeable consumption (Witkowski, 2004), but so was specific ‘training for spending’ (Peck and Harris, 1922) that young women would have received by attending the growing number of home economics courses being offered. As Gordon and McArthur (1985, p. 42) state, “The ideal housewife, as defined by educational institutions and the media… was to know where to go to find the best information… how to buy appropriate furnishings, how to properly clothe, feed and take care of all the members of the family.” She also had to know how to preserve the family’s investments through the appropriate cleaning and storage. One home making guide recommended, “Where a cedar box can be afforded it will prove a good investment as a storage receptacle for woolen garments or furs” (The N.Y. Globe and Commercial Advertiser, 1911, p.59) at risk of damage or destruction by moths.
A new group of ‘influencers’.

Previous research has pointed out that there was a shift in the kinds of people who represented models of desirable consumer behaviour in the 1920s. In the previous century, the tastes of aristocratic, European classes set the tone. But by the 1920s, …the trend-setters were more likely to be the new rich, celebrities and movie stars. Because the lifestyle of these persons was based on money, as opposed to inherited status, it was more accessible to upwardly mobile persons (Gordon and McArthur, 1985, p. 43).

Furthermore, the consumption tastes of these new trendsetters could be learned through advertising. Lane contracted with some of these new influencers - movie stars, including Shirley Temple, and beauty contest winners, such as Miss America - to endorse their products in their advertisements and even named some models of hope chests after these stars. Figure 6 provides just one example, Rosalind Russell endorsing the Lane cedar chest, along with the Rosalind Russell model.

Growth in the home furnishings market.

Undoubtedly, the market for household furnishings grew during the period under discussion. How much it grew is somewhat difficult to assess, given the changes in statistical record keeping and differences in how ‘home furnishings’ was defined. For example, in 1924 Paul Nystrom, head of Retail Research Association, estimated total retail trade volume at $35 billion annually, of which furniture and home furnishings
accounted for $1.3 billion or 3.7 percent (cited in Fredericks, 1924, p. 75). However, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated the size of the market at $5.09 billion in 1929. Using the same definition, Census Bureau figures show the home furnishings market expanding to $44.25 billion by 1970. Of particular note in Table 2 below is the huge jump between 1940 and 1950. Presumably this takes into account changes in the economy post World War II. The sale of cedar hope chests and other ‘case goods’, such as end tables and chests of drawers, manufactured by the Lane Company would have benefitted from the expansion occurring within the larger industry.

Negative Influences

So, why did the Girl Graduate Plan eventually come to an end? It seems there were several reasons, some internal to the company, but probably the most influential forces were those occurring within the larger society. The Lane Company did experience a hostile takeover and, no doubt, this caused serious disruption. However, a successful sales promotion, especially one that had been functioning as long and as well as the Girl Graduate Plan could have been continued by the new owners. Here we highlight the important roles played by changes in gender roles and women’s perceptions of themselves and changes in legislation. Major societal changes brought about by the women’s liberation movement in terms of how young women saw themselves in their future roles as wage earners, ‘career women’ and marital partners, along with the rejection by many of traditional gender roles no doubt played a large part in the decline
of hope chest sales (Peril, 2016). The 1960s were characterized by the beginning of a new wave in the women’s liberation movement in the U.S. and by a large increase in the percentage of wives working outside the home (Shuptine and Samuelson 1976). Whereas only 20% of all women worked outside the home at the turn of the century, by 1975, the number had more than doubled, to 40% (Bartos, 1977, p. 31). Researchers pointed to an important change in attitude among young women. “In 1967, 60% of the adult women generally or definitely agreed with the statement, *A woman’s place is in the home*. In less than a decade the percentage fell to 26%... Who has changed? Data... suggest it is the younger, better educated, working woman with a higher family income” (Reynolds, Crask and Wells, 1977, pp. 38, 39).

In the mid-1970s, citing US Census data, Kerckoff (1976, p. 270) noted, “It is certain that young people are marrying at a later age than they did just a few years ago. Whereas the median age for first marriage was 22.8 for men and 20.3 for women in both 1950 and 1960, by 1974 the median age had reached 23.1 for men and 21.1 for women... although we cannot conclude that young people have given up on marriage, they at least tend to be postponing it.” Table 3 below confirms the changes in age at first marriage between 1910 and 1990. Marketing researchers also pointed to another demographic change. “While 28% of the women 20-24 years of age were single in 1950, by 1975 the figure had grown to a remarkable 40%” (Lazar and Smallwood, 1977, p. 14). It seems marriage may not have been a first priority for many young women.

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By 1977, Scanzoni (1977) reported on research which revealed a major change in the attitude of young women towards working, “Work is a means not only to earn money, but also to gain prestige and esteem or worth, and very significantly – independence and autonomy from subsidies” (p. 185). Scanzoni (1977) goes on to discuss how the predominant marital arrangement prior to the 1960s was one in which the wife was seen as a complement to her husband, but by the 1970s marriage partners saw themselves as co-providers and their work outside the home as equally significant. The trend continued into the 1980s (Green et al., 1983), with an important concomitant change. Even though married, working women now had the money to increase family consumption, “they no longer have the time to act as full time consumption managers” (Gordon and McArthur, 1985, p. 43). We see here subtle shifts within American society with respect to the role of family purchasing agent: from husband to wife/shared responsibility to a need for more definite sharing of the role.

Previous research has demonstrated that a persons’ most important possessions reflect their personal values (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988). Watson et al. (2002, p. 926) suggest that because they influence self-image, cultural values may also influence consumers’ choices of their most important possessions. Thus, in societies in which “power roles are achieved, not ascribed, through the attainment of goals that the society deems important (i.e., education, high-status occupation, and income)” (Green et al, 1983, p. 437), changing personal and societal values with respect to the relative importance of the ‘home making’ role of women may have influenced their desire to purchase or reject objects, like a hope chest, that had traditionally been closely associated with this role.
Legislative Changes.

Legislative changes may also have played a role. Palagktsooglou and colleagues (2013-14) note that the abolition of the dowry in Italy in 1968 and in Greece in 1983 had a major impact on dowry traditions. While parents still provided some linen ware and contributed towards the down payment for a house, the most public and ostentatious display became the wedding celebration itself, with large numbers of guests invited to partake in elaborate feasting. By the late 1970s, in the United States and Canada, information privacy legislation was introduced in various forms (Holvast, 2008; Solove, 2006). The Lane Company had been able to work around school board policies that restricted access to young women’s personal information, first, by appealing to class secretaries and later changing their approach by advertising the availability of the miniature cedar chests in local newspapers. However, the increased attention given to the need to protect personal information likely caused a ‘chilling effect’ and would have made the direct mail campaigns previously used much more difficult to orchestrate.

Research Contributions and Conclusion

The Girl Graduate Plan promotion of the Lane Company provides an historical example of how socio-economic forces which originally sustained a marketing strategy can, in a relatively short period of time, reverse and lead to the demise of a product line. Lane benefitted from the trend towards shared-decision making for household goods, although to them the ‘trend’ probably just appeared as a normal state of affairs, given its lengthy development time. They similarly benefitted from growth in the furniture market stimulated, especially, by the post-WWII consumption boom. They
likewise cashed in on the youth market in the sense that they realized how quickly young women graduating from high school would become the major ‘purchasing agents’ for their products. However, they focused so much of their advertising on marriage as the most meaningful moment in a young woman’s life that they were too late in recognizing shifting values and priorities. By the time Douglas Lane could comment to an interviewer (Fulford, 1989) about these changes, the company had missed the opportunity to provide products that would align with consumers’ changed and changing values.

The Girl Graduate Plan also provides an historical example of the importance of the youth market, and lends support to Hollander’s and Germain’s (1992) research regarding how the youth segment was served by marketers in the early and mid-20th century. If Gilbert could emphasize the importance of the youth market in 1948, it is even more important today. The youth market is the market in which almost all mass buying trends originate (Gilbert, 1948) and these trends are often adopted by other demographics. Not only do youths influence household purchasing (Fromm, 2018) the buying power of youth today is substantial (Packaged Facts, 2018). Generation Z (those born between 1995 and 2015), is predicted to become the largest generation of consumers by 2020, accounting $29 to $143 billion in direct spending (Fromm, 2018). They are not only the consumer of tomorrow, they are already purchasing today.

Finally, the example of the Girl Graduate Plan demonstrates how a firm can work closely with its channel partners to achieve distinctive advantage. Lane encouraged a two-way flow of information and not only stayed open to suggestions from channel partners, but often shared tactics, such as the card shown in Figure 5, throughout its network of distribution partners. Although the company began
questioning its choice of some channel partners in the 1980s, for many years, working collaboratively with and supporting furniture retailers with promotional materials worked to the advantage of both parties and contributed to Lane becoming the market share leader.

Suggestions for Further Research

There are a number of avenues for future research that appear to be promising. Lane Company President and CEO, Paul A. Levengood (2009, p. iv) expressed the view that “The history of the Lane is illustrative not only of how innovation can be introduced into a crowded market but also how even strong companies can become prey in the world of business.” The marketing literature has established a relationship between early market entry and long-term market share advantage known more commonly as ‘first mover’ or ‘pioneering’ advantage (Carpenter and Nakamoto, 1989). Further, researchers have found that while greater finance skills within the management team increased the probability of early entry, greater marketing skills favored later entry (Robinson, Fornell and Sullivan, 1992). While it appears that Lane was able to overcome any disadvantage of late entry through its value positioning – offering a good quality product at a reasonable price – and with the recognition by its President of the value of effective sales campaigns, it would be interesting to use quantitative analysis to test theories related to first mover advantage within the larger furniture industry.

