

**HELEN LANSDOWNE
RESOR**

A Life of Contributions

(1886-1964)

Her Jewish

grandmother married well known Presbyterian minister John Clark Bayless;
that would raise some eyebrows even today.

According to George Wollford, "Dr. John C. Bayless, pressed for his southern
ties, came to Grayson in 1866, mainly engaged in distributing bibles to
mountain homes. In 1875 he organized a Presbyterian church in the same
structure shared by the Methodists and Christians." "Helen

Landsdowne moved an organ from her home to the church to add music to the
service." The Bayless Memorial Church is located on Second Street in Grayson.

Submitted by Glen Haney



EARLY YEARS

Helen Lansdowne was born on a farm in Grayson, Kentucky, on February 20, 1886, to George and Helen Bayless Lansdowne. She was the second youngest of nine children. Her mother was the daughter of a Presbyterian minister who had graduated from college and then studied for three years at Princeton Theological Seminary. As a result, for that time and region, Helen Bayless came from a background of culture and aspiration. However, when Helen

Lansdowne was four years old, her mother decided to leave her husband, George, and took the children to Covington, where her two brothers lived.

Having no trade and no apparent means to earn a living, her mother went to work for one brother as a clerk. The other brother was responsible for bringing food money to the home every day. And because the mother had to work, the oldest girl was to take care of their rented, not owned, house. Eventually, her mother became a librarian and sold real estate. Although the family was never in dire poverty, they lived carefully (Fox, 1984).



Helen Lansdowne Resor
around 1917 at the time of her marriage
from the Mirror Makers

According to Fox (1984), losing her father when she was only four years old and being away from her mother during the day, Helen Lansdowne learned a lesson in feminism and self-sufficiency. Her mother told her sisters and herself, "You're never going to get caught the way I was." "You're going to learn how to work" (p. 94). The influence of her mother was clearly shown in her success at J. Walter Thompson as well as her support for women's suffrage and planned parenthood. It was also presented in the kind of advertising she wrote, which was about improving oneself and aspiring upward to the habits of richer people.

In 1903, at the age of 17, Helen Lansdowne graduated from high school, as class valedictorian, in Covington, Kentucky. After graduation, she began to work for the World Manufacturing Company, manufacturers of toilet preparations sold exclusively by mail (Keding, 1994). She, according to the Stockholder's Affidavit on March 20, 1924, remained there less than one year. Then she left for Procter and Collier, a Cincinnati advertising agency which mainly functioned as the house agency for Procter and Gamble, and worked there as a bill auditor. There she had met Stanley Resor, seven years her senior, who later became her husband. After a year or more at Procter and Collier, Helen Lansdowne moved to the Commercial Tribune, a morning newspaper in Cincinnati, and wrote advertisements for retailers (Keding, 1994).

A few years later, in 1906, she moved again to the Cincinnati office of the Street Railways Advertising Company, which controlled most of the streetcar advertising in the United States. Then, in 1907, she was offered a position in the company's main office in New York. But about the same time, Stanley Resor, needing a copy writer, asked her to return to Procter and Collier (Keding, 1994). "Her family warned her not to accept his offer: he'll work you to death, they said" (Fox, 1984, p. 81). However, she decided to work for him in Cincinnati. Working for Procter and Collier for the second time, Helen

Lansdowne, under the direction of Stanley Resor, wrote copies for Red Cross shoes, Brenlin window shades, and Higgin all-metal screens (Stockholder's Affidavit, 1924).



James Webb Young
around 1948

<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/hartman/jwt/findaids/off-staf.html>

A year later, in 1908, Stanley Resor was asked by J. Walter Thompson to manage its Chicago branch but he declined. Instead, Thompson hired him and his brother,

Walter, to open a branch in Cincinnati (Fox, 1984). Helen Lansdowne left Procter and Collier and go along with the Resors as the sole copywriter in the Cincinnati office. In January 1911, she was promoted and moved to J. Walter Thompson in New York as a writer (Keding, 1994). Leaving for New York, she recommended her schoolmate from Covington who had quit school in the sixth grade, James Webb Young, to Stanley Resor. To Young's surprise, Stanley Resor offered him a job as a writer. Eventually, he succeeded Stanley Resor as head of the Cincinnati office and became the third key member of the team that pushed J. Walter Thompson to dominance in the 1920s (Fox, 1984).

Helen Lansdowne's great successes in her advertising career started after her promotion to [J. Walter Thompson](#) headquarters in New York in 1911. Most of the JWT's clients made products which focused on women as the ultimate consumers and Helen Lansdowne strongly believed that JWT's success resulted from its concentration and specialization upon products sold to women. The reason was that a very large proportion of all retail purchases, in grocery stores, department stores, and drug stores, were made by women. She also believed that in order to be successful in selling products to women, the advertising had to be made with knowledge of the habits of women, their methods of reasoning, and also their prejudices (Stockholder's Affidavit, 1924).

Helen Resor played an important role in supplying the feminine point of view and watching the advertising to see that the idea, the wording, and the illustrating were effective for women (Fox, 1984). In the same year she was promoted, Procter and Gamble introduced Crisco, a vegetable shortening, and the company, breaking the rule it had kept for twenty years, paid an outside agency, JWT, a fee to take care of the opening campaign. "On five occasions, Helen Lansdowne traveled to Cincinnati to appear before the P&G board of directors to explain the advertising. This was the first time Procter and Gamble had opened their board meetings to a woman" (Keding, 1994, p. 263).

