

ARKANSAS EXTENSION HOMEMAKERS COUNCIL
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Official transcript of:

Edythe Miller

Member of Washington County Extension Homemakers Council

Original recording made 26 January 2012

at Fayetteville, Arkansas

Recorded, transcribed and edited by:

Susan Young

Shiloh Museum of Ozark History Outreach Coordinator
Springdale, Arkansas

UofA
DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE
RESEARCH & EXTENSION
University of Arkansas System





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Oral History Program

Susan Young, Shiloh Museum of Ozark History at Springdale, Arkansas,
Outreach Coordinator

26 January 2012

This is an audio recording of Edythe Miller, member of the Washington County Extension Homemakers Council. This interview is part of an Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council Oral History Program, and Edythe is answering questions asked by Shiloh Museum of Ozark History at Springdale, Arkansas, Outreach Coordinator, Susan Young

Questions and comments by Susan are in boldface type; Edythe's responses and comments are in lightface type.

I am Susan Young. This is the interview with Edythe Miller for the Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council Oral History Program. This is being done on January 26, 2012, at the Washington County Extension Office in Fayetteville.

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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Yes.

First off, let's start out—give your complete legal name and spell it out for me so I make sure Edythe gets spelled right.

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E-d-y-t-h-e, Edythe. Irene, I-r-e-n-e. Miller, M-i-l-l-e-r.

All right. Tell me what city and county you live in right now.

Fayetteville, Arkansas, Washington County.

Now, we've gotten all our paperwork and official stuff out of the way. I've just got about six or seven questions, and we'll look at your scrapbook, too. I'm glad you brought that. What has been your association with the Extension Homemakers Program? Were you a club member?

I was a club member for 64 years.

How did you first learn about Extension Homemakers?

We moved to Arkansas, and my mother was invited to come to the club. I started going with her before I ever married.

When did you all move to Arkansas? Just a ballpark idea.

19, probably 1940.

So if you were born in 1929, you were about 11 or 12 years old?

Yes.

You were in Kansas before you came to Arkansas?

Yes, Augusta. A-u-g-u-s-t-a.

How come you all to move to Arkansas?

My stepdad bought a farm down here. My mother was a widow woman, up till then, practically. A widow. We moved to Arkansas because they come down and bought the farm.

Where was that? Where was the farm?

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East of Greenland. G-r-e-e-n-l-a-n-d.

Was there a community? East of Greenland, not as far as out in Middle Fork Valley, was it that far out?

Down across from Baptist Ford Cemetery and Church.

You live now not far from where you were raised.

That's right.

You all moved here, and your mother was invited to go. Do you remember the name of the club?

At that time it was Baptist Ford Extension Homemakers, but before then it had a name. They named it the Sew and Sew Club to begin with.

And Sew is S-e-w?

S-e-w. S-e-w.

Do you know how they came to pick that name? Have you ever heard any story?

Yeah, right here it is [shows typed one-page history of the club]. It says the ladies met at the house of Etta Laney and they decided they needed to do something to improve the community. They took Baptist Ford Church over as one of their projects. I know up until a few years ago, they put flags on Decoration Day on all the veterans' graves at Baptist Ford.

There's a big cemetery there at the church, so they took care of the cemetery.

We bought the piano—helped pay for it—for the church.

How did you all raise money to do that?

[Points at typed history]

Is that in here? Well, let's see.

Yes, oh, they had sales, bazaars, made quilts and sold them. Five cents a month for dues, pie suppers, ice cream socials, selling homemade quilts, and whatever they could do.

Do you mind, I'm just going to read this real quick, is that OK?

Yeah.

This is a one-page little history of the club that was in the scrapbook that you brought today. [reads document:]

The Baptist Ford Community Club

In the summer of 1930, a group of ladies met in the home of Mrs. Etta Laney, L-a-n-e-y, and expressed the need for an organization that would—that would be a benefit to the community. At that time, the Sew and Sew Club—and that's s-e-w and s-e-w club—was formed and Mrs. Bessie Burnett was elected president. The club met in the homes of the members every month and would have a covered-dish luncheon and then quilt in the afternoon. Quilts when finished were given to a needy family or sold to buy other things a family might need. On March 11, 1937, with 12 members present, the club was federated and renamed the Baptist Ford Community Club. The main objective of the club was the upkeep of the Baptist Ford Church and Cemetery. This project required a little money and a lot of volunteer work. In addition to the 5 cents per month dues, the club raised money by having pie suppers, ice cream socials, and selling homemade quilts. By May 1937 the club had 23 members and was becoming very active in community affairs. In addition to painting the church and fixing it up, the club helped buy a piano for the church and also donated money to various charities. The club continued to grow and in early 1953, discussion of buying land and building a clubhouse began. It was agreed that \$100 could be spent on land, but a satisfactory location was never found. In January of 1956 a motion was made that the executive committee, composed of Ava Terhune, Edythe Miller, Alma Terhune, and Madge Kirkpatrick to secure land for building, and, if unsuccessful, we would