During WWII, Lane targeted its advertising at servicemen, suggesting that a hope chest was the ideal gift for the ‘girl waiting at home’. At the same time, it addressed home audiences with frugality appeals, suggesting the moth-proof nature of its cedar chest would help to conserve woolens (Witkowski, 2017). A longitudinal
analysis of its magazine advertising could highlight whether shifts in messaging helped
to maintain the product’s popularity.

The intersection of gender theory with consumption research has raised some
interesting questions that could be researched in this context. For example, a
longitudinal analysis of Lane’s advertising focused on the agency of female consumers
might concentrate on the presence of themes of passivity and sexual allure (Soley &
Kurzbard, 1986), the representation of traditional versus non-traditional gender roles,
and the idealization of marriage and the heterosexual couple. Surveying Lane’s
advertising over several decades highlights how the product was re-designed to look
more ‘contemporary’, the haircuts and clothing of models was adjusted, and even
distribution methods for the miniature chest were adapted, however, the underlying
ideology of coupling and marriage as a necessary step in maturation remained
unchanged.

During our research, many people offered personal stories linked to hope
chests. Interviews might help to elucidate interpretive strategies used by consumers to
negotiate or counter-argue conventional gender roles portrayed in advertising. How did
women who desired to postpone marriage until after their career was established
respond? During our participant observation, we spoke with one woman who
 purchased a large amount of second-hand crystal, proclaiming that since she had never
formally married her partner, she did not have the chance to create a wedding registry
or experience a bridal shower. Thus, she was taking the opportunity to purchase her
‘wedding crystal’ for herself, reminiscent of Douglas Lane’s recognition of the ‘self-
purchase’ segment. Is the reclaiming or remaking of traditional wedding rituals
something that is commonly experienced by consumers today? What about gay and
lesbian consumers who may have seen Lane’s ads – did they feel excluded?

As mentioned above, this research was inspired by authors’ experience while
conducting a participant observation exercise at a local auction house. We have since
witnessed a minor resurgence in the popularity of cedar/hope chests as parents purchase
pre-owned chests to help their children, male and female, prepare for the eventual move
into their own home. Could this lead to a resurgence in consumer demand or does the
lifestyle desired by millennials negate this possibility? Out of interest, we examined
the spring/summer 2020 editions of four popular wedding magazines (Today’s Bride,
Wedding Bells, Bridal Guide and The Bridal Guide), and found very few
advertisements of home furnishings and almost no advertisements for ‘traditional’
wedding gifts such as crystal, china and silverware. Instead, it seemed like advertisers
chose to focus on the ‘experience’ of the wedding day and honeymoon. How will
millennial tastes and social norms influence the ‘bridal market’?

In conclusion, the fact remains that for many consumers the hope chest is an
item of great symbolic and emotional importance and is thus an object of material
culture worthy of scholarly attention (cf. Burke, 2000; Miller, 1997; Ward, 2017).
McAra (2017, pp. 170, 180) calls it “both a memory vessel and a prophetic device, a
trap or cage, as well as a symbol of comfort and security.” It is hoped that this paper
may inspire other researchers to ‘travel’ into the past to examine the history of products
which are not popular today but may have played very important roles in the lives of
consumers. Similarly, some products may have experienced a period of lower demand
but be experiencing a resurgence. These items too may provide an opportunity for
historical research. [11]
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Endnotes

[1] The Cairo Geniza is a collection of almost 300,000 manuscript fragments housed in the geniza, or storeroom, of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo, Egypt. It has been described as the largest and most diverse collection of medieval manuscripts in the world, providing a detailed picture of the economic and cultural life of North Africa and the Middle Mediterranean, particularly during the 10th to 13th centuries.

[2] The Caswell-Runyan Company was founded by J.W. Caswell and Winfred Runyan. Winfred Runyan died of a heart attack on December 25, 1942. J.W. Caswell died one month later, on January 25, 1943 (Huntington County Honours, 2016). In spite of having twice refitted its facilities to serve war time needs, and expanding its product line to include radio and later television cabinets, stereo speakers and juke boxes, the company never stopped making cedar chests (Jones, 2018). Caswell-Runyan was eventually bought out; its machinery and inventory were liquidated in 1956. The plant sat empty for several years and was destroyed by fire in June, 1962 (Huntington County TAB, 2010; The History of Caswell-Runyan Company, 1924).

[3] Especially during WWII, the company targeted servicemen in an effort to persuade them to purchase hope chests for their sweetheart ‘back home’. Lane Box historian, Chad Hilkemeier reported that he found evidence in the Lane Company archives to indicate Lane experimented with expanding the Plan to include male graduates in 1978, but the expansion was not successful. I could not find this evidence during my visits to the archives. (See Hilkemeier’s blog, Lane Cedar Box, at: https://lanecedarbox.wordpress.com/2018/06/23/tidbits-from-lane-archives/)


[5] Conversion to 2019 dollars was calculated using Friedman’s Inflation Calculator available at: westegg.com/inflation/

[6] One of the reviewers helpfully noted that his wife, while receiving a miniature chest upon her high school graduation in 1973, “pooh-poohed the idea of getting a full-size hope chest”, as did her friends. It seems from the 1960s through 1980s the idea of the hope chest definitely fell out of vogue with its primary target audience.

[7] In 1972, Lane purchased Action Industries, a reclining chair company, located in Tupelo, Mississippi, which later changed its name to Lane Furniture (Lane Home Furnishings, 2020).

[8] Witkowskki used visual data (paintings) for his 2004 paper, but primarily textual sources (diaries, letters, sermons, probate inventories, newspaper advertisements, business records, trade cards as well as genre paintings) for his 1999 paper, focused on the 1750 to 1840 period. Witkowski’s 1999 paper referenced the work of John Demos (1970) who focused on Plymouth colony, while Gordon and McArthur (1985) examined popular books and magazines published across the U.S. during the 1800 to 1920 period.

[9] Later research would support this observation. For example, (Fannin, 1984) reported that 30 percent of females between the ages of 20 and 24 still use the first cosmetic brand tried as teenagers, and Holbrook and Schindler (1989) found that regardless of current age, popular music heard at the age of 24 remains the most-liked popular music through an individual’s lifetime.

[10] As part of our research we created a collection of images downloaded from websites, google searches, online newspaper and magazine archives, etc. sorted by manufacturer. While this collection is not complete, in that we cannot be sure we have collected every advertisement ever used, we felt it was comprehensive enough to give us a good sense of the direction of Lane’s advertising.

[11] Thank-you to one of the reviewers for suggesting these ideas for future research.
Figure 1. Early cedar chest with metal banding

Figure 2. Lane miniature chest.

Source: ebay.com
Figure 3. Invitation mailed to high school seniors, circa 1938.

**Figure 4.** Invitation mailed to high school seniors, circa 1938.

Source: Lane Company Records, 1907-2003, Mss3 L4532 FA2 Series 5.9, Lane Girl Graduate Plan, ca. 1936-1978, Folder 2673, Virginia Museum of History and Culture. Used with permission.
Figure 5. Lane Choose-a-Chest Card

Source: Mss3 L2453a FA2 Lane Company Records, Series 5.9 Oversized Lane Girl Graduate Plan, Virginia Historical Society Archives. Used with permission.
Figure 6. Rosalind Russell Endorsement and Cedar Chest Model

Source: Mss3 L2453a FA2 Lane Company Records, Series 5.9 Lane Girl Graduate Plan, ca. 1936-1978; Folder 2673 Advertising ca. 1936-1996; Virginia Historical Society Archives. Used with permission.
Table 1. Population and Education Trends: 1910 to 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total USA Population</th>
<th>Population of 17 yr olds</th>
<th>Percent of 17 yr olds</th>
<th>Total Number of High School Graduates</th>
<th>Number of Male High School Graduates</th>
<th>Percent of Male High School Graduates</th>
<th>Number of Female High School Graduates</th>
<th>Percent of Female High School Graduates</th>
<th>High School Graduates per 100 17 yr olds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>92,407</td>
<td>1,814</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>106,461</td>
<td>1,908</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>123,077</td>
<td>2,296</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>132,122</td>
<td>2,403</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>1,221</td>
<td>579</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>643</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>152,271</td>
<td>2,034</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>571</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>180,671</td>
<td>2,672</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>1,858</td>
<td>895</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>963</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>205,052</td>
<td>3,757</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>2,889</td>
<td>1,430</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1,459</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>77</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>227,225</td>
<td>4,262</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>3,043</td>
<td>1,491</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1,552</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>71</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>249,464</td>
<td>3,574</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>2,586</td>
<td>1,285</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1,302</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Expenditures on Household Furnishings, 1909-1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>G478*</th>
<th>G434†</th>
<th>G709‡</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>1,229</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>2,841</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>3,698</td>
<td>5,090</td>
<td>16,571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>4,161</td>
<td>4,891</td>
<td>22,581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>16,571</td>
<td></td>
<td>44,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>20,700</td>
<td>36,700</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Notes: *during this time period, expenditures for furniture and furnishings were kept separate from expenditures for appliances and operating costs, such as fuel, lighting, electricity, water, etc.