In addition to Crisco, Helen Lansdowne also wrote the original advertisements for Woodbury's facial soap, Yuban coffee, Lux soap flakes, and Cutex nail polish. According to what she said in the Stockholder's Affidavit (1924), when she worked on these accounts, she needed to address the sales conventions of the



Stanley B. Resor

from the Mirror Makers

clients in order to explain why the advertisements were prepared the way they were because her advertisements were widely different from all other advertisements appearing in American magazines at that time. Her innovations were shown, as examples, in issues of the *Ladies' Home Journal* for this period.

The professional relationship of Stanley Resor and Helen Lansdowne turned into something more. On March 6, 1917, they were married in New York when Helen Lansdowne was thirty one and Stanley Resor was thirty eight years old (Fox, 1984). It was interestingly noted that about a month before she was to married, Helen Lansdowne was asked to come to Chicago to prepare an original campaign for the firm of Libby, McNeill and Libby, which threatened to take their advertising to another agency. She worked until two days before she was to married (Keding, 1994).

After getting married, Stanley and Helen Resor continued to work together for J. Walter Thompson. They were regarded as one of advertising's most prominent husband-and-wife teams. Dividing the work load, Stanley took care of the administration and client services while Helen concentrated on the preparation of ads. However, they informally discussed all aspects of the business, over the dinner table or on the commuter train to their home in Greenwich, Connecticut. Therefore, decisions basically emerged with no clear line of accountability to either one (Keding, 1994).

In 1916, when J. Walter Thompson decided to retire, a group led by Stanley Resor bought the agency for \$500,000, and Stanley Resor succeeded him as president (Fox, 1984). Many actions were taken including cutting the client list from over three hundred to under eighty, reorienting JWT toward big national accounts, closing anemic local branches, and firing unneeded employees. "During 1916, 1917, and 1918, [Helen Lansdowne Resor] was one of a committee of three that passed decisions on all policies of J. Walter Thompson, including the payroll and practically all personnel" (p. 264).

Despite her significant role in making decisions, she held no vice-presidency at the agency, gave no speeches, turned down requests for interviews. "Publicity of this kind does not appeal to me," she explained (Fox, 1984).

According to Fox, the personal and working relationship of these two dissimilar people mystified observers. While Stanley believed in social science, Helen trusted her own imagination. According to an admirer, he was

“one of the least articulate men alive” (p. 92). But she had great verbal facility, whether writing or talking. “He was a listener who liked to be read to. She was a talker and constant, omnivorous reader” (p. 92). Because of his diffidence, he hesitated when speaking, which gave his listener plenty of time to interrupt. But she, as Peggy King who was one of her protégés recalled, “had a dozen ideas to the minute, and kept them coming so fast you couldn’t possibly keep up and had to sit down afterwards with a pencil and paper and try to sort them out” (p. 93).

Moreover, he was not flashy and was a brain-picker and synthesizer but she, as Nancy Stephenson, another of her copywriters, said, “had a brilliant feminine mind that darted and dipped and swooped with terrifying speed and accuracy” (p. 93). “He was slow and serious, she quick and smiling. He found his recreation outdoors, playing golf on Sunday mornings, working around the yard in Greenwich, and playing rancher at a summer home in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. She found her recreation indoors, in art and books and fashion” (p. 93).

However, Fox pointed out that in spite of the differences they had, “[what] they shared was a common background of reduced circumstances, and perhaps this, more than anything else, informed the emulation style of advertising they developed” (p. 93). By the time Stanley Resor received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Yale in 1901, his father had lost control of the family’s kitchen-stove manufacturing firm. As a result, he went to work in a Cincinnati bank for a \$5-a-week wage. Going through several other jobs, he finally found the right work, advertising, starting at Procter and Collier and later at J. Walter Thompson (“American National Biography,” 1999; “Business Executives of America, 1950; Fox, 1984). As Fox wrote, “he had known the insecurity of falling down the class ladder and wondering whether he could climb back up” (p. 93).

In *J. Walter Thompson: Advertising Leadership 1864-1989*, it was written that “[Stanley and Helen Resor] enlarged each other. It was a case of the whole being far greater than the simple sum of the parts” (p. 14). With their oddly matched but complementary skills and dispositions, they together built J. Walter Thompson into the largest single integrated advertising agency in the world (Fox, 1984; Keding, 1994). In the 1920s, as Keding wrote, JWT moved into first place in total agency billings and kept this eminence for the next five decades.



Stanley Resor
led JWT to the biggest agency
in the world.

from the Mirror Makers

When [Stanley Resor] took over the firm, it was placing less than \$3 million a year in advertising, had a mere five offices, and employed only 177 people. By 1927 the annual billing had increased to \$23 million and the payroll included 432 employees. In 1947 the company became the first advertising agency with yearly billings of

more than \$100 million. In 1954, the year before Resor resigned as the company's president to become chairman of the board, the volume of advertising placed reached \$200million; by 1961, the year Resor stepped down as chairman of the board, billings soared to greater than \$370 million. At that time, the company had a staff of 6,225 people in fifty-five cities ("American National Biography," 1999, p. 354).