abandon building plans. Later that year a piece of land was donated by Kirk Hale with the understanding that if it was not used for a clubhouse, the land would be returned to the original owners or heirs. Later that year, special meetings to plan the clearing of the land began. With a lot of work, both hired and volunteer, the clubhouse was complete enough to have its first meeting on May 11, 1957. The clubhouse did not have electricity or heat, and had very little furniture. The Baptist Ford Church, as well as Wiggins Memorial [Editor's Note: Methodist] Church, donated various pieces of furniture to the club, some of which are still being used at the present time. After 53 years, the club has 23 members, and enjoys helping the needy of the community, helping area hospitals, the 4-H Scholarship Fund, and many other organizations. The club looks forward to the fellowship it has at its monthly meetings and hopes to be a helping organization for many years to come.

Is your club still active today?

Yes.

Today it's called?

Baptist Ford.

That is a great piece of history right there [points at typed history]. So somebody who had an eye toward history was thinking of that.

I wish they would have put the names on the pictures [turns through scrapbook].

That would be a good project to go through and do. Now, you've told me that you've been associated with Extension Homemakers for 65 years, and that goes back to when you and your Mom . . .

Was visiting. I've been a member for 46. Well, I've been a member for 64 years.

When you first moved here, your mother was a member, became a member of the Sew and Sew.

No, she wasn't a member of the Sew and Sew; it was Baptist Ford when she joined.

OK. You were a little girl; you were getting to be a teenager then. What do you remember about those club meetings that you went to with your mother?

Well, we had to walk most of the time because we didn't have cars, and I can remember wading the river to get across to some of their homes, when we went to a meeting.

Is that the West Fork of the White River?

Yes. I remember the good food.

Was there always food associated with it?

They always had a covered-dish luncheon. And then they'd sit and sew and let us kids play.

So several kids would go. What did you kids do while they were having their sewing and all that?

We chased each other and played hide-and-go-seek, things like that.

Did they do any quilting?

The women would quilt in the afternoon. And they always brought a hand-embroidered dishtowel to the hostess. Each member that come would make a dishtowel, tea towel, and give to the hostess.

Oh, that is so nice! How often would the group meet? Monthly?

Yes.

So every month there would be a new tea towel to be made.

Mh-hmm.

I love that. Now, the quilting that the club was doing. Were they making the quilts for each other?

Well, for needy families, or they'd sell them and make money. They even raffled them off—sold chances on them.

Did the Home Demonstration agent ever come to the meetings?

Yes.

Do you remember who that was?

Mary—well, I've got the pictures here [turning to scrapbook].

Oh, let's see.

Will that be recorded?

We can, or we can do whatever you want.

I've even got the bylaws.

This scrapbook is a great resource. So Mary Gilbert, when you were an adult, she was the Extension Agent.

Yeah, I helped make one of the quilt blocks in there for her.

Oh, the great big quilt hanging in there? [Editor's Note: when Mary Gilbert retired, the county clubs made a large quilt for her, with each club's name on it. It hangs in the Washington County Extension Office at the time of this interview.]

So you grew up with your Mom going to the meetings, and then you became a member.

Yes.

Were you married when you became a member? At what point did you join?

I was married. I married in [19]47 and had a son in [19]47, [19]48. I had him in [19]48. My daughter was born the same year. There's 10 months difference.

You had two in diapers running around.

Mh-hmm. Washed them by hand. Then I had a son born in [19]53, and another son born in [19]76. [Editor's Note: Edythe's fourth child was born in 1966.]

Are you still a club member today then?

Yes, I belong to two clubs.

What other one?

Busy Bees.

Busy Bees, where are they in the county? A specific location?

All over, and we meet in here [Washington County Extension Office].

OK. I've been to this club meeting before. Do you know Pat Pond?

Oh, yeah, I talk to her every day.

Here we go, now we're going to start up again. OK. All right.

Your first club when you were a member as an adult, what are some of your memories of some of the work you all did?