†during this time period, expenditures included household furniture, equipment and supplies

‡during this time period household furniture included mattresses and box springs, but not ‘soft’ furnishings, e.g. textiles, or equipment, e.g., brooms, brushes, etc.
### Table 3. Median age (in years) at first marriage: 1910 to 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/marital.html](https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/marital.html)
Abstract

Purpose – The paper presents a history of the marketing of hope chests in the United States, focusing in particular on one very successful sales promotion, the Lane Company’s Girl Graduate Plan. The Girl Graduate Plan is placed within its historical context in order to better understand the socioeconomic forces that contributed to its success for a considerable period of time but ultimately led to decreased demand for the product.

Design/methodology/approach – The history of the marketing of hope or marriage chests draws upon primary sources located in the Lane Company Collection at the Virginia Museum of History and Culture. Secondary sources and images of advertising culled from Google image searches provided additional insight into the operation of the company’s Girl Graduate Plan.

Findings – While the Lane Company benefitted in the form of increased sales, profit and brand awareness and loyalty from prevailing socio-economic trends which supported the success of its Girl Graduate Plan, including targeting the youth market, this promotion ultimately fell victim to the company’s failure to stay abreast of social changes related to the role of women in society.

Research limitations – Like all historical research, this research is only as complete as the records upon which it is based.

Practical implications – This history investigates how one manufacturer, a leader in the North American industry, collaborated with furniture dealers to promote their products to young women who were about to become the primary decision makers for the purchase of home furnishings. As such, it provides an historical example of the power of successful collaboration with channel partners.

Social implications – The hope chest as an object of material culture can be found in many cultures worldwide. It has variously represented a woman’s coming of age, the love relationship between a couple, and a family’s social status. It has also served as a woman’s store of wealth. This history details how changing social values influenced the popularity of the hope chest tradition in the United States.

Originality/value – The history of the marketing of hope chests is an area that has not been seriously considered in consumption histories or in histories of marketing practices to date, in spite of the continuing sentimental appeal for many consumers.

Keywords: Hope chests, glory boxes, dowry, cedar chest, history of marketing practices, Lane Company, Girl Graduate Plan

Article Classification: Research Paper
‘The Gift that Starts a Home’: Marketing of the hope chest in the United States

Introduction

For many young women, receiving a chest in which to store items to furnish a future home was once a rite of passage. Known as a ‘hope chest’ in North America, a ‘glory box’ in Australia, a ‘bottom drawer’ in the United Kingdom, and a dowry or marriage chest in other regions, these objects of material culture were significant not only as a symbol of coming-of-age and romantic love, but also as markers of social status, for young women and their families. Further, in times and countries when women were legally denied the right to own property, “the bridal chest and its contents were often the only things a woman owned” (Schleining, 2001, p. 43), acting as a store of wealth. The hope chest has been called the “crossed fingers of the furniture world” (Fulford, 1989), and “a place for precious anticipations” (Lolley and Nachsen, 2007) in recognition of the wished-for future life the objects it holds represent. Although few young women today are familiar with the consumer practice of keeping a hope chest, there were once many companies manufacturing and marketing hope chests throughout the United States. This research is part of a larger project examining the history of the marketing and consuming of household goods. In this paper, we look at the Lane Company’s Girl Graduate Plan, a sales promotion campaign which was extremely successful in promoting brand awareness and loyalty for the manufacturer, and in driving sales of household furnishings for the retailers who participated. The miniature chests at the heart of the promotion became very popular with the target audience – young women about to graduate from high school. The company’s advertising and sales campaigns initially tapped into but ultimately fell victim to larger economic and social trends.
A Brief History of the Hope or Marriage Chest

While our research focuses on marketing practices and consumer culture associated with the hope chest in the United States, it is important to an understanding of the historical context to acknowledge that the hope chest, in its various forms, has been a feature of many cultures over time.

Middle East

Among the more than 300,000 documents surviving from the Cairo Geniza [1] are numerous marriage contracts, spanning from the ninth to 19th centuries, almost all of which refer to a dowry chest. Two forms of chests are discussed, the *muqaddama*, which typically contained the bride’s personal possessions, and the *sunduq*, which came in matching pairs and contained other goods (Goitein, 1983).

[T]he *muqaddama*, the bridal trunk…contained the wife’s lingerie and main personal effects. The term appears in almost every complete trousseau list, usually, at the end… *Muqaddama* means put first, leading, probably because the donkey carrying it headed the procession that transported the outfit from the bride’s domicile to that of her future husband… In life, a wife’s most cherished possessions were properly placed in the bridal trunk (Goitein, 1983, p. 129-130).

These chests were traditionally made of wood and were decorated as richly as a family’s means would allow. They were typically fairly large and rectangular, with a flat top, to facilitate later use as a bench or table. They were sometimes constructed with a drawer at the bottom, or with a smaller compartment inside the lid, for holding valuables. A richly decorated dowry chest continued to serve as a status symbol, even
after the bride reached her new home. “Across the Middle East, where houses were traditionally sparsely furnished, such a dowry chest would often be placed in the woman’s area, where it could quietly continue to announce its status and serve as an item of practical furniture” (Stone, 2015, p. 25).

Germany

In Germany, during the 13th to 15th centuries, small decorative chests, made from various materials, were used as courting gifts. A man hoping to court a woman would commission a box and present it to her as a token of affection. Later known as minnekästchen, these boxes were often decorated on the sides, top and inside with verses and “depictions of couples talking, symbols, and animals, occasionally scenes of an erotic kind – indicating a function as love gifts” (Wurst, 2003, p. 98). Measuring approximately 8.3 cm in height by 22.5 cm in width and 9.9 cm in depth (3.25 inches x 8.85 inches x 3.9 inches), it is thought they would have been used to store tokens of affection, such as love letters or jewelry (Walters, 2012; Wurst, 2003). Their size would have limited their storage capacity, making them somewhat different from the muqaddama, which held a bride’s trousseau, or later hope chests, which were large enough to hold household goods. Walters (2012, p. 10) suggests that chests of this sort would have been kept in the personal chamber in the home, close to the owner, since they were intended as private pieces. Although originating in a courtly context, by the late Middle Ages, the emerging middle class had adopted their use (Wurst, 2003). Use of the minnekästchen seems to have ended in the late fifteenth century, along with the custom of the bridal procession (Wurst, 2003).
In Italy, chests originally known as *forzieri*, but more commonly discussed as *cassone* today, were placed in halls, corridors and bedrooms and used to hold household goods (Walters, 2012). The custom seems to have been that two large, elaborately painted wedding chests would accompany the bride on her way through the city to the home of her future husband. These large chests contained the bride’s dowry and her marriage gifts, including sheets, shirts and other linen goods made by the bride and the female members of her family (Gloag, 1966). *Forzieri* would often be made in pairs, with one intended for the groom and the other for the bride (Baskins, 1998).

In addition to their practical use for storage, *forzieri* also served a symbolic purpose, reflecting the status of the bride, especially when put on display during the wedding ceremony. Thus, they were often considered to be the most valuable and most treasured of the gifts given to the bride (Walters, 2012). The father of the bride would commission the creation of the *forzieri* months in advance of the wedding. The artwork painted on the exterior of the box would be quite elaborate, usually featuring a love scene or the coats of arms of the families being joined. The pieces could be identical in decoration, or complementary, with the first featuring one half of a scene and the second completing the picture (Baskins, 1998; Walters, 2012). Since a pair of painted chests could cost as much as the annual salary of a skilled labourer, the acquisition and use of marriage chests was restricted to the elite (Baskins, 1998). Historian Richard Goldthwaite (1993) argues that an increase in both the number of wealthy families in Italy’s major cities, between 1300 and 1600, and the wealth held by those families, was reflected in increased demand for ‘art’, broadly defined to include consumer goods such a decorated wedding chests.
The glory box tradition in Australia was most prominent from the 1930s to the 1950s, according to researcher Moya McFadzean (2010), who uses the glory box tradition to examine changing consumption patterns, the interplay between handmade and mass produced goods, shifting notions of ‘essential’ versus ‘luxury’ items, and the impact of waged labour on the consumption activity of unmarried women. She identifies working- and lower middle-class Australian women of British ancestry as the primary participants in and mediators of the glory box tradition in Australia during this time period, although other researchers have established that the collection of items for a daughter’s dowry box was also extremely important for Italian and Greek immigrant families who settled in New South Wales and South Australia, post WWII (Grace and Gandolfo, 2011; Palakgtsoglou et al., 2013-14; Tully, 1962). In contrast to some of the examples discussed above, glory boxes, during this period of time were typically purchased, mass-produced items of furniture.

There is likewise evidence of a shift in how the contents of the glory box were produced. Traditional Italian and Greek customs dictated the number and type of items that were to be included in a young woman’s dowry, with some regional variations. Palakgtsoglou and colleagues (2013-14) reported that for both Italian and Greek families, 6 to 24 double sheets and matching pillowcases, 6 to 12 towels, 12 tea towels, tablecloths, napkins, blankets for summer and winter, and 1 or 2 quilts were seen as the necessary complement of goods to equip the future household. Some items and fabrics had to be purchased, and thus, required a certain level of family affluence. However, creating many of the items was seen to be part of a young woman’s training for her
future role as wife and mother. The quality of the items she produced would reflect on her abilities as a seamstress and specialist in needlework (Tence and Triarico, 1999). Thus it is perhaps not surprising that within the Italian-Australian community described by Tully (1962), the tradition of hand-crafted lace, embroidery and drawn-thread work remained a matter of community and individual pride. However, from the 1950s onward it became more common to purchase at least some of the items (Palakgtsoglou et al., 2013-14). Contents of the glory box during this time period reflect the shift in the roles of women.

