

ARKANSAS EXTENSION HOMEMAKERS COUNCIL

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Official transcript of:

Thelma Lockhart

Vaughn Extension Homemakers Club Member

Original recording made 9 March 2012

at Bentonville, Arkansas

Interviewed by:

Katie Rieff

Benton County Extension Homemakers Council Vice President
Benton County Oral History Project Chairman

Transcribed and edited by:

Melissa Ayers

Friend of Benton County Extension Homemakers Council

Recorded by:

Susan Kendrick-Perry

The David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History
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Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council

Oral History Program

Katie Rieff, Benton County Extension Homemakers Council Vice President and Benton County Oral History Project Chairman

9 March 2012

This is an audio recording of Thelma Lockhart, a member of the Benton County Extension Homemakers Council. This interview is part of an Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council Oral History Program, and Thelma is answering questions asked by Benton County Extension Homemakers Council Vice President and Benton County Oral History Project Chairman, Katie Rieff.

Questions and comments by Katie are in boldface type; Thelma's responses and comments are in lightface type.

I am Katie Rieff. This is the interview with Thelma Lockhart for the Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council Oral History Program. This is being done at the Benton County Cooperative Extension Service office on March 9, 2012, in Bentonville, Arkansas, in Benton County.

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

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Are you willing to give the Pryor Center permission to make the audio file and transcript available to others?

Yes, I am.

First, I would like 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.

This is going to be a very informal interview, and I want you to share your—share your memories of your involvement with the Arkansas Extension Program—Program—the good times and the challenges. OK?

Thelma, T-H-E-L-M-A, Erma, E-R-M-A, Lockhart, L-O-C-K-H-A-R-T. And my address, 7457 Vaughn Road, Bentonville, Arkansas 72712.

Thank you, Thelma.

What has been your association with the Extension Homemakers program? As a member, a professional or agent?

As a member.

Thank you. How did you learn about the Extension Homemakers Program?

When we first moved here from Nebraska, the Vaughn Club was very large and it consisted of a great many of the members being members of the Vaughn Presbyterian Church. And, as we went to the Vaughn Presbyterian Church, I was invited to m—join the Vaughn Exten—Home—Home Demonstration Club, which it was known as at that time and, so that was how I was invited.

Do you remember what year was that, Thelma?

1951.

That takes care of my next question then. How long have you been associated with the program?

Sixty-one years. [*Laughs*]

What was the first club in which you were associated? Was that the first club in which you were associated?

Yes, that was the first club that I was associated with in Arkansas.

And, as you've said in 1951.

Are you presently a club member?

Yes, ma'am.

And, what is the name of your club, and the county and the district?

The name of the club is the Vaughn Extension Homemakers Club and we are in Bentonville, Arkansas. Technically we are in Bentonville, Arkansas, but really we live in a little town called Vaughn and that's where the club is located.

And that is in what county?

Benton County

And then your district?

Is Ozark District.

Thank you.

Well, Thelma, do you have any special remembrances of that first meeting you attended?

Not really because I just remember that it was a very large club and they were very welcoming to me. And, I don't remember any special thing about the first meeting. [*Laughs*]

Well, why did you join the club?

When I—before we came to Arkansas, I was a member of a community club in Nebraska, and when we came here and I was invited to join, it gave me an opportunity to meet more people and to become more in the community than—and it gave me a place to go once in a while, too. [*Laughs*]

Were there any similarities between the community club you were in in

another state and the one when you came here and [unclear words]?

We did not have specific lessons in that club, we had—it was more of a club where they met to socialize. I mean it was—we did various things, but it was more of a social club than a working club.

Well, why have you continued your membership all these 50-some years?

I have continued because I have enjoyed it and because it gave me an opportunity to meet people out in the county besides the ones in the community that I lived in. And it also was a learning experience that I could use, being fairly young at that time and having three children at that time and, so I had a lot of things to learn and I have enjoyed that part, too.

Well, while we're talking about learning, do you want to list a few of the things that you've learned?

