

ARKANSAS EXTENSION HOMEMAKERS COUNCIL

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Official transcript of:

Rowena Garner

Sugar Grove Extension Homemakers Club Member

Original recording made 11 April 2012

at Booneville, Arkansas

Interviewed by:

Grace Ryan Calva

Logan County Extension Homemakers Council Member

Recorded, transcribed and edited by:

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Oral History Program

Grace Ryan Calva, Blue Mountain Extension Homemakers Club Member.

11 April 2012

This is an audio recording of Rowena Garner, a member of the Sugar Grove Extension Homemakers Club. This interview is part of an Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council Oral History Program, and Rowena is answering questions asked by Blue Mountain Extension Homemakers Club Member, Grace Ryan Calva.

Questions and comments by Grace are in boldface type; Rowena's responses and comments are in lightface type.

I am Grace Ryan Calva. This is the interview with Rowena Garner for the Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council Oral History Program. This is being done April 11, 2012, at the Logan County Courthouse in Booneville, Arkansas, in Logan County.

The audio recordings and transcript of this interview will be donated to the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual—pardon me—Visual History at the University of Arkansas.

The recording, transcript, and any other related material will be deposited and preserved forever in the Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville, and the copyright will belong solely to the University of Arkansas.

Mrs. Rowena Garner, are you ready to give the—are you willing to give the Pryor Center permission to make the audio file and transcript available to others.

I am.

Thank you. First, I'd like for you to give your complete legal name and spell it for me, and then tell me the city and county in which you presently reside.

My name is Rowena Garner—R-O-W-E-N-A, G-A-R-N-E-R, and I live at Sugar Grove, Logan County, Arkansas.

Thank you. You are a wonderful lady and you have been like a—you are such a role model for each one of us.

Thank you.

This is going to be—this is going to be a very informal interview, and I want to share many memories of your involvement with the Extension Homemakers, Rowena. So I want you to feel free to—to comment anything that you want to comment, the good times as well as the bad times. What has been your association with the Extension Homemakers Program? As a member or as a professional—you were a member, of course. How did you learn about the Extension Homemakers Program?

I grew up with it because my Mother was a member and she had been a member just about all of my life, so I just grew up with it. [Editor's Note: Rowena's Mother's name was Ruth Lee Pennington Smith. Her father was William E. Smith.]

That's wonderful. How long have you been associated with the program?

Ever since I got out of high school.

And what year was that?

In 1938.

Isn't that wonderful. Gosh, you're such—you've been associated with the—the association longer than some of our members are old.

That's right.

That's wonderful, Rowena. What was the first club with which you were associated and what year? Do you remember that?

In—I joined the Ione Club when I got out of high school and in the Ione Community. [Editor's Note: Rowena worked in their family store in the Ione Community from high school in 1938 until she was married to Pleas Allen Garner in 1941 and moved to the Sugar Grove Community.]

And what year was that?

Nineteen thirty-eight.

Mh-hmm—that's wonderful. You're—you're the oldest member of our Logan County membership in the association, so I'm so very proud to be interviewing you.

Thank you.

Are you presently a club member?

Yes.

If so please, please give the name of the club, the county and the district.

Sugar Grove Club, Logan County, Ozark District.

That is great. Do you have any special remembrance of that first meeting of your first club? It's been a few years ago.

I'm sorry; I don't remember the first meeting. I just know that I—I went. [Laughs] And I remember that it was there at Ione, but I don't remember any special thing that happened that day.

Mh-hmm. OK. Why did you join, Rowena?

I reckon I thought it was just the thing to do. [Laughs]

Now when did you join a—Sugar Grove? When did you—what year did you join the club there?

I married in November of 1941, and I don't know whether I went to the first meeting right after I married or whether it was after the first of the year of 1942, but anyway, I joined the Sugar Grove Club immediately after I married.
[Editor's Note: Rowena and her husband were farmers, sawmill owners, and raised cattle.]

Well, after all, you were a new bride, so [*laughs*] that is great then that you joined immediately when you moved to Sugar Grove and married.

Yes, yes.

OK. That is great.