Australian women who owned glory boxes were simultaneously producers and consumers, for they often themselves made the things that they later consumed, but they also consumed the produce of others (both the mass produced and the handmade), and they labored to pay for the items they purchased (McFadzean, 2010 p. 158).

As women entered the paid labour force, they both gained the financial wherewithal to purchase, and lost the time to hand produce, many of the items for their glory boxes.

The process of collecting items was pleasurable for many women, who saw their glory box as the start of their home and saw themselves as contributing to a future economic and romantic partnership. The selection of items for a glory box was an exercise in taste, and for some, an aspirational purchase which would hopefully lead to an improvement in their standard of living. Highlighting that the practice of collecting items to be kept in a glory box involved planning, saving, and the deferral of pleasure, McFadzean (2010, p. 158) argues that delayed gratification “for a future married state was the very essence of the desire the glory box embodied as a commodity.”

Importantly, McFadzean (2010, p. 167) also points out that even though the ‘outcome’
of a glory box project was socially sanctioned and defined (heterosexual marriage), “[t]he glory box was their property, over which they had ultimate control”.

Thus we see that across time and cultures, wooden chests of various sizes were part of courtship and marriage rituals. These chests and some of their contents were often given as gifts and were cherished and highly prized possessions. In the process of filling the chest, bonds among female members of the family were strengthened, as mothers showed daughters how to perform the creative tasks necessary to make fine lace, linen garments, etc. Extended family members would also contribute, by gifting a young woman with household items on special occasions, like birthdays. As women entered the work force, a shift occurred – items for their hope chests, and indeed the hope chests themselves, were increasingly purchased rather than homemade. We turn now to a discussion of the hope chest tradition in the United States.

The Hope Chest in the United States

As in the Australian example just discussed, immigrants to the U.S. brought many of their traditions associated with bridal or marriage chests with them. In his history of ‘treasure chests’, Schleining (2001) mentions, for example, the brightly painted chests of both the Scandinavians, who settled in the northern Midwest, and the German- and Swiss-born settlers in Pennsylvania. In the United States, the terms ‘hope chest’, ‘marriage chest’ and ‘cedar chest’ are often used interchangeably since many marriage or hope chests were wooden chests lined with cedar. In the early years of the settlement of the U.S., the marriage chest was often made by the bride’s father or her fiancé, rather than commissioned from a craftsman, as the earlier Italian forzieri were. Frequently given as a gift from her parents, a bride’s marriage chest was often customized with
her initials and wedding date painted on the front. While Schleining (2001, p. 45) argues that “the bridal chest tradition crossed economic as well as cultural boundaries and was found in all levels of society”, the quality of workmanship and materials used in construction could vary widely, reflecting a family’s socioeconomic status.

In the spring of 1907, the Caswell-Runyan Company [2] opened a factory in Huntington, Indiana. There appears to be agreement across sources that this was the first commercial concern in the U.S. to manufacture cedar chests (Huntington County Honors, 2018; Huntington County TAB, 2010). By 1925, Caswell-Runyan’s workforce of 30 to 40 people had expanded to 700 and it claimed to be the largest cedar chest manufacturer in the world (Huntington County Historical Society, p. 132). Its cedar chests were being sold across the U.S., the cedar chest having become recognized as a ‘standard piece’ of household furniture (The History of the Caswell-Runyan Company, 1924; Wikicollecting, 2015).

Supporting the idea that the hope chest had become a household ‘standard’, is a brochure entitled ‘The Hope Chest’, published by Royal Society (manufacturers of embroidery floss) in 1917. The brochure suggested that, “it is not right that a bride bring nothing to the new home but her own charming self and her apparel” (p. 3). It went on to argue that a marriage between equals was the most appropriate way to think of marriage, and thus it should not be only the man who brought ‘earthly goods’ into the union, but the young woman should also do her share towards equipping the new home. The brochure then provided detailed instructions on the use of monograms, presumably stitched using Royal Society embroidery floss and stored in the hope chest. Here we see introduced the idea of men and women as equal partners – something we
will return to later – plus the necessity for a young woman to start preparing for marriage by accumulating household goods.

Although some sources suggest that the Caswell-Runyan company did not use advertising to promote its products (Wikicollecting, 2015); ads featuring the company’s ‘treasure chests’ have been found as part of our research. Thus, it seems likely that while they did not use print advertising to promote the product initially, they did adopt this marketing practice eventually, positioning their product as a place to store one’s treasure.

The Lane Company

The Lane Company of Altavista, Virginia began manufacturing cedar chests in 1912, eventually taking over from Caswell-Runyan as the largest manufacturer of cedar chests in the world (Lane, 1963, p. 11) [3]. Edward Lane’s father got the idea to enter the cedar chest market from another businessman whose furniture manufacturing business had set up in Altavista and gone bankrupt. Apparently, the man told him that if he’d been able to keep manufacturing cedar chests, he might have been able to avoid bankruptcy since they were his most profitable item. Although Edward had no previous business experience and didn’t know what a cedar chest was, his father turned the business over to him to run. Since the family wasn’t sure this new cedar chest business would be a success, they didn’t want to use the Lane name, calling the business Standard Red Cedar Chest Company instead.

At the time Lane set up shop, there were already 25 or 30 manufacturers making chests in sizeable numbers, including the aforementioned Caswell-Runyan of Huntington, Indiana; Roos Manufacturing of Chicago; Ferguson Brothers
Manufacturing of Hoboken, New Jersey; Klein Brothers of Long Island City, NY; West Branch Novelty Company of Milton, Pennsylvania and the Piedmont Red Cedar Chest Company of Statesville, North Carolina (Lane, 1963, p. 48). Piedmont Red Cedar was purchasing chests from Caswell-Runyan and selling via a direct-to-consumer model, facilitated by a small, one-column ad in the Saturday Evening Post.

The Lane Company, while operating as the Standard Red Cedar Chest Company, was quite production oriented. Their plan called for them to manufacture 10 to 15 chests per day, although they did not know at the time if they could sell that many (Lane, 1963, p. 26). In order to establish themselves against their competition, including the industry leading Caswell-Runyan, the company focused on making “as good a product as we could and …sell(ing) it just as cheap as possible” (Lane, 1963, p. 48). By 1930, the plant was making between 250 and 300 chests per day.

While Lane chests would later be distinguished by a special hidden corner joint, “a locking miter that slides together [and] provides great strength and security” (Schleining, 2001, p. 54), during the first 10 years of manufacture, the company’s product was crude by comparison. Their early chests were made from solid red cedar, nailed together (Lane, 1963, p. 45). Metal bands were riveted along the edges and around the body of the chest.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Referring to their product as a ‘Hall and Bedroom Chest’, the company’s ads suggested that, “A Cedar chest is the one piece of useful furniture no home should be without.” The ad copy emphasized the versatility and elegance of their products, saying, “Our
Standard Chests are not built for usefulness alone. They are handsome enough to adorn the most elegant homes” (Lane, 1963 p. 57). Ads targeted at ‘professional, business [and] college men’, suggested “the Standard Chest is the most artistic piece of furniture a business or literary man can secure for his den or office” (Lane, 1963, p. 57).

Over the years, the company experimented with both materials and production methods to improve manufacturing efficiency and product quality. The development of an air-tight dust-proof lid increased the effectiveness of the chest for storage and the removal of the metal bands in favour of polished round corners enhanced its looks (Lane, 1963, p. 58). By the time Helen Hughes Lane wrote the history of the company’s first 50 years in business in 1963, chests were being constructed with an interior core of ¾ inch red cedar and encased in a wide variety of hardwood veneers, to help them fit in with contemporary décor. Chests were tested for their ‘aroma-tightness’, allowing the firm to offer an insurance policy of up to $1000 for mothproofing (Lane, 1963, p. 11).

In the early years, the company did not have its own sales force, relying instead on commission furniture, or window and door, salesmen to represent them. The results were uneven, at best. The company tried partnering with a mail-order firm, but that also did not work out. Edward Lane himself brought in early sales orders, in addition to his managerial duties. During one sales trip that had been very unsuccessful, Lane came up with an idea for a store window display which would use cedar shaving, cedar logs, small green cedar trees, cedar chests and display cards which described and showed the many uses of cedar chests. Armed with my idea… I left the hotel and went out and sold twenty-five chests to a dealer who had already turned me down. On the strength of this success, I doubled back to
Buffalo, where I’d previously had a refusal, and sold fifty chests… That lesson stayed with me through fifty years of being in business… you’ve got to sell with an idea! (Lane, 1963, p. 52).

In addition to his revelation regarding ‘selling with an idea’, Lane became convinced that they must develop a well-trained sales force to represent their product exclusively. Before this could occur, World War I intervened; the government placed embargoes on freight deemed non-essential, including cedar chests. Rather than go out of business, the company secured a government contract to make pine ammunition boxes.

After WWI, the company resumed manufacturing cedar chests. In 1922, the company experimented with its first national advertising campaign, putting up billboards on the Pennsylvania and B&O railroads between Washington and New York. Lane (1962) reported that dealer reaction to the billboards was good, so the firm decided to expand the campaign into newspaper advertising, running ads prior to Christmas in Richmond, Washington, Baltimore and Philadelphia, their biggest distribution points. The firm asked N.W. Ayer to prepare the ads.

…Ayer recommended that two one-half pages in black and white could be had in the Saturday Evening Post, the mass publication of that day, for the same amount of money involved in running of the proposed local newspaper ads. They also suggested we rename our firm The Lane Company. So it was, that The Lane Company, as we have been called ever since, embarked on a program of national advertising to bring our product to the attention of the consumer public through mass media (Lane, 1962, p. 13).