J. Walter Thompson was the first American advertising agency to expand its operations worldwide, beginning with an office in London in 1927 (Keding, 1994). At the time of Helen Resor's death, on January 2, 1964, "J. Walter Thompson had a world-wide staff of 6,913. Of this number, 4,374 were at work in offices outside the United States ... JWT maintains offices in 23 countries around the world" (J. Walter Thompson Company News, January 10, 1964, p. 1).

"Helen Lansdowne Resor's contributions to the advertising industry begin with a style of advertising that made her one of the most celebrated copywriters of her generation, a style that became the hallmark of J. Walter Thompson's creative work" (Keding, 1994, p. 265). Her style was intuitive and aesthetic instead of scientific. "She represented the magic ... the emotion ... that brings advertising to life" (J. Walter Thompson: Advertising Leadership 1864-1989, p.

14). Her favorite advertising media were the *Curtis flagships*, the *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Saturday Evening Post*. And “[she] developed an “editorial style” of advertising that imitated the look and layout of the Curtis magazines and so caught the reader’s eye by resembling nearby reading matter” (Fox, 1984, p. 86).

In 1918 and prior years, Helen Resor was responsible for creating “key” advertisements, which indicated the appeal to be made and also set the style which assistants could follow under her direction or that of Stanley Resor (Stockholder’s Affidavit, 1924). Her ad typically presented a pretty painting, the gently pointed selling copy underneath the painting, and an offer of a free or cheap sample by mail. It was, therefore, concluded that she “blended the visual appeal of Calkins with the reason-why and proffered coupon of Hopkins: a powerful combination” (Fox, 1984, p. 86-87).

Her most famous ad, for Woodbury’s Facial Soap, established this style with a painting by Alonzo Kimball of a handsome couple in evening dress, the man embracing the woman from the side, the woman smiling and winsomely looking away. Beneath the painting, the headline “A skin you love to touch,” followed by seven paragraphs of copy ... Next the offer: for ten cents, an eight-color reproduction of the Kimball painting and a week’s supply of the soap. Finally, in a corner of the page, a picture of the soap and a fine-print suggestion to “Tear out this cake as a reminder to get Woodbury’s today at your druggist’s or toilet counter.” (p. 87).



Helen's most famous ad for Woodbury's

from John W. Hartman Center

Interestingly, the ad was filled with details yet had an open, airy, and uncluttered look. Later on, the ads in the series, with different illustrations, kept the headline “A skin you love to touch” and its muted sexuality. In *Atlantic Monthly*, the author commented on “A skin you love to touch” that “What a monument of argument! What a poetic figure! Could anything be more delicately alluring! The phrase sings itself into your memory. It even scans” (“Words That Sing to Your Pocketbook,” 1919, p. 575).

It was important to note that Woodbury's Facial Soap had long been advertised as a patent medicine which could get rid of the skin of blemishes, sores, and ailments before Helen created a new campaign that identified the product with facial beauty, not skin disease. Turning a harsh, stinging soap into a popular beauty aid, the campaign transformed Woodbury's fortunes (Peiss, Fall 1998). "Helen Resor knew how to appeal to women and to stir up their imagination" (Cotton, 2001, p. 2).



Later Woodbury's ad
from Ladies' Home Journal
(March, 1915)

The success of Woodbury's Facial Soap was remarkable. Coming to JWT as a client in 1910, Woodbury's could increase its sales by 1,000 percent in eight years due to Helen's ads. Although there were a number of ads which had previously exploited sex and pretty women, those ads could not have the same effect and persistence as Helen's Woodbury's campaign had. Several decades later, Albert Lasker regarded JWT's use of sex appeal in the Woodbury's ad as one of the three great landmarks in advertising history (Fox, 1984). Moreover, Woodbury's ad, "A skin you love to touch," was ranked as the number 31 of "[Top 100 Advertising Campaigns of the Century](#)" by *Advertising Age* magazine because it changed the culture of advertising by implying a romantic advantage

and being the first triumph for sex in advertising.

[See more ads for Woodbury's facial soap.](#)

In addition to the successful use of sex appeal, according to Keding (1994), Helen Resor and JWT have been given credit for inventing endorsement advertising. Although endorsement advertising had been used for a long time, Helen Resor and JWT took it and gave it new credibility by obtaining endorsements from famous people, not just ordinary citizens. This approach was used in creating the campaign for Pond's Cold Cream. In 1924, the first Pond's testimonial ad was created featuring Mrs. Alva Belmont, a wealthy woman of New York society and a prominent feminist. She had been active in the suffrage campaign, supported working women's causes, and bankrolled the National Woman's Party. She gave her name to be used in Pond's Cold

Cream ad in exchange for a donation to charity (Peiss, Fall 1998). The ad began with a narrator saying:

I was excited and eager for the interview because I knew that Mrs. Belmont not only has given lavishly to women's causes from her colossal fortune, has been and is a tremendous worker, but also is particularly interested in woman's special problem of how to keep her force and her charm through middle life and later (para. 26).