We learned about nutrition, which was a good thing and also we received recipes that would help us and also things that would help economically, things that we could substitute and so on when we bought things and also the . . . We learned to watch the—the cans that we bought and what the nutrition and calories and so on was on, in them.

Well, why have you continued your membership?

I think because, probably, I enjoyed it. And also, I'm still learning because there's so many things that they teach us that we don't get in other places and I'm still learning things that I didn't know and I probably will forever. [*Laughs*]

Well, how involved have you—did you become in your club, like holding offices, or committee chairman or responsibilities or just . . . ?

Well, at the time, of course, they had a large club so it wasn't so necessary to be a member that was working in the club as an officer, but later on I have been the president several times; I have been secretary; I have been vice-president; I have been inspiration leader and I have served on a great many committees.

Do you think you have benefited from your leadership positions in the Home Demonstration Club and Extension Club, as we talk of it now?

Yes, I think I have because it gets you out and if you give up—give demonstrations or illustrated talks in front of people; it gives you confidence and helps you to reach out to other people and you're not in your own little nest all the time.

The—have you been able to attend any state Council meetings or other state activities?

No, I haven't. I have participated in county ones, but not in the state.

The—I'm going to ask you how has Extension Homemakers has touched your life and I hope that you will share some of your favor—your experiences?

I have learned a great deal and also I have met a lot of people that I would not otherwise have met and being in Extension club I have been [*pause*] privileged to meet with the county agents in the Extension office and it's made me much more apt to come to them with problems. And if we came to them with problems, they could usually help us; and if they couldn't, they could call on the state to find out. And it's made me much more comfortable to work with them and they have been so helpful and there are a lot of things that the men and the women of the Extension office have helped me with.

I'm going to ask you, Thelma, tell me about your family's life and if you lived on a farm, if you lived in a small community, and how Extension Service— you say that they have helped you in so many ways. Can you just elaborate on that a little bit and your—your lifestyle and your children's, your family's?

I have lived on a farm all of my life and, of course, I was born in Nebraska and I went to a rural school. We walked a mile and a half. I think I can remember one or two times ever being taken to school. And we had a—we were farmers but my folks always rented and every two years, it seemed like, we moved and I would go to a different school and that was an experience, too. And, I enjoyed

that, but, later on I graduated from high school in 1941 and then I taught school, rural school, for six years and part of the time I walked three miles to go to school to teach and the other times I rode a horse and that was the way things were done and the—the schools were small and you had all eight grades. You didn't always have someone in each grade, but you ha—taught all eight grades and the things that Extension has helped me with in my life is the fact that . . .

[Editor's Note: The interview was interrupted by external activity in the building. The interview was paused and restarted after a short delay with the continuation of this dialogue.]

I was raised on a farm. I've been on a farm all my life and our schools were rural schools and I walked a mile and a half or we did, walked a mile and half to school and I can remember very few times of being taken to school even when it was snowy or—I do remember one morning, we walked to school and we got home that night and they said, "Do you know how cold it was this morning?" and we said, "No." Thirty degrees below zero and it hadn't felt that cold, but it was and we had terrible snow storms, too, and I don't remember the school was ever let out for snow storms.

And we—I taught—graduated from high school and, at that time, you could take normal training and professional training in high school and then you could teach for six years without going to college, and so I taught for six years in rural schools and I . . . One school was three miles from home and I stayed home in all except [*unclear words*] the worst part of the winter and I also rode a horse part of the time the three miles. And we had all eight grades and at times, of course, we did not have students in each grade, but we still had eight grades and the schools were mostly small and when I did not stay at home, I boarded in a home in the community.

When did you move to Arkansas, again?

We moved in 1951. I had one son that was born in September before we moved, so he was small, but I had two others that were under 3 years old. So that kept me very busy. [*Laughs*]

And what did you—you lived on a farm when you came . . .

Yes.

... to Arkansas immediately. Well what—what was your main interest on the farm? Were you diversified or?

We were—had milk cows and we milked—had a dairy and eventually we went to Grade A milk. And, we also had a chicken house that we could raise 2,000 chickens in and that was something that I took part in, too. And I also helped to milk. So . . .

So you were busy . . . ?