Lane would later estimate that between 1922 and 1962, the company spent “in the neighborhood of $20 million on advertising and promotion”, crediting this with the fact
that “a Lane cedar chest ranks along with the fraternity pin and engagement ring as a
token of serious romantic intentions” (1962, p. 13). Along with suggesting a name
change for the company, Ayer was influential in partially re-positioning the product in
terms of ‘romance’. While the company’s ads continued to emphasize benefits such as
protecting woolen clothing from moths, the tag line ‘The Gift That Starts a Home’
“endeared the company to the public” (Gilmour Stoner, 2009, p. 5) and allowed them
to target both men and women in their advertising [4] [5]. In addition to its adoption of
advertising techniques, the company began organizing and training a “hard-hitting,
exclusive sales force, experienced in the techniques of promotion” (Lane, 1962, p. 13).
It is this sales orientation that, perhaps, most distinguishes the company from this point
forward.

The Girl Graduate Plan

One of the most successful sales promotion ideas the company adopted had them
targeting what they felt was an untapped market – the young woman graduating from
high school. The idea behind the plan was to foster brand loyalty early in a young
woman’s life because “the woman of the house was seen as the decision maker in the
purchase of home furnishings” (Gilmour Stoner, 2009, p. 6). In the 1930s, 50 percent
of all female high school graduates were married within 18 months of graduation and,
therefore, were likely to need furniture (Gilmour Stoner, 2009). Lane Company
employees had for some time been making little miniature cedar chests as a hobby or
‘end of day’ project. Many of these chests were given as gifts to female family members
and became very popular. Most of them had a lock and key and, thus, were used as
jewelry boxes or to save love letters, recalling the minnekästchen discussed above. The
company’s sales manager, J. Arthur Krauss, developed an idea using these small
miniatures which became what Edward Lane (1962, p. 14) described as “one of the
greatest promotionary plans the furniture industry has ever had.”

Krauss initially had difficulty convincing the company’s Vice President and
Treasurer of the plan’s viability, so he had the miniature chests manufactured by an
outside firm. They paid a small amount for the miniatures ($1.35 in 1922 dollars) and
resold them to furniture dealers. Initially, the company tried appealing to local
newspapers to secure their assistance in compiling a list of graduates. The response
was reported to be “very poor and in some cases … very sarcastic” (Krauss, 1929).
Many newspapers insisted that the company pay for advertising space. Next, the
company sent letters out to school secretaries in all cities with a population of more
than 100,000 and to class secretaries in smaller cities and towns, advising them that
they would give a miniature chest, free of charge, to each young woman graduating
that year, if they could obtain a list of their names. Krauss noted that response to this
request was “very successful”. While many school secretaries, especially those in
larger cities, replied that providing such a list was against Board of Education policy
(Krauss, 1929), class secretaries in medium-sized and smaller towns responded quite
favorably. Each young woman whose name was received by the company was mailed
a letter or brochure which enclosed a card she could take to her local furniture store
and exchange for a miniature chest. The program appears to have been a winner from
the start. Manufacturing of the miniatures was moved in house, with the company
eventually devoting an entire division to their manufacture. In 1929, it was credited as
a major source of the company’s success; a night shift had to be added just to catch up
with demand (Lane, 1929).
The Girl Graduate Plan officially launched in 1930, and with this came years of close collaboration among distribution channel partners. In 1934, there was some concern that the promotional program had run its course, with very few dealers buying in. However, in 1935, the plan was reported to be working well. Its decline in 1934 was attributed to “business conditions” and the fact that “salesmen were not pushing it as well as they were [in 1935]” (Lane, 1935). In 1936, the plan was even more successful. This was attributed to three factors: 1) producing a better miniature chest; 2) burning the name of the dealer into the lid of the miniature (literally, branding the piece); and 3) mailing a follow-up letter to girl graduates in the fall of the year (Lane 1936). Sales materials for 1937 designed to recruit more furniture dealers to join the Plan included endorsements from other dealers across the US, extolling the good will the plan had engendered with ‘the brides of tomorrow’ and their parents. The booklet entitled, ‘Win the Brides of 1938 Now! With the new Improved Girl Graduate Plan’, emphasized in large, bold letters, “Statistics show that 28% of the girls who graduate in 1937 will be married by July, 1938 – three-fourths by 1940!” (Lane Company, 1938). Dealers purchased the miniature chests at cost price and were responsible for providing the names of girl graduates. Lane bore the cost of postage, imprinting the invitation with the furniture dealer’s name and address, providing a special window display and two brochures, one to accompany the congratulatory letter/invitation mailed in the spring and a second sent as a follow-up mailing in December. Figures 3 and 4 provide an example of the brochure mailed out to young women.
Dealers were encouraged to make the occasion of receiving the miniature chest a festive one by hanging school pennants behind the Lane Cedar Chests on display in their stores and wrapping the miniature gift chests in cellophane matching the local school colours. Many dealers provided food and drink for the young women and their parents; some hosted fashion shows or hired DJs to play music during the event. The program developed over time, often by sharing and implementing suggestions made by one dealer across the whole network. For example, a dealer came up with the idea of having the young woman write down the style of hope chest she liked best on a card where she also provided her parents’ names and address. The card could then be used by the retailer’s sales personnel to follow-up with her parents, suggesting the selected hope chest would make an ideal graduation gift. Lane began producing these cards, and inserted them into the miniature chests (see Figure 5).

The brochures sent to the young women also became more comprehensive over time. In addition to providing tips for how to pick a hope chest, they detailed what *Good Housekeeping* magazine recommended as ‘inventory’ for a well-stocked hope chest, as can be seen in Figure 3, an invitation from circa 1938. The inventory bears a striking similarity to traditional Italian and Greek customs discussed earlier – several sets of
bedsheets, blankets, spreads, multiple bath and kitchen towels, and table linens, with the noted addition of coloured linens in addition to the traditional white.

Consumer practices in the US in the 1940s also paralleled those discussed above from other countries:

Parents bought hope chests when their daughters were about fourteen-years-old. At the same time the family began collecting items to store in the chest. Mothers, daughters, godmothers and aunts crocheted, embroidered, or tatted linens, anticipating the day the girl would marry. Years of labor went into handcrafted goods essential for dream homes (Baldino, 2013).

When young girls got together, it was not uncommon for them to take items out of their chest to look at while they talked about what their imagined future married life would be like. The hope chest would accompany the young women into the marital home, providing storage in homes which did not have many closets at the time (Baldino, 2013).

The 1950s ushered in a new era of mass consumption, “A full employment economy and a shortage of consumer goods meant that at the end of the war the general public had disposable income and the urge to spend it” (Staton, Fine-Meyer and Gibson, 2004, p. 115). Women’s magazines of the time emphasized traditional family values, including the return of women to the home from the factory. Staton and colleagues (2004, p. 115, 117) conclude that “during the 1950s, there was enormous pressure on women to be successful housekeepers”, noting that McCall’s magazine featured advertisements for hope chests and silverware for “that special day ‘when the white graduation gown is replaced by another white gown as you walk down another aisle’”. Lane kept pace with an ad featuring a young woman in a white graduation
gown, being presented with a cedar chest by her parents, accompanied by the slogan, “Give her the graduation gift that gathers more gifts…” The first sentence in the body text of the ad suggests the girl graduate could be either “trousseau-gathering or just sweater-collecting.”

As part of their efforts to measure the success of the Girl Graduate Plan, Lane encouraged dealers to report back to them, supported by an incentive program offered to Lane salesmen – letters from dealers were rewarded with a $5 bonus, ‘good’ letters with $10. In April 1951, the manager of the Bradley Hall furniture store in New Castle, Indiana wrote to say that not only had they sold many Lane chests and pieces of luggage during their first year in the program, but they had had two young couples return to the store to purchase additional furniture – one for $600 and the other for $1300. In each case, the young woman of the couple had received a miniature chest as a gift from the store (Hern, 1951). Michaels & Co. of Brooklyn, NY reported that in their first year in the program (1952), they sold more hope chests during the promotion than they had in the previous six months. Turnout at their event was reported to be, “seven times greater than that which we would regard as good average pull.” The company president concluded his letter by saying, “…we see cumulative benefits which we don’t want to be without, for we know of no other means (even at far greater cost) by which we could achieve contact in our own stores with so many girls, all of whom will so soon be furnishing their own homes” (Michaels, 1952). The General Manager of the Byrd-Walker Company of Windsor, NC, relayed to his Lane Company salesman that company records over a period of six years showed 85% of the young women given miniature chests had returned to the store to purchase furniture. In his opinion, “…this
is the best advertisement for money that we possibly could spend for we believe that
from mouth to ear beats all other advertising” (Byrd, 1955).

Praise was received not only from participating furniture dealers. In 1955, the
Principal of Mineola High School in Mineola, NY, wrote, “Our senior girls were
delighted with the beautiful jewelry chests they received … I know each girl will
treasure the gift as long as she lives” (Sloat, 1955). Mirman’s Furniture of Wausau,
Wisconsin sent miniature chests to the principals of schools that partnered with them,
noting that this allowed them to capitalize on the relationship later, “Some of these
principals have also stated they appreciated our remembering them, and as a result,
were in to see us when they wanted furniture” (Mirman, 1950). As Lane successfully
expanded its product lines, moving into occasional tables in 1951, case goods in 1956
and accent pieces in 1965 (Lane Home Furnishing, 2020), the company benefited more
directly from sales stimulated by its graduation gift, if former ‘girl graduates’
purchased Lane brand items when they returned to the retailer.