This ad was considered to be a breakthrough for the agency and the brand because around that time Pond's was losing sales to the higher-status brands such as Elizabeth Arden and Helena Rubinstein. After this ad, JWT was able to obtain endorsements from other "great ladies," both in the U.S. and abroad (Fox, 1984). Among those "great ladies" were Alice Roosevelt Longworth, Princesse Marie de Bourbon of Spain, the Queen of Rumania, Mrs. Reginald Vanderbilt, and the Dutchess de Richelieu.



from JWT Company News
(January 10, 1964)

Helen Resor developed one endorsement campaign with the headline, "Distinguished in the society of five nations ... They trust their beauty to the same sure care," featuring the society leaders from both sides of the Atlantic.

Running for many years, this campaign brought an outstanding increase in Pond's sales (J. Walter Thompson Company News, January 10, 1964).

It was found that the full-page testimonial ad, in the Ladies' Home Journal,

which featured the Queen of Rumania, pulled in 9,435 coupon replies from some two-and-one-half million circulation. Another one sponsored by Mrs. Reginald Vanderbilt brought 10,325 replies from the same circulation group. And the one bearing the signature of the Duchess de Richelieu brought 19,126 replies. Each of later ads, constantly dealing with the testimony of a woman of accepted beauty and



Pond's ad featuring
Mrs. Reginald Vanderbilt
Database#PO186 from
<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/ea/>



Pond's ad featuring Queen of Rumania
Database#PO199 from
<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/ea/>

arresting social position, brought from 10,000 to 20,000 coupon sample requests from each two-and-one-half million circulation (Rheinstrom, 1976). In the 1940s, the testimonial ads for Pond's were developed to a series of ads featuring a young engaged woman recommending the skin cream. The campaign's slogan "She's engaged! She's lovely! She uses Pond's." became a very popular slogan of that era ("American National Biography," 1999).

Presenting these distinguished women not only or primarily because they were beautiful, but because they had accomplished something newsworthy and of significance to women, the campaign had been created to impart an "image of status and prestige" to skin cream (Peiss, Fall 1998). In *Psyching the Ads*, Rheinstrom (1976) regarded this concept as "[testimonials] by beautiful women, who would be so socially famous as to command instantaneous attention and unquestioning credence" (p. 37). However, according to the *J. Walter Thompson Company News* (January 10, 1964), Helen's approach to endorsement advertising or any other kind of advertising was based on the concept that copy must be believable and "[this] concept is her great legacy to JWT and advertising" (p. 9).



Pond's ad featuring the Duchesse de Richelieu Database#PO192 from <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/aaa/>

[See more ads for Pond's cold cream.](#)

In addition to Woodbury's facial soap and Pond's cold cream, Helen Resor also played a leading role in the great success of Lux flakes, the Lux product line of Lever Brothers. Lux flakes, an unknown brand at that time, came to JWT as a client in 1916. Through the new copy platform that Lux flakes was a new form of soap especially designed for fine fabrics, Lux flakes was established as a leading seller. This copy platform was mainly developed by Helen Resor and had continued to serve Lux flakes.



Lux Flakes ad Database #L0013 John W. Hartman Center

[See more ads for Lux Flakes.](#)

Moreover, with the success of Lux flakes, JWT, in 1925, was appointed to handle another new Lever product, Lux Toilet Soap. "And here too Mrs. Resor

contributed ideas that have since been used in Lux advertising in countries throughout the world” (p. 11).

According to Keding (1994), other notable clients and campaigns in Helen Lansdowne Resor’s responsibility were the following:

Aunt Jemina	Carter’s underwear
Charles Williams store	Crisco
Cutex nail polish	Lever Brothers (Lifebuoy health soap)
Maxwell House coffee	Nontuck Silk Company
Pictorial Review	Pyrex glass
R.F. Simmons jewelry	Schweizer Importers
Silk Association of America	Stork rubber sheeting and pants for babies
Tintex dyes	Yuban coffee

INFLUENCE ON WOMEN

J. Walter Thompson was the first agency to engage women for major positions and became well known as a place where women could achieve important positions (Schmitt, 1964). “Helen Resor made it the only big agency with a feminist near the top” (Fox, 1984, p. 288). It was known that in the early twentieth century, women composed a small minority of professionals working in advertising, magazines, and newspapers, and they rarely had the control over those enterprises or held executive positions with them. Moreover, they were generally excluded from “contact” or “outside” jobs, which required face-

to-face interaction with manufacturers' representatives. As a result, in the advertising agency, copywriters seemed to be women's "proper sphere" (Peiss, Fall 1998).

For Helen Lansdowne Resor, beginning her career, at the age of 17, as a copywriter in Covington, Kentucky, she became one of the most significant influences in the advertising industry. She was the first woman who appeared before the P&G board of directors to explain the advertising. Her talent and ability were proven by the great successes of the ads written by her. She was the first woman to be successful in writing and planning national, as opposed to retail, advertising (Stockholder's Affidavit, 1924).