My mother-in-law and two sister-in-laws belonged and I went with them and joined. [Editor's Note: Rowena's mother-in-law was Luzetta Bradford Garner Wilkins, and her sisters-in-law were Vada Garner Fennell and Effie Garner Hunter.]

Why have you continued your membership with our association?

It was just the thing to do. [*Laughs*] It—a—there was always something to look forward to, there was always something new fixin' (fixing) to happen, and I could learn new things.

And do you remember Ms. Marcelle Phillips the—the Extension Agent?

I most certainly remember Ms. Phillips.

Oh, she was so wonderful.

She was a wonderful person.

Yes, she was.

I was with her in 4-H before EH [Extension Homemakers], before Home Demonstration, and she taught me a lot. I can remember things now that she taught me and I'll see girls that don't know how to do something, I think—they

need Ms. Phillips. [*Laughs*] [Editor's Note: Ms. Marcelle Phillips came to Logan County, Booneville, as Home Demonstration Agent on June 23, 1919, and retired June 30, 1960. She entered into an agreement with Pleasant Andrew "Uncle Buddy" Garner, Rowena's husband's grandfather, to build a permanent cabin on Sugar Creek in the 1930's for the purpose of Home Demonstration Club meetings. It was called the "Club House." During one meeting there, the Ione Club members made deodorant using soda as an ingredient. The cabin later burned during a forest fire.]

And now what—what association did you have with the Arkansas Tuberculosis Association? The clubs—the Extension Clubs?

The Extension Clubs, the Home Demonstration Clubs at that time, were—well, they asked us to help with them, and I was appointed to one of the committees to help organize and help get people to have X-rays and be involved in the State Sanatorium because it was here right under our nose [*laughs*] and it was very important.

Well, it was a—for us to have the TB . . .

Right.

. . . mh-hmm—Sanatorium here was . . .

Right.

. . . really and—and it needed all the leadership . . .

It needed all—everybody's help.

OK. And what are some things that you really did in the club that—that helped bring new members in and helped with a—I know we had needy families now— well, then, like we do now, but what were things that you all did?

One thing that I remember was a—Ms. Phillips would have some—some—have the people meet at someone's home. Of course, we met in the—in the

homes most of the time, anyway. But she would ask them to have certain things, or she would bring some food to cook, and she would show us how to cook different things. She taught us how to cook several different things, things that us country people didn't know much about. [*Laughs*]

And she showed you how to can, too, didn't she?

Yes, she really . . .

Now I was a . . .

She really helped us to learn how to can, and back then lots of people butchered their own hogs and calves, and she taught us how to can pork and beef.

Mh-hmm.

And we—we did lots of canning back then.

Well, that's the only way we—everybody didn't have a freezer and—and everything.

No.

You had a pressure cooker, though.

We didn't know how—we didn't know anything about freezing back then, at the first.

Now, Rowena, did you go to Wal-Mart after Wal-Mart came to Booneville and set up those pressure cooker checks?

Yes, yes we . . .

That's another thing that was a . . .

We set up—we would have a testing for the canners, canner lids to see that the pressure would seal all right.

OK. Now tell me about those gatherings that you'll used to have with other clubs in the county where you made mattresses, comforters for needy families. Those were a very big . . .

That—that was something that was really big and it was hard work, but we enjoyed it. We . . .

You knew you were helping someone, didn't you?

. . . we were helping someone. Uh-huh. And the mattresses were good. I—I just imagine that some of those mattresses are still in use.

Mh-hmm.

I don't know of any, but I wouldn't be surprised but what they are. And—and some of the comforters are still and they furnished the—all of the material even the material for the comforters.

Wonderful.

Furnished that.

For you'll just donated so much of your talent and time to do this and that was great. Can—how many of the agents—can you remember their names or remember something about them.

We didn't have too many because Ms Phillips was here for so many years. And right this minute I don't know who followed her. Was it Judith Hittle? Judith Hittle was one. And . . .

Well, we've just—we've just had one retire. Sheila.

Sheila.

Uh-huh.

And we had one named Willis before Sheila and what was her name? What

was her name was Willis. [Editor's Note: The agent was Sheila Willis Brandt.]

No.

Wasn't it?