By 1962, the plan had grown to the extent that, between one-half and two-thirds
of all girls graduating from high school in the U.S. were presented with a Lane
miniature chest. It was estimated that approximately seven million girls had received
them since the start of the promotion (Lane, 1962, p. 14). In 1968, the plan was
supported by prime time television advertising over the ABC network. During eight
consecutive days of advertising in April on American Bandstand, Peyton Place, The
Dating Game, That Girl and other programs, the audience was told to consult the May
11th issue of TV Guide to determine where they could get their free Keepsake Chest.
Participating stores would have their name, and the schools they covered, printed in
this issue (Lane Company, 1968).
A research study by Herbert Otto and Robert Andersen (1967), entitled, “The Hope Chest and Dowry: American Custom?” provides some insight from the consumer’s perspective. In 1964, Otto and Anderson surveyed female university students, most aged between 18 and 24 years, from families with high socio-economic status. Their results showed that 38% of respondents maintained a hope chest at the time of the survey. Others indicated they had at one time maintained a hope chest but had discontinued the practice, bringing the total proportion who had been involved with the custom to 46%. For those who maintained a hope chest, 41.9% reported that the items being saved in the chest came from friends and family; 35.3% said friends, family and their own purchases; and 22.8% indicated only one source – relatives. The authors concluded, “In a sense, the hope chest represents on a symbolical level a young woman's aspirations and on a reality level her concrete investment in the marital estate prior to its onset” (Otto and Andersen, 1967, p.19).

In the 1970s, archival records show that a network of 1500 furniture dealers gave away 500,000 miniature chests per year (Hicks Furniture Company, 1972). To help secure follow-on sales, Lane offered all purchasers of Hope Chests a discount certificate worth 10% off the regular retail price of all Lane furniture purchased from the store, up to the entire purchase price of the ‘Sweetheart Chest’, not to exceed a maximum of $200 (Lane Company, n.d.) While all of this sounds very positive, the seeds of a major change had been planted. The 8 percent of college women who had stopped keeping a hope chest in Otto’s and Andersen’s (1967) study were at the leading edge of social change.

By the early 1980s serious questions were being raised by Lane’s salesmen. An internal document entitled simply ‘The Girl Graduate Plan’ acknowledges these doubts
and the lack of hard evidence supporting the promotion. It highlights several environmental influences that were thought to be having a detrimental effect:

…girls wait longer to marry, fewer of them remain in the home town after high school graduation, more go to college or get jobs in other cities. Of those who do marry shortly after high school, some follow their husbands to other environs. We live in a mobile society (Lane Company, 1983, p. 1).

In defense of the program, the report’s author points to the success enjoyed by large furniture stores who prospered from their participation in the program, arguing, “These are all keen merchants. They dominate their trading areas. The plan must work for them” (p.1). The author goes on to note that all of these companies had exclusive rights to participate in the program within their geographic markets, and that they used the plan ‘on a large scale.’ He suggests the Lane Company may have erred in its selling strategy, by seeking to limit the number of schools covered by any one dealer.

The idea behind the original strategy was that by dealing with more dealers, the company would benefit from more sales opportunities and the individual firms would incur less expense (from purchasing miniature chests for only a small number of schools). The problem with this strategy appears to have been one of scale, resulting in promotions with no impact on the local market, disappointed dealers, and dispirited salesmen. A revised sales strategy was recommended, one where the salesman would go after the best merchants in their area and offer them exclusive access to the Plan. The writer then went further, suggesting a national network of affiliated dealers, each covering a separate trading area, but collectively agreeing to offer special consideration (e.g., price reductions) to a young woman who could provide evidence of having
received a chest from any store in the network. Unfortunately, the archival sources
don’t tell us if attempts were made to establish such a network.

What we do know is that the Lane Company began to distance itself from the
use of the term ‘hope chest’ in the late 1980s, preferring instead the term ‘cedar chest’.

“‘Hope’ has connotations of love. It’s really outmoded to think that a woman who gets
one is hoping that a white knight is going to come” (Douglas Lane, quoted in Fulford,
1989). While the company still targeted high school and college graduates as well as
women who got married in their 20s, they looked to the 60s generation as their new
target market. “They may be in their 40s now and think, yes, that’s a great piece of
furniture. The married woman might drop a hint to her husband. A woman with a
boyfriend might do the same. But then we get the woman who is not involved, someone
who is going to drop $400 on herself. We call it the self purchase market” (Douglas
Lane, quoted in Fulford, 1989). As the Girl Graduate Plan was wound down, the
company continued to produce small boxes, but they were linked to sales promotion
programs for Disney, NASCAR, JC Penny and others (Hilkemeier in Oeltjenbruns,
2016). During the life of the Girl Graduate Plan, it is estimated that over 27 million
miniature chests were distributed as graduation gifts by the retailers involved in the
promotion campaign (Hilkemeier in Oeltjenbruns, 2016).

In 1987, the Lane Company was purchased by Interco Corporation in a hostile
takeover. In 1992, Interco’s successor, Furniture Brands International, filed for
bankruptcy. The September 11th attack on the World Trade Centre produced a minor
pickup in business for some retailers. A Chicago retailer suggested, “[I]t has to do with
family traditions…People are again interested in passing down an heirloom” (Arends,
2002). Nevertheless, the last Lane cedar chest to be manufactured in the US was
produced in 2001, and after that, the plant at Altavista closed for good (Virginia Museum of History & Culture, n.d.) Today, Lane Furniture (the former Action Industries) is owned by United Furniture Industries and manufactures upholstery and case goods [6]. The firm traces its history back to the 1912 cedar chest factory established by Edward Lane. Lane products can be purchased through furniture retailers in the US and Canada.

Discussion

The Girl Graduate Plan was, for a time, an extremely successful sales promotion whether measured in terms of creating good will and brand loyalty or increased retail sales. What made it so and why did it eventually fail to produce the same positive results? In this section we discuss socio-economic trends that positively and negatively influenced the success of the plan.

Positive Influences

There were several longer- and medium-term socio-economic trends that made the market more receptive to the Girl Graduate Plan. These included: the trend to joint or female-dominant from male-dominant decision making; the focus of retailers on the youth market; growth in the number of young women attending secondary school and thus able to be reached by the promotion; a shift in consumer perceptions of who constituted an ‘influencer’ when it came to purchasing, and growth in the furniture market overall.

Household Purchase Decision Making. Researchers disagree on the extent to which women have traditionally participated in and/or dominated household decision
making in the United States. Gordon and McArthur (1985) suggest that for the first 250 years or so of American history, most consumption decisions were made by men. They note that, “It was not uncommon for either the husband or the father of the bride to provide a young wife with a completely furnished house” (Gordon and McArthur, 1985, p. 36), suggesting that decisions regarding the style and quality of furnishings were, thus, not made by the bride. Witkowski (1999, p. 112), however, disagrees, proposing instead that, “as early as 200 years ago, American society already had begun to concede that the acquisition and use of domestic goods was within a woman’s sphere of responsibility”. The disagreement may be a matter of degree – the distinction between participation and domination – or the result of researchers focusing their efforts on different sources, time periods or geographies [7].

There does seem to be agreement that a rather dramatic change occurred between 1850 and 1870, with female-dominant consumer agency having come into its own by 1870 (Witkowski, 2004). A number of factors are thought to have contributed to this shift. Witkowski (2004) identifies increasing industrialization, growing urbanization and the monetization of commerce (as opposed to barter or trading of goods) as factors, along with increased literacy among American women, “an important skill for reading ads and otherwise negotiating the marketplace” (Witkowski 2004, p. 265). Gordon and McArthur (1985, p. 43) also point to the influence of the industrial revolution, suggesting that as “as men left for work outside the home, women became the chief domestic consumers.” In the post-Civil War years, as men became pre-occupied with the expansion of business away from the home it became necessary to divide labour (Witkowski, 2004) – leaving women to attend to household
purchasing; “it was the duty of American men to make the money and the right of American women to spend it” (Gordon and McArthur, 1985, p. 40).

During the 1880s and 1890s, the newly coined term ‘homemaker’ appeared in the newer women’s magazines. The homemaker “was responsible for the proper management of her household as [her husband] was responsible for the direction of his business” (Gordon and McArthur, 1985, p. 41). Throughout much of the 20th century, this seems to have been the prevailing attitude.

Research conducted in the mid-1950s revealed that the selection of a new residence was most likely to be the joint responsibility of both spouses (Sharp and Mott, 149, p. 153) and that “Decisions to purchase household goods are made jointly or by wives singly” (Wolgast, 1958, p. 152). Fortunately for this research many of the previous studies investigating the role of husbands and wives in family consumption decision making used automobile and furniture purchasing as example products (Davis, 1970; Davis and Rigaux, 1974; Ford, LaTour & Henthorne, 1995; Green et al., 1983; Sharp and Mott, 1956; Shuptine and Samuelson, 1976; Wolgast, 1958). In late 1960s Chicago, Davis (1970) reported that the decision on where to buy furniture was made jointly by husbands and wives, although wives tended to dominate questions of when to purchase, how much to spend, and what brand, model and colour to buy.