Article in Ladies' Home Journal (July, 1920) which wrote about Helen Lansdowne Resor

In the article "Doctor? Lawyer? Merchant? Chief? -- Which Shall She Be? Woman's New Leadership in Business," which appeared in the July 1920 issue of *Ladies' Home Journal*, Abbott, the author, wrote about one successful woman in advertising. Although Abbott did not mention her name, anyone familiar with J. Walter Thompson and its history would quickly know that the woman was Helen Lansdowne Resor (Keding, 1994). Impressed by the powerful copy of the "Supreme" soap's ad, Abbott wrote that

[the] woman who planned the campaign knew by swift, sure, straight-to-the-bull's-eye instinct – if you want to call it that;

I call it woman experience – just what women do, what they think, what they want, above all, what they want a soap to do

for them when they struggle with the daily and nightly facial treatments It was woman experience she applied. She pasted the magazines and the newspapers with page copy illustrated with processes of plain women made beautiful. And that copy placed "Supreme" on almost every bathroom shelf in America (1920, p. 43).

Abbott also wrote that

[she] not only put manufacturers' products and her own agency on the map; she made a place in advertising geography for women, a place no advertiser or agency ever before has granted them. She pioneered the way for women in advertising, marking a trail for which successful women to-day are grateful to her (p. 43).

The lesson Helen Resor had learned from her experiences in the early ages had a strong influence on her belief in feminism. As Peiss (1998) stated, because one of JWT's leaders, Helen Resor, was a feminist, she provided a way for women into the company. According to Abbott (1920), Helen Resor believed in women, in their power, their honesty, and their implicit response to a direct appeal. When a girl who wanted to apply for a job came to her, Helen Resor would believe in the girl even more than the girl believed in herself. She would give her a job, coach her, stand back of her, and develop her into part of the agency's corporate genius. Among the women writers whom Helen Resor recognized the talent of and supported were Aminta Casseres, Ruth Waldo, Peggy King, and Nancy Stephenson.



Peggy King
JWT Company News
January 10, 1964

In *J. Walter Thompson Company News*, January 10, 1964, Peggy King credited Helen Resor with fostering her growth and independence. She wrote that Helen sent her, a beginning writer at that time, on a coast-to-coast trip with a photographer to get better pictures for a Fleischmann's Yeast-for-Health campaign. Then, she sent her to Sands Point, Long Island, to interview Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont and let her write the first Pond's "great lady" ad. Moreover, after Pearl Harbor, she took her to Washington to work on the wartime revisions of government booklets.

King also pointed out that not only did Helen Resor care for her professional development, but she also took an interest in her personal one. She encouraged her to rent paintings and sculpture from the Museum of Modern Art, to have very good clothes, to work with top decorators at home and in the office. King further wrote

I remember that she wrote me a warm and comforting letter on the death of my brother from cancer, and a beautifully encouraging letter, confirming her faith in the women writers after Mr. Resor's death. She was proud of us and gave us pride. She looked after us, knowing that we needed a friend in court (p. 9).

King confirmed that Helen Resor "had such faith in those who worked for her that they were motivated to put forth more effort" (Keding, 1994, p. 268).

Fox said that, at J. Walter Thompson agency, the opposite end of the floor from Stanley's office was Helen's "own turf" which was a wing of her women copywriters. Believing that women would improve better if working in their own environment separated from men, she created a "Woman's Copy Department" (Peiss, Fall 1998). They were responsible for most of the food, soap, and cosmetic accounts, the agency's mainstay (Fox, 1984). As one executive emphasized, "the women were terrifically powerful" (Peiss, Fall 1998).

Nancy Stephenson, another of her women writers, once asked her the best way for a woman to be successful in advertising. Although Helen Resor replied, "I really shouldn't answer that. I cheated. I married the boss," Stephenson noted that anyone knew that she was recognized as an outstanding advertising strategist years before she married Stanley Resor.

She demanded rigor and preparing for a meeting with her required digging for supporting facts and figures weeks in advance. Tiny, easy-to-come-by ideas stood little or no chance with her. She was a creator and executor of grand and daring ideas. To her, nothing was impossible. No thinking was too ambitious, no effort too great if it brought a great idea to life (p. 269).



Nancy Stephenson

JWT Company News
January 10, 1964

Her belief in feminism was also shown during President Wilson's support of women's suffrage in 1915 and 1916. At that time, New York was the first state to make changes in its constitution, and New York City was the central stronghold of the movement. She organized a group of JWT women who marched in the suffragette parade and, according to Agnes Court, her secretary for 46 years, she got them all big campaign hats to

wear of different colors – green, purple, and white. “We marched from 42nd Street to 59th Street, and after the parade, J. Walter Thompson gave us a big dinner at the Savoy Hotel” (p. 268).

A significant number of women at JWT came directly from the suffrage campaign and women’s reform. Helen Resor hired activist who were unemployed after passage of the women’s suffrage amendment. Among them were Terese Olzendam, circulation manager of *The Suffragist* magazine, and Frances Maule, formerly head of the publication department of the National American Women’s Suffrage Association. Also, Ruth Waldo, JWT’s first woman vice president, had worked for the Russell Sage Foundation and the New York Charity Organization Society before she joined the agency in 1915 (Peiss, Fall 1998).

Helen Resor’s influences on and supports to women was undoubtedly invaluable. Women in advertising, and particularly women in JWT offices around the world, owe Helen Lansdowne Resor a great deal for the inspiring standards she set for them to follow (J. Walter Thompson Company News, January 10, 1964).

