When Mabel Lincoln penned the following entry in her diary in May 1930, she was 52 years old and living in the town of Leongatha in Victoria’s Gippsland district. Mabel had previously lived on a dairy farm with her husband but had moved to Leongatha in 1923 where she established Lincoln’s General Store with her daughter Rosie. In 1930 we find her immersed in domestic work and recording its constant demands in her dairy:

Rise 7.30 Kornies & toast, no eggs to be procured in the town, tidy up generally get to washing 11 oclock, for dinner we have Purree made from Rice & beans I have in the meat safe & Mutton stock, boiled potatoes (in skins) tin kippered herrings, Tapioca warmed up (left from Yesterday) do three coppers full of white washing, finished 5 PM cook scones & jam tarts for tea (pastry scraps left from yesterday makes 15 tarts) cook corn beef for tomorrow (Harolds [son] favourite dish) after tea wash my face, Mabel Maureen & Lorna (children) go up to the train to greet Harold, Rosie goes too, I stay home & have hot soup ready for him, balance of Purree 1 small tin of tomatoes soup, 1 tin of water, this makes a delicious meal for him, says he knew I would have soup or something so we talk & read until bedtime…get to bed 12 PM. (16 May 1930)¹

In Mabel’s chronological recounting of her day, food and housework are its dominant narrative features, while time structured her day and its telling.

The dominance of time in Mabel’s diary, and her never ending struggle to complete her daily tasks within the limited allocation available to her, provide us with detailed insight into the nature of domestic work in Australia in the 1930s and the influences of the domestic science

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¹ This chapter is a much revised version of an article previously published as ‘Making Time: Representations of Temporality in Australian Women’s Diaries of the 1920s and 1930s’, in Australian Historical Studies 102 (1994), pp. 1–17. My special thanks to Rhys Isaac and Janet Butler for their insights and suggestions for revisions.

¹ State Library of Victoria, Australian Manuscripts Collection MS 9748, Bay 18, Mabel Lincoln, Diary.
movement on women’s lives. Contemporary discourses about domestic work and household management sought to introduce the concepts of industrial efficiency and rationality into the home. Hygiene was a key feature. A hygienic home was also an efficient home and the twin goals of the domestic science movement were careful economic management and household efficiency. In marked contrast to the pre-industrial household so vividly represented in the diary of midwife Martha Ballard, in Mabel’s world domestic routines were to be governed by the clock.

Domestic time is just one experience of temporality to be found in Mabel’s diary and those of her fellow Australian diarists who found a moment or an hour in their day or week to record the things that mattered. Using a collection of such diaries written by white, mainly middle-class Australian women during the interwar years, I explore here the different renderings of time within them, and argue that an understanding of women’s time is integrally linked to the spaces they occupy, the locations they live in and to their biological possibilities. A more sustained discussion of these issues can be found in my book *Spaces in

Fig. 1. A page from Mabel Lincoln’s 1930 diary. (Photo Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria).

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2 Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785–1812* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991 [1990]). The clock already casts its shadow in Martha’s diary, but only in hours, and as a record of when things happened rather than how long tasks took.