By the 1970s, Shuptine and Samuelson (1976, p. 88) noted an increase in the sharing of power and duties between marital partners, concluding that “Neither spouse is completely dominant in the purchase decision. Instead, each spouse is dominant in certain aspects of the purchase decision” (cf. Ford, LaTour and Henthorne, 1995). The task of information search was characterized by more role specialization – calling upon the spouse with more time available, greater competence with the specific product
category or a vested interest (Davis and Rigaux, 1974). “[T]he partner who is dominant for most pre-purchase decision components [problem awareness, internal & external info search] also tends to make the real decision to purchase” (Shuptrine & Samuelson, 1976, p. 91).

Part of the genius of the Girl Graduate Plan was that it introduced a young woman to the sales staff and the brands carried by her local furniture store, at a time when she was open to discussions of product features and quality. As the testimonial letters cited earlier attest, the ‘girl graduate’ often returned to the store that had gifted her a miniature chest with her fiancé or new husband to make furniture purchases. The Lane Hope Chest may have been the ‘Gift That Starts a Home’ in the sense that what was inside the hope chest provided ‘start up’ tools for the newly married couple, but it may also have provided a couple with one of their first opportunities to engage in consumer decision making as a couple.

Targeting the Youth Market. In their book, Was There a Pepsi Generation Before Pepsi Discovered It?, Hollander and Germain (1992, p. xiv) argue that many firms targeted the youth market (defined as those between 15 and 24 years of age) as early as the late 19th century and that the practice grew throughout the 20th century such that it was firmly established by the beginning of World War II. Youth were targeted for products that appealed specifically to the young (toys, amusements) (Ballard, 1919), but also because the idea of youth as ‘customers of tomorrow’ seems to have been fairly well established (Hollander and Germain, 1922; Printers’ Ink, 1924) and because purchase preferences once formed tended to be retained. [8]

The extent to which the youth market was important to furniture manufacturers like Lane can be seen in industry studies. In 1922, Photoplay magazine reported on a
study conducted by Barton, Durstine & Osborn of retail merchants in seven US cities. Merchants were asked what proportion of sales were accounted for by various age groups. Furniture merchants reported that those under 18 accounted for 3% of sales, those aged 18 to 30 accounted for 40% of sales, those aged 30 to 44 accounted for 36% of sales and those over 44 years accounted for 21% of sales (Photoplay, 1922, p. 17). At the time, those aged 18 to 30 represented 23% of the US population (Hollander and Germain 1992, p. 14). In 1964, Ziff-Davis, publishers of Modern Bride magazine, pulled together data from multiple industry sources and reported that “the bridal market, comprising less than 3% of all households, accounts for a highly disproportionate share of total retail sales. For instance, the bridal market accounts for 29% of total retail sales of living room furniture [and]…30% of total sales of linens and blankets” (p. 3).

Eugene Gilbert, President of Gilbert Youth Research, a marketing research firm, conducted research during the 1950s for Lane Company, Oneida Community Ltd. and Seventeen magazine, all interested in targeting the youth market. With reference to the latter, he noted “In 1946 only 18.4 pages were devoted to advertising on household equipment and furnishings. In 1956 advertisers used 164.3 pages to appeal to the expanding market of young girls interested in marriage and homemaking” (Gilbert, 1957, p. 70). Gilbert commented on the ‘fact’ that women were marrying at a younger age suggesting, “Introducing the girl graduating from school to hope-chest items, for example, is almost effortlessly achieved if the promotion is geared to her special needs.”

Although Hollander and Germain (1992, p. 35) concluded that, with the exception of the Photoplay Magazine 1922 article just mentioned, “home furnishings
makers did not exploit the youth market” between 1880 and 1940, this research shows something quite different. Lane tapped into an under-served market – the young woman about to become a major consumption decision maker – and it did so in a way that updated a custom which pre-dated the company by several centuries. Although our database of Lane advertisements is admittedly incomplete, nowhere in the text of the ads we’ve been able to download and analyze does the word ‘dowry’ appear. Instead, the company positioned their products as an appropriate graduation gift, when targeting the young woman’s parents, and as a demonstration of romantic love, when targeting young couples.

*Increasing number of young women staying in school.* The increasing number of young women (17-18 years of age) attending and graduating from secondary school was crucial to the plan’s success, given that it hinged on being able to reach these consumers via their educational institution. Table 1 below shows the increase from 1910 to 1990.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Young Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>3,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>4,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Increasing literacy levels in general were important for knowledgeable consumption (Witkowski, 2004), but so was specific ‘training for spending’ (Peck and Harris, 1922) that young women would have received by attending the growing number of home economics courses being offered. As Gordon and McArthur (1985, p. 42) state, “The ideal housewife, as defined by educational institutions and the media… was to know where to go to find the best information… how to buy appropriate furnishings, how to properly clothe, feed and take care of all the members of the family.” She also had to
know how to preserve the family’s investments through the appropriate cleaning and storage. One home making guide recommended, “Where a cedar box can be afforded it will prove a good investment as a storage receptacle for woolen garments or furs” (The N.Y. Globe and Commercial Advertiser, 1911, p.59) at risk of damage or destruction by moths.

A new group of ‘influencers’. Previous research has pointed out that there was a shift in the kinds of people who represented models of desirable consumer behaviour in the 1920s. In the previous century, the tastes of aristocratic, European classes set the tone. But by the 1920s,…the trend-setters were more likely to be the new rich, celebrities and movie stars. Because the lifestyle of these persons was based on money, as opposed to inherited status, it was more accessible to upwardly mobile persons (Gordon and McArthur, 1985, p. 43).

Furthermore, the consumption tastes of these new trendsetters could be learning through advertising. Lane contracted with some of these new influencers - movie stars, including Shirley Temple, and beauty contest winners, such as Miss America - to endorse their products in their advertisements and even named some models of hope chests after these stars. Figure 6 provides just one example, Rosalind Russell endorsing the Lane cedar chest, along with the Rosalind Russell model.

Insert Figure 6 about here

Growth in the home furnishings market. Undoubtedly, the market for household furnishings grew during the period under discussion. How much it grew is somewhat
difficult to assess, given the changes in statistical record keeping and differences in how ‘home furnishings’ was defined. For example, in 1924 Paul Nystrom, head of Retail Research Association, estimated total retail trade volume in the US at $35 billion annually, of which furniture and home furnishings accounted for $1.3 billion or 3.7 percent (cited in Fredericks, 1924, p. 75). However, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated the size of the market at $US 5,090 million in 1929. Using the same definition, U.S. Census Bureau figures show the home furnishings market expanding to $US 44,251 million by 1970. Of particular note in Table 2 below is the huge jump between 1940 and 1950. Presumably this takes into account changes in the economy post World War II. The sale of cedar hope chests and other ‘case goods’, such as end tables and chests of drawers, manufactured by the Lane Company would have benefitted from the expansion occurring within the larger industry.

Negative Influences

So, why did the Girl Graduate Plan eventually come to an end? It seems there were several reasons, some internal to the company, but probably the most influential forces were those occurring within the larger society. The Lane Company did experience a hostile takeover and, no doubt, this caused serious disruption. However, a successful sales promotion, especially one that had been functioning as long and as well as the Girl Graduate Plan could have been continued by the new owners. Here we
highlight the important roles played by changes in gender roles and women’s perceptions of themselves and changes in legislation.

Major societal changes brought about by the women’s liberation movement in terms of how young women saw themselves in their future roles as wage earners, ‘career women’ and marital partners, along with the rejection by many of traditional gender roles no doubt played a large part in the decline of hope chest sales (Peril, 2016). The 1960s were characterized by the beginning of a new wave in the women’s liberation movement in the U.S. and by a large increase in the percentage of wives working outside the home (Shuprine and Samuelson 1976). Whereas only 20% of all women worked outside the home at the turn of the century, by 1975, the number had more than doubled, to 40% (Bartos, 1977, p. 31). Researchers pointed to an important change in attitude among young women. “In 1967, 60% of the adult women generally or definitely agreed with the statement, A woman’s place is in the home. In less than a decade the percentage fell to 26%... Who has changed? Data... suggest it is the younger, better educated, working woman with a higher family income” (Reynolds, Crask and Wells, 1977, pp. 38, 39).

In the mid-1970s, citing US Census data, Kerckoff (1976, p. 270) noted, “it is certain that young people are marrying at a later age than they did just a few years ago. Whereas the median age for first marriage was 22.8 for men and 20.3 for women in both 1950 and 1960, by 1974 the median age had reached 23.1 for men and 21.1 for women... although we cannot conclude that young people have given up on marriage, they at least tend to be postponing it.” Table 3 below confirms the changes in age at first marriage between 1910 and 1990. Marketing researchers also pointed to another demographic change. “While 28% of the women 20-24 years of age were single in
1950, by 1975 the figure had grown to a remarkable 40%” (Lazar and Smallwood, 1977, p. 14). It seems marriage may not have been a first priority for many young women.

By 1977, Scanzoni (1977) reported on research which revealed a major change in the attitude of young women towards working, “Work is a means not only to earn money, but also to gain prestige and esteem or worth, and very significantly – independence and autonomy from subsidies” (p. 185). Scanzoni (1977) goes on to discuss how the predominant marital arrangement prior to the 1960’s was one in which the wife was seen as complement to her husband, but by the 1970’s marriage partners saw themselves as co-providers and their work outside the home as equally significant. The trend continued into the 1980s (Green et al., 1983), with an important concomitant change. Even though married, working women now had the money to increase family consumption, “they no longer have the time to act as full time consumption managers” (Gordon and McArthur, 1985, p. 43). We see here subtle shifts within American society with respect to the role of family purchasing agent: from husband to wife/shared responsibility to a need for more definite sharing of the role.