SUPPORT TO ART

Helen Lansdowne Resor’s love for art was found in the style of her ads. She believed that “the advertising to-day is concerned with art, and the successful advertiser is allied with the art museum of his city, bulletins its lectures and exhibits for his employees and makes copy artistic as well as commercial” (Abbott, 1920, p. 43). According to Arthur T. Blomquist, one of her co-workers, Helen Resor “had a major influence on advertising art. She was a great Art Director in helping advance art photography and typography to its highest level” (J. Walter Thompson Company News, January 10, 1964, p. 11).

“With an eye for new art trends, she commissioned work by talented artists and undoubtedly contributed to the prominence they attained” (Keding, 1994, p. 266). She was credited with bringing Edward Steichen who was already regarded as one of greatest photographers of his time into advertising. She approached him in 1923 because she had seen his work for *Vogue and Vanity*

Fair. Up to that time, advertising art was dominated by illustrators and photographs used were ordinary and poorly executed.

In his autobiography, *A Life in Photography*, Steichen (1963) wrote that

[not] long after I began working for *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*, I was approached by the J. Walter Thompson agency and asked if I would be interested in doing some advertising work. I had been watching the magazines and was distressed by how little and how badly photography was being used. So, when the agency proposed an interesting idea for Jergens Lotion, I took the job (Chapter 9, p. 1).

The idea for Jergens's Lotion ad was to take a picture of the hands of a woman doing her own housework. He said that he particularly liked the task of peeling potatoes. He also wrote that "[the] wife of the president of J. Walter Thompson posed for the hands, and I could tell by the way she cut the potatoes that this wasn't the first time she had done it" (p. 1). Jergens's Lotion ads became his notable work in advertising.



"I could tell by the way she cut the potatoes that this wasn't the first time she had done it"
Edward Steichen. *A Life in Photography*.

Several years later, Steichen agreed to the ads for the Eastman Kodak Company for JWT. He took this job because it involved realism and he decided to use everyday people in the suburbs and various towns around New York instead of professional models. His "specific" procedure was after getting ready to make the exposure, he handed the persons he was photographing a set of lively snapshots of subjects that particularly interested them. As a result, he got their spontaneous and real expressions.



Advertisement for Eastman Kodak
by Edward Steichen
from *A Life in Photography*

In addition to the advertisements for firms, he also worked, for JWT, on the promotions for organizations and charities including the Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital, the New York Post-Graduate Hospital, the Travelers Aid Society, and the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies.



Advertisement for Eastman Kodak
by Edward Steichen
from *A Life in Photography*

[See Steichen's work for organizations and charities.](#)

Steichen's work for JWT was revolutionary for its time and helped pave the way for a far-reaching change in the entire appearance of advertising (Keding, 1994). In addition to Steichen, other famous photographers including Cecil Beaton, Youseff Karsh, and Norman Rockwell did their first advertising work for JWT (Schmitt, 1964).

Helen Lansdowne Resor's aesthetic contributions went beyond advertising. Her interest in architecture and interiors was initially displayed in the decoration of the JWT offices, especially the New York office. In 1927, when the New York office moved from 244 Madison Avenue to the Graybar Building, the world's largest office building at that time, she took this opportunity to create a showcase in JWT's new corporate headquarters.



The Graybar Building.
The world's largest building in 1927.
JWT: Advertising Leadership 1864-1989

Norman Bel Geddes was commissioned by her to design the lush two-story conference room. She supervised the decoration and arrangement of the executive offices on the eleventh floor. Numerous interior designers, among them Elsie de Wolfe, were hired to decorate specific offices. The offices with windows on the outside of the building were separated from inner offices by iron grilles designed by Samuel Yellin, in stead of walls, so that secretaries might partake of the view (Fox, 1984; Keding, 1994).

Fox further described that “[the] executive dining room was reconstructed from an eighteenth-century farmhouse in Ipswich, Massachusetts. Kettle irons swung from the fifteen-foot fireplace, and ad executives ate off pewter dishes at an antique maple table” (p. 90).



The iron grilles door
designed by Samuel Yellin
JWT: Advertising
Leadership 1864-1989



The wrought iron door of
John B. Watson's office
JWT Company News
January 10, 1964

One of the office's outstanding architectural features was the wrought iron door of John B. Watson's office which was designed and executed by Samuel Yellin. The iron door told the history of printing in eighteen panels. Thirty

five years later, this door was moved to serve as the entrance to the new Board Room on the 11th floor of the New York Office (J. Walter Thompson Company News, January 10, 1964).

It could be seen that a tour of the floor meant a trip through architectural history (Fox, 1984). Helen chose furnishings not to please clients but to please the occupants and each executive was allowed to choose the period he liked the best because she believed that they would work better and longer in tasteful, attractive, and comfortable surroundings (J. Walter Thompson Company News, January 10, 1964; Ogilvy, 1983). JWT Company News also stated that the furnishings in the New York office were unique in the advertising agency business and one of JWT's hallmark.

Helen Resor was also widely recognized in the art field. Her career in advertising and expertise in public relations brought her to the attention of Mrs. Cornelius Sullivan, a founder of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and Helen was introduced to her. In 1935, Mrs. Sullivan introduced her to the Board of Trustees, and in May, Helen Lansdowne Resor was elected to that Board. She served as a trustee until February 1940. Through her activities at MOMA, her interests in modern art and architecture developed. She made use of her experience as a trustee of MOMA to form one of the most outstanding collections of modern art in the world, a small part of which was loaned for public exhibitions (Bremer, 1976; Keding, 1994).