Well, we've had some. Yes, it was, I think. We've had some really good, good leadership . . .

But, we sure have.

. . . in the county . . .

We sure have.

. . . and that's been most appreciative.

And . . .

Rowena, in your busy schedule have you had time to attend—I know that we've had many Council meetings in the county, and I know that you've been very—attending a lot of those, but have you been to—been able to attend any of the state meetings and things?

Yes, I went to two state meetings at Fayetteville.

And they had lots of workshops and things for you, didn't they.

Lots of workshops and we—we learned a lot at those workshops and we came back home and tried to teach what we had learned.

Oh, that was wonderful, so you brought it back to your members that was not able to attend.

Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Right. Right.

That was great. How has Extension Homemakers touched your life?

Well, it's just been part of my life. I've told lots of people that it was part of my life because that's what—well, I just depended on it so much.

You circled that day that you met each month . . .

Right.

. . . on the calendar . . .

Right.

. . . and, that was an important day, and you looked forward to it.

Yes.

I feel quite sure—having a Mom that was also a member.

It was something that we just looked forward to.

That is—what has been your favorite event or activity?

[*Laughs*] I think the fellowship and just getting together has meant—and I've helped with the fair, the county fair, just about every year. Back . . .

For how many years?

I—I don't know how many years. But I worked out of the home after my children got grown and the years that I worked out, I would take my vacation during fair time [*laughs*] and worked at the fair. [Editor's Note: Rowena's children are William Allen Garner, Mary Ruth Garner Lewis, and Emma Charlene Garner Watts. After her children were grown, Rowena worked in the Logan County Tax Assessor's office and was the Logan County Judge's Secretary.]

How sweet of you . . .

So . . .

. . . because you were a permanent fixture at that fair each fall.

Yeah.

That is great. I'm not going—I don't want to ask you this question because I don't want you to tell me anything, but what has been your least favorite event or activity?

One thing, that still aggravates me is when we get together sometimes people get too involved in visiting and don't pay attention to what's—the . . .

What we're there for.

Well, what we went for to start with.

Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

That's one thing that still irritates me. [*Laughs*]

Because you know the Roberts Rules by heart, I'm sure.

[*RG: Laughs*]

OK. What changes have you experienced in the Extens—in the Extension Homemakers organization? That's a big question.

It's a big question, but no one—no one agent has ever done for the county what Ms. Phillips did because she went to—nearly every meeting and she brought some kind of good information each time and in later years the agents have not been, maybe faithful's not the word, but anyway haven't . . .

Available?

May not have been available to go as much as she did. And I think we all miss that.

And I think that you just answered has Extension Homemakers taught you

anything about people?

Right.

You just about answered that question and—and in answering that one because of the fact that—that people—when a presiding officer is presiding, they need to be quiet and pay attention.

They need to pay attention, that's right.

Correct, so I think you've probably answered that one. Do you have other memories that you'd like to share with us or experiences or thoughts that you would like to share that your membership has brought to mind?

Right this minute I, don't think of anything outstanding that—there's just so many things that we have done that I do recall and—and I'm glad that I've been able to be a part of it all these years.

We've had us a couple of really good cookbooks in the county, too.

Yes.

That was a real project that we all worked on so that's been . . .

Yes, we really worked on those cookbooks.

And I bet you use it every day and I do, too.

Yes, I sure do. I still use my cookbook a lot.

And—and that we're going all even—to state with, with that.

Yes, yes.

I want to thank you, Rowena, for—I want to thank you, Rowena, for all the—all you've contributed to the Extension Homemakers Club and—and for sharing your memories with us today. This has been most important to

me because like I said when they asked me to do this interview, you have been a role model for not only me, but you've been a role model—and how many years have you been—what age are you today?

I'm 92.

**And still a member of AEHC [Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council].
(Applause)**

Yes.

That is wonderful and I want to thank you again for doing this today and this is going to be in our history for years to come and there'll be some little girl that will come along and read this and say, "I knew Rowena Garner from Sugar Grove," and that will be a highlight of today, I think. So, I love you with all my heart and thank you for being my friend.

Thank you for being my friend. [*Laughs*]

And, I thank you, Sandra.

SS: You're welcome.

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