Yes.

... raising your children, doing your club activities . . .

And we had a big garden and my husband had—we had—mostly raised silage and hay.

The—what—then I'm going to ask one more time, how has Extension Homemakers touched your life?

It has helped me to reach out and not just be home all the time and it has also taught me things that has helped my family—things about what—what to cook and how to raise my children. It has helped in that also. And, of course, I was a 4-H leader for at least 20 years so that took part of my time, also. My daughter had volunteered me to be a leader, she—when they asked at school, she said, “My mother will,” you know, so I started in being a 4-H leader and I stayed at it for about 20 years.

Did you find that being a 4-H leader and being an Extension Homemaker kind of went hand—complemented each other?

Yes, it did. The Extension Homemakers sometimes helped with the 4-H and the things that I learned in Extension could help me in 4-H, also.

Well, through all these years can you tell—think of one thing, or maybe

two, that were your favorite events or activities in Extension Homemakers?

County Councils were always good because you got to meet other people in the other clubs and make friends that way. Also, if—if you—now I lost my train of thought. But, you could learn that—and then, also, I like to go to Maysville on the Fun Day. That's been a more recent thing, but it gives us a chance—they always have a good program and I always enjoy going and meeting other people.

What about the county fair?

I have worked in the county fair for years and I enjoy that very much because you get to show off the things that the Homemakers have done and, also, you meet the people that are going in the fair. And we showed cattle for years, until the kids got too big and I enjoyed that immensely.

Do you have grandchildren, other generations coming down that enjoy these same things you did?

Yes. I have grandchildren that are in 4-H and they are showing cattle at the county fair and also, they take great part in 4-H.

Have you ever entered—entered anything in the fairs yourself—had any exhibits?

Yes. In the latter years. Well, after my great-granddaughter got to 4-H time, she wanted to learn to cook and can and so we started canning and, of course, then we started taking canning to the county fair and this last year I had the most points in the canning division.

Do you think this is still an important project for young women to learn to do some of these things like canning and food—other types of food preservation and some of the skills—the homemaking skills?

Yes, I do. I think that canning is very essential and I—it's coming back a great deal. A lot of the younger ones are learning to can and it certainly helps on the grocery bill. And also, I don't do it, but a lot of people do home sewing. Back

when we first started, a lot of people did home sewing and the lessons that we got were demonstrations on how to finish up seams and how to put in a zipper and things like that that you learned, and that was quite helpful because I did a lot of sewing for my children and I think that that has kinda [kind of] gone by the wayside in the county fair. But I think it's coming back.

Well, what has been your least favorite event or activity? Maybe something that you haven't enjoyed as much or was a little harder for you to do?

Well, I can't really think of anything [that] was too terribly unimportant to me in EH but sometimes getting the lesson was a little difficult. [*Laughs*]

Could you take a minute maybe and tell us how you—lessons are chosen for your club and who is assigned to do these lessons.

We are on a volunteer basis a lot of times on the lessons and sometimes someone will think of something that they're doing that they might think the club might like to know. For example, next month the lady that has the foot lesson is going to show us how to make foot cream, so things like that are very essential and it—it helps us. Mostly, we have volunteers that take the lessons and the county agents have been very good about giving us lessons that we can use.

So you do get a lot of help through the Extension Service for your lesson.

Yes, we certainly do. They—they help. They give us a demonstration of it and then they usually give us handouts that we can use.

OK. Well, what changes have you experienced in the Extension Homemakers organization?

I think one of them is that when we started out it was more demonstrations. We—we actually did things and now it's more illustrated talks and it's—we're looking more at things that reach out into the community and things that are happening in the world for our lessons. But we still have the basics also because we had a soup lesson not too long ago.

You mentioned reaching out into the community. Have you been a part of any projects that actually contribute to the community service?

Yes. We—each month we have picked an organization that needs help and every month all of us bring one thing for this organization. For example, we have brought trash bags the last time and it's the paper goods and things like that that they can use at their organization.

Has Extension Homemakers taught you anything about people?

It's taught me that most people are good, and that they are helpful and are willing to share what they know, and that they will put out a hand of friendship to you.