J. Walter Thompson Company News of January 10, 1964 stated Helen Resor's significant role in the success of MOMA. "The Museum of Modern Art in New York is today one of the world's foremost exhibition points for modern art, and Mrs. Resor had a part in the development of this museum to its present rank and status. She was for many years a trustee and supporter of the Museum" (p.11). In addition to her financial and personal support, she donated many works of art to the Museum, many of which were given anonymously. Among her donations were the following:

Dali – "Persistence of Memory"

Klee – "Vocal Fabric of the Singer Rosa Silver"

de Chirico – "The Mathematicians" (pencil drawing)

Picasso – "Flower Girl" (ink drawing)

Numerous prints of Braque, de Chirico, Cadmus, Derain, Laurencin, Laurens,

Leger, Picasso, Schrag and Weber and a series of posters by Cassandre (p. 11).

Moreover, during the 1930s, when the museum did not have the financial resources, the museum purchased paintings for Helen Resor with the option to buy them back them later. The works which were repurchased by the museum from Helen Resor at the original prices were the following:

Balthus – “Portrait of Andre Derain”

Leger – “Still Life”

Wyndham Lewis – “Roman Actors”

Vieira da Silva – “Dance”

Picasso – “Two Figures On A Beach” (ink drawing)

Tchelitchew – “Nathalie Paley”

Berard – “Promenade” (p. 11).

According to Bremer (1976), Helen Resor’s collection of paintings and her readings in architecture were strongly influenced by Alfred Barr, founding Director of MOMA. Moreover, her interest in modern art led to the decision to build a modern house on the family ranch in Wyoming. Late in 1936 or early 1937, most likely at Barr’s urging, Helen Resor contacted Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in Berlin. Bremer wrote that

[after] a meeting with Mies in Paris during the summer of 1937, the Resors invited him to come to the USA as their guest. This provided a reason and a means for Mies to leave Germany, and he returned with the Resor family to New York, visited them at the ranch in Wyoming and agreed to design a house spanning the bridge, to attach to the existing service building (p. 3).

“Pivotal in Mies’s career and in his life, this project marks the end of [his] European phase and the beginning of his work in America” (p. 1).

The project was carried through, with more than a thousand drawings as evidence. Unfortunately, it had to be dropped due to the spring flood in 1943. Helen Resor once wrote that she chose Mies to build her ranch house because she considered him one of the world’s finest architects. However, it was undoubted that the reason also came from the Resors’ pure generosity toward the stranded artist. Bremer wrote that

[no] doubt their sympathy and warmth toward Mies helped overcome his reluctance to seek a new life in a new land and to accept the Chicago post. It was only after he came to America that he experienced a triumphant rebirth of his career ... The role of the Resors in rescuing Mies from a world fallen into tyranny will go down in the history of modern architecture despite the fact that their house was never built (p. 3).

Helen Resor was well known for the role she played in helping many artists and being a patron who looked for and encouraged new artists and photographers. She was the anonymous backer of many struggling painters, sculptors and some musicians. After World War II, she gave special commissions to artists, artisans and sculptors in England to help them to reestablish themselves (Schmitt, 1964). Arthur T. Blomquist, one of her co-workers, said that "... [she] would often call me to meet her at a gallery to view the work of a new and unknown artist. She was always ready to view any artist that I thought had high potential, and shared in my enthusiasm, and would say: "If you feel that way I will gamble on him.'" (J. Walter Thompson Company News, January 10, 1964, p. 11).



Arthur T. Blomquist
JWT Company News
January 10, 1964

DEVOTION TO PUBLIC SERVICE

"Helen Lansdowne Resor had a long history of public service involvement through advertising" (Keding, 1994, p. 270). In 1917, during the World War I, President Hoover wanted to rouse every woman in America to a sense of her responsibility in winning the war (Abbott, 1920). Helen Resor was invited to create a campaign for the Conservation of Food. "She set going a part of that extraordinary publicity work of the Food Administration that set you and me and every other woman in the country a flame to do the uttermost in her power to save the world from the onmarching, conquering hosts of evil" (p. 43). In addition to this campaign, she also prepared many of advertisements for the Red Cross and the YMCA (Stockholder's Affidavit, 1924).

According to J. Walter Thompson Company News of August, 5, 1918, Helen Resor was responsible for directing and supervising all of the war work on behalf of the agency, refusing to accept even the customary honorarium of one dollar a year.

During the World War II, it was believed that the traditional image of women, as housewives and mothers, had to be changed before the recruitment of women needed for the war production could be achieved (Valgos, 1994). In 1943, Helen Resor, Jim Young, and Bill Berchtold, with the support of their complete creative department, created a campaign for the government client, the War Manpower Commission, in order to get three million women into war factories and related civilian activities by the end of the year (Keding, 1994).