Previous research has demonstrated that a persons’ most important possessions reflect their personal values (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988). Watson et al. (2002, p. 926) suggest that because they influence self-image, cultural values may also influence consumers’ choices of their most important possessions. Thus, in societies in which “power roles are achieved, not
ascribed, through the attainment of goals that the society deems important (i.e., education, high-status occupation, and income)” (Green et al, 1983, p. 437), changing personal and societal values with respect to the relative importance of the ‘home making’ role of women may have influenced their desire to purchase or reject objects, like a hope chest, that had traditionally been closely associated with this role.

Legislative Changes. Legislative changes may also have played a role. Palakgtsoglou and colleagues (2013-14) note that the abolition of the dowry in Italy in 1968 and Greece in 1983 had a major impact on dowry traditions. While parents still provided some linen ware and contributed towards the down payment for a house, the most public and ostentatious display became the wedding celebration itself, with large numbers of guests invited to partake in elaborate feasting.

By the late 1970s, in the United States and Canada, information privacy legislation was introduced in various forms (Holvast, 2008; Solove, 2006). The Lane Company had been able to work around school board policies that restricted access to young women’s personal information, first, by appealing to class secretaries and later changing their approach by advertising the availability of the miniature cedar chests in local newspapers. However, the increased attention given to the need to protect personal information likely caused a ‘chilling effect’ and would have made the direct mail campaigns previously used much more difficult to orchestrate.

Research Contributions and Conclusion

The Girl Graduate Plan promotion of the Lane Company provides an historical example of how socio-economic forces which originally sustained a marketing strategy can, in a relatively short period of time, reverse and lead to the demise of a product
line. Lane benefitted from the trend towards shared-decision making for household goods, although to them the ‘trend’ probably just appeared as a normal state of affairs, given its lengthy development time. They similarly benefitted from growth in the furniture market stimulated, especially, by the post-WWII consumption boom. They similarly cashed in on the youth market in the sense that they realized how quickly young women graduating from high school would become the major ‘purchasing agents’ for their products. However, they focused so much of their advertising on marriage as the most meaningful moment in a young woman’s life that they were too late in recognizing shifting values and priorities. By the time Douglas Lane could comment to an interviewer (Fulford, 1989) about these changes, the company had missed the opportunity to provide products that would align with consumers’ changed and changing values.

The Girl Graduate Plan also provides an historical example of the importance of the youth market, and lends support to Hollander’s and Germain’s (1992) research regarding how the youth segment was served by marketers in the early and mid-20th century. If Gilbert could emphasize the importance of the youth market in 1948, it is even more important today. The youth market is the market in which almost all mass buying trends originate (Gilbert, 1948) and these trends are often adopted by other demographics. Not only do youths influence household purchasing (Fromm, 2018) the buying power of youth today is substantial (Packaged Facts, 2018). Generation Z (those born between 1995 and 2015), is predicted to become the largest generation of consumers by 2020, accounting $29 to $143 billion in direct spending (Fromm, 2018). They are not only the consumer of tomorrow, they are already purchasing today.
Finally, the example of the Girl Graduate Plan demonstrates how a firm can work closely with its channel partners to achieve distinctive advantage. Although the company began questioning its choice of some channel partners in the 1980s, for many years, working collaboratively with and supporting furniture retailers with promotional materials worked to the advantage of both parties.

The fact remains that for many consumers the hope chest is an item of great symbolic and emotional importance and is thus an object of material culture worthy of scholarly attention (cf. Burke, 2000; Miller, 1997; Ward, 2017). McAra (2017, pp. 170, 180) calls it “both a memory vessel and a prophetic device, a trap or cage, as well as a symbol of comfort and security… [a] transitional object, though for an adolescent rather than an infant.” This research was inspired by authors’ experience while conducting a participant observation exercise at a local auction house. We saw fine china and crystal (traditional wedding related purchases) and, indeed, wedding and engagement rings being offered for sale. Our thoughts about these objects revolved around the maintenance or loss of economic value and the potential for savings from consumers re-using precious gemstones – more cognitive, objective or detached reactions. It was when a hope chest full of treasured items came up for sale that we felt truly moved and were inspired to research this topic. We have since witnessed a minor resurgence in popularity, as parents purchase used cedar chests to help their children, male and female, prepare for the eventual move into their own home, however, the idea of the ‘hope chest’ seems to have vanished from the minds of the majority of young women, at least in the classes we teach.
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Endnotes

[1] The Cairo Geniza is a collection of almost 300,000 manuscript fragments housed in the geniza, or storeroom, of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo, Egypt. It has been described as the largest and most diverse collection of medieval manuscripts in the world, providing a detailed picture of the economic and cultural life of North Africa and the Middle Mediterranean, particularly during the 10th to 13th centuries.

[2] The Caswell-Runyan Company was founded by J.W. Caswell and Winfred Runyan. Winfred Runyan died of a heart attack on December 25, 1942. J.W. Caswell died one month later, on January 25, 1943 (Huntington County Honours, 2016). In spite of having twice refitted its facilities to serve war time needs, and expanding its product line to include radio and later television cabinets, stereo speakers and juke boxes, the company never stopped making cedar chests (Jones, 2018). Caswell-Runyan was eventually bought out; its machinery and inventory were liquidated in 1956. The plant sat empty for several years and was destroyed by fire in June, 1962 (Huntington County TAB, 2010; The History of Caswell-Runyan Company, 1924).

[3] Unless otherwise noted, much of the material for this company history has been drawn from the printed version of a speech given by Edward Hudson Lane in 1962 to the Newcomen Society, in celebration of the company’s 50th anniversary.

[4] Especially during WWII, the company targeted servicemen in an effort to persuade them to purchase hope chests for their sweetheart ‘back home’. Self-styled Lane Box Historian, Chad Hilkemeier reported that he found evidence in the Lane Company archives to indicate Lane experimented with expanding the Plan to include male graduates in 1978, but the expansion was not successful. Since Hilkemeier did not provide archival references, his source to corroborate this claim could not be located (See Hilkemeier’s blog, Lane Cedar Box, at: https://lanecedarbox.wordpress.com/2018/06/23/tidbits-from-lane-archives/)

[5] The Cavalier Company of Chattanooga, Tennessee used the slogan, “The gift of a lifetime of happiness”. A company brochure from the 1940s said, “In countless instances, this Cavalier Chest will be the first piece of furniture for a future home” (cited in Baldino, 2013).

[6] In 1972, Lane purchased Action Industries, a reclining chair company, located in Tupelo, Mississippi, which later changed its name to Lane Furniture (Lane Home Furnishings, 2020).


[8] Later research would support this observation. For example, (Fannin, 1984) reported that 30 percent of females between the ages of 20 and 24 still use the first cosmetic brand tried as teenagers, and Holbrook and Schindler (1989) found that regardless of current age, popular music heard at the age of 24 remains the most-liked popular music through an individual’s lifetime.
Figure 1. Early cedar chest with metal banding

**Figure 2.** Lane miniature chest.

Source: ebay.com
Figure 3. Invitation mailed to high school seniors, circa 1938.

Figure 4. Invitation mailed to high school seniors, circa 1938.

Figure 5. Lane Choose-a-Chest Card

![Lane Choose-a-Chest Card](image)

I enjoyed looking at your selection of beautiful Lane Cedar Chests very much. The model I like best and would like to have for my very own is

__________________________
Name

__________________________
Address

__________________________
City

__________________________
Name of School

__________________________
Class

__________________________
Birthday

__________________________
Parent’s Name

Litho in U.S.A.

Source: Mss3 L2453a FA2 Lane Company Records, Series 5.9 Oversized Lane Girl Graduate Plan, Virginia Historical Society Archives.
Figure 6. Rosalind Russell Endorsement and Cedar Chest Model

Source: Mss3 L2453a FA2 Lane Company Records, Series 5.9 Lane Girl Graduate Plan, ca. 1936-1978; Folder 2673 Advertising ca. 1936-1996; Virginia Historical Society Archives.
Table 1. Population and Education Trends: 1910 to 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total US Population</th>
<th>Population of 17 yr olds</th>
<th>Percent of 17 yr olds</th>
<th>Total Number of High School Graduates</th>
<th>Number of Male High School Graduates</th>
<th>Percent of Male High School Graduates</th>
<th>Number of Female High School Graduates</th>
<th>Percent of Female High School Graduates</th>
<th>High School Graduates per 100 17 yr olds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Units</td>
<td>Thousands</td>
<td>Thousands</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Thousands</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Thousands</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
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<td>64</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>59</td>
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<td>1.79</td>
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<td>124</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>188</td>
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<td>152,271</td>
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<td>180,671</td>
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<td>1,302</td>
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Table 2. Expenditures on Household Furnishings, 1909-1990

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<th>G478*</th>
<th>G434†</th>
<th>G709‡</th>
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<td>5,090</td>
<td>4,161</td>
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<td>1929</td>
<td>16,571</td>
<td>22,581</td>
<td>44,251</td>
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<td>1930</td>
<td>20,700</td>
<td>36,700</td>
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<td>1960</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Notes: * during this time period, expenditures for furniture and furnishings were kept separate from expenditures for appliances and operating costs, such as fuel, lighting, electricity, water, etc.

† during this time period, expenditures included household furniture, equipment and supplies

‡ during this time period household furniture included mattresses and box springs, but not ‘soft’ furnishings, e.g. textiles, or equipment, e.g., brooms, brushes, etc.
Table 3. Median age (in years) at first marriage: 1910 to 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24.7</td>
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Source: [https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/marital.html](https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/marital.html)