Is Extension Homemakers limited to one particular age group in their members? Does it reach across all ages?

It reaches across all ages. Lately, however, it's been the older people because so many of the younger ones work away from home that they do not—they're not able to come to daytime meetings. And—but, they—we do have a few young ones that show up once in a while. But, I mean, that come to join, but very, very seldom. It seems like we're not reaching the younger group as much as we used to.

In thinking back over your 50-plus years in Extension Homemakers, how has it changed in the number of young women . . . ?

[Unclear words]

. . . and what was the place of the younger women in the Extension clubs 30, 40 years ago?

The younger women were the backbone of it se—years ago because they had a little more vigor and—than the older people and they were more open to new ideas, also. Sometimes we get—when we get older we get set in our ways, but now it seems like that we don't have very many young people, the young women, coming to join our organization and we have very few in our club. I

know we have one that's younger, but it has made the older people work a little more than they did before.

Trying to keep everything together is a big part of our Extension Homemakers Program, it sounds like.

It is, and it's hard to keep the offices moving from one to another. Sometimes you get in a rut and somebody has one office and they don't get out of it [*laughs*] for years. [*Laughs*]

Are there any other memories or experiences or thoughts that you would like to share about the Extension Homemakers clubs?

Just that it is a wonderful organization and we have good help from the state and the county in our organizations. Without them, we would not be able to do the things that we do, and where it is a countywide organization, we meet other people and get other ideas from different clubs and that is a big plus.

Well, thank – Thelma, thank you for all your contributions to the Extension Homemakers and for sharing your time and memories with us.

Well, thank you.

We appreciate it.

Well, we're—we are back with Thelma and I have a couple of more questions for her. You mentioned—we talked about your participation in the county fair and your canning being one of the major things that you exhibited. You've been canning for many years, obviously. Have you seen the methods of canning and food preservation change any? Do you do anything differently—any equipment—any things that you use in your canning— things you can now that you might not have canned then— versus other ways of food preserving.

Things have changed a lot. Personally, I was using a pressure cooker from the beginning and I still have the same pressure cooker, but, thank goodness the county agents checked the lid several years ago and found whether it was OK or

not. I have changed the parts of it, but I still have the same pressure cooker.

You're still using the same pressure cooker that you've used . . . ?

Yes, all these years. I got a new gauge and new rubbers and new plug last year, and I had replaced them one other time, but, it lasts forever. Also, I can more than I did at first. I raise a large garden. I can tomatoes and green beans and, also, I do a lot of freezing, which was not able to do in earlier years because we did not have a freezer. But, now I do freeze a lot of things and so—the lids, of course, have changed and they're much easier to use, I think, than they used to be, too.

Well, Thelma, I know you've mentioned about your farm—that you had a dairy; you had chickens. I'd like for you to just go back to one day that—when your children were at home and young—that you wanted to go to club that afternoon. What would be a typical day for you to be able to fit that time slot for your club?

Well, normally we got up about 3:30 in the morning to start because we had a barn that only had—you had three stalls in it, and we were milking about 30 cows. So, we would get up about 3:30. I would go out and get the cows; my husband would start the milking. And then, I would come in and get breakfast and he would milk and then I would get the kids up and send them to school, if they were school-age. And then, of course, we had chickens to feed. In the summer time, the children would help with that. They would pull the cart and I would fill the feeders or I would pull the cart and they would feed the feeders and then we would have to clean the barn and—every day because we were Grade A you had to scrub it down and then, of course, getting meals, and then, of course, I had to hurry to be able to go to club and—it was a rat's race, really. *[Laughter]*

You think it was worth it, though?

It was very worth it because you got out, away from home and the club was quite welcoming to have children come, so that was one plus because I could take my children before they were school-age. I could take them and they would be taken care of there at the club.

You did not have to get a babysitter?

No, I did not have—couldn't have gotten one if I'd had to. [*Laughs*]

Well, Thelma, thank you again. I just wanted a few more insights into your experiences and your life through these years that have kept you in Extension Homemakers. Thank you.

Well, thank you.

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