“According to the January 11, 1943 issue, “Those lights burning in Mrs. Resor’s office [on] Christmas Eve weren’t candles. Just a huddle on a knockout graphic arts training presentation ordered by the War Department.”” (p. 270). In the first week of April 1943, the campaign, with the theme, “Women must work to win this war,” was launched. Local advertising was emphasized and consisted of car cards, posters, newspaper ads, radio spots, publicity releases, and speeches presented by local chairmen in over 100 cities. [See more examples of ads created by Helen Resor and her team for the War Manpower Commission](#)



Ad done by Helen Resor for the War Manpower Commission from John W. Hartman Center

Moreover, Helen Resor devoted her time and attention to several organizations and charities. “[She] was a longtime supporter of Radcliffe College and she took an early interest in the Planned Parenthood Association. From 1926 to 1936 she was committee chairman of the Babies Ward of the New York Post-Graduate Hospital and was responsible for improvements which the hospital had been trying to accomplish for years without success” (Schmitt, 1964, p. 3). She also served as president of the Travelers Aid Society, a shelter for homeless women during the Depression, in 1931

CONCLUSION

After living a life of contributions, Helen Lansdowne Resor died, at the age of 77, on January 2, 1964, two months after the death of Stanley Resor. She was survived by three children – Stanley Roger Resor; Helen Lansdowne (Mrs. Gabriel Hauge); and Ann Clark (Mrs. James Laughlin); sixteen

grandchildren, and two sisters, Mrs. Therese Duple and Mrs. Rosalie Lansdowne Bruchelle (Schmitt, 1964).

It was clearly shown that her life was extraordinary and full of influences and contributions. Her role in JWT's success was "in every way as great as her husband's" ("Quiet, Competent, Helen Resor Helped in Shaping of JWT," 1962, p. 101). Working alongside her husband, she served the agency for more than four decades as a director and was one of the main architects of the agency's growth. JWT's contributions to advertising, which were the practices leading to the use of editorial copy, photography, and the testimonial, were initiated by her or under her direction (Cotton, 2001; Keding, 1994).



Helen Lansdowne Resor
from John W. Hartman Center

She was a "great inspiration" to the copy department ("Quiet, Competent, Helen Resor Helped in Shaping of JWT," 1962, p. 101). "A brilliant writer, she fashioned many of the great campaigns of advertising history" (Schmitt, 1964, p. 2). As a result of her great work, she was regarded as "the greatest copywriter of her generation" ("Mrs. Stanley Resor: "The Greatest Copywriter,'" 1964). In his article in Advertising Age (1951), James M. Woolf, one of the great JWT copywriters, wrote that

Mrs. Helen Resor ...
deserves immense credit for
the quality of thinking she
has contributed to making
advertising copy an instrument of
effective
salesmanship ... Mrs. Resor
pioneered conceptions
that to this day are the source of
inspiration of many
successful campaigns. The
advertising agency is in
debt to Mrs. Resor – NOT because
she is a woman
but because she is the fortunate
possessor of a fine

mind (p. 69).

Moreover, Helen Resor, the first woman to be greatly successful in writing and planning national advertising, opened up the opportunities to women in advertising, especially in JWT offices around the world. She also had an influence on the field of modern art and actively supported the public services through several organizations and causes. David Ogilvy (1983) commented in his book *Ogilvy on Advertising* that everything she had done made her “more than Stanley” (p. 193).

However, according to J. Walter Thompson Company News, January 10, 1964, “Helen Lansdowne Resor was a retiring woman who never took personal credit for her accomplishments. She was rarely photographed. She seldom attended industry meetings ... She did not author articles” (p. 1). In *Stockholder’s Affidavit* (1924), she said that she was asked by many women’s magazines and by many newspaper syndicates to author articles on herself or on her work. However, she refused those requests because that kind of publicity did not appeal to her.

She was viewed as a quiet, modest, and very beautiful-to-look-upon executive (Abbott, 1920). “A brainy, quietly competent woman of a great charm, she dresses conservatively and plainly, usually wearing a black or other dark dress, and no makeup” (“Quiet, Competent, Helen Resor Helped in Shaping of JWT,” 1962, p. 101). In July 1924, Stanley Resor, the president of the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA) at that time, and Helen visited London, where they attended a dinner party given for “advertising agents from overseas” (J. Walter Thompson Company News, January 10, 1964, p. 11). The July 23, 1924 issue of *Punch* magazine carried a sketch of Helen Resor along with the comment:



A sketch of Helen Resor

from *Punch* (July 23, 1924)

The President of the Association of American Advertising Agencies looks like a senator. The wife of the President of the Association of American Advertising Agencies looks like a Rosetti. How frightfully fit and well most of these ladies and gentlemen

seem to be! That's through practising what they preach, you know. They keep that schoolgirl complexion. Truth in advertising ("Gog, Zip, and Magog," 1924, p. 90).

In 1967, three years after her death, Helen Lansdowne Resor was elected by the American Advertising Federation into [the Advertising Hall of Fame](#). In "Advertising Hall of Fame" section of *Who's Who in Advertising* (Morgan, 1972), it was written that "Helen Lansdowne Resor will be remembered particularly in two capacities – her own work as a copywriter ... and her work as a Vice President and the president's wife of the J. Walter Thompson Co" (p. 694). Also, with Stanley Resor, she was elected by Advertising Age to be the number 14 of [Top 100 Advertising People of the Century](#).

Helen Lansdowne Resor devoted her life not only to JWT and advertising, but also to people and the society. "She was one of the most outstanding women in American life" (Schmitt, 1964, p.1).

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