Well, the first year I joined, they gave me a wedding shower. It was right after my marriage. And the next year, they give me a baby shower. In 10 months, they give me another baby shower, [*laughs*], and then I waited 13 years and had another baby. [Editor's Note: After the two children that were born 10 months apart, Edythe had a third child in 1953 and then 13 years later had another baby.]

Did they give you a shower then, too?

Uh-huh, and then I quit having them! I enjoyed the club.

What did you like about it?

Well, we made things. We made those little dolls for the Children's Hospital, and we'd take cards and things out to the veterans at the Veterans Hospital. We made quite a few things for the Children's Hospital.

Did you know how to sew and crochet and all?

I crochet, I don't knit.

Did you know how to do those things before you joined the club?

Yes. I started learning crochet with string that Mama pulled out of feed sacks, you know, to open them.

So she'd save those strings and teach you to crochet.

She'd roll them in a ball and teach me to crochet with them.

Wow!

And I sewed. I made quite a few clothes. But I never did learn to knit.

Did you quilt?

No. I can't thread the needle. Well, I probably could then, but now, I can't

hardly thread a needle.

Hard to see?

Uh-huh. I can't hit that hole!

It's a tiny little hole and gets tinier every day!

Why did you decide you wanted to be in—were they calling it Home Demonstration back then?

It was Home Demonstration.

So why did you decide—I know you'd grown up doing it.

I think it was because church and things like that was all we had to go to. We didn't have, we couldn't go to picture shows and things like that, because we didn't have the money. And we'd of had to walk.

That would have been a long walk into Fayetteville to the movie theater. So, 65 years is a long time to be involved in an organization. Why have you kept on with it all those years?

I just enjoy it. The visitation, and meeting people, and getting caught up on gossip [*laughs*].

There's a lot to be said with having time to visit. When you were an adult in the club, did Mary Gilbert come out and do things with you all?

Yes. I was trying to think of some of the other Extension [Agents].

We saw Ramona Gordon in the scrapbook.

Yeah.

Did you ever have any offices in the club?

I was president, and I was secretary, and I think my name is still on the checking account.

So you've done it all.

Uh-huh.

How many members . . .

We started out with twenty-some-odd members, but now we don't have but about 10 or 12, and they're all widow women. I think we maybe have three women in the club that still has husbands.

What does that say about the future of Extension Homemakers?

It's getting smaller and smaller. The younger ones—and this is the same thing with Busy Bees—the younger ones are working, and the older ones are just getting too old and they just don't care about these fancy things to make for the house.

Do you think there's going to come a time when . . .

We have lost one or two members nearly every year . . .

Just keeps getting smaller and smaller.

Uh-huh. And Busy Bees hasn't met in three months now. They can't get enough people together to have a meeting.

Well, that's sad, isn't it?

It is.

There's so many skills, and a lot of, I think, younger people, who are interested in learning how to can, or how to quilt.

One thing that I didn't mention on things that we did when we started the

Baptist Ford Club, was during the war. Everybody was poor back then. We had a Mercy Chest. It's still up there. It had bedpan, and towels, washcloths, soap, sheets, and I don't know what all. If anybody in the community that was sick and needed that—it had a thermometer in it—they would let them use it.

That is fantastic.

It's a big footlocker.

That started during World War II?

I guess it was World War II.

The Baptist Ford Club still has its own clubhouse, still today?

Uh-huh.

And you all still use it today?

Yes. In the wintertime, if it's bad weather, we don't meet there.

Because there's no heat?

We have heat, but you have to go up a hill, and if it's snowy and icy, we don't go.

Who takes care of the building?

We volunteer. We hire a man to mow the lawn. Other than that—it's all cement block. We did get a new roof on it after that ice storm.

Did you have any tree limbs fall on it?

We've had some fall in the yard. One of the members has got a husband that goes down and gathers it up and puts it in a pile. I don't know whether he's got them burned yet or not. We told him not to burn them, because they might—as dry as it's been . . .

Yeah. Did you ever to state meetings?

I have been, years ago, to a few. But never did go a whole lot, because I had kids to stay home and take care of. And I worked.

That's right, you were holding down a full-time job, as well as raising kids, and did you have to help on the farm? Did you have to help with the cattle?

I used to help—my husband was the one that seen to it that our cattle had calves all during winter months. We didn't have any during the summer. That way, by the time they was old enough to eat grass, they was able to eat it. I don't know how many calves I've had to rub down with gunny sacks when they was born, because they'd be so cold.

Were they out in the field?

We'd bring them in and put them in the basement.

Of the barn?

Our house [*chuckles*].

The little calves?

Mh-hmm. Till they'd get dried off, and it would get warm enough for them to go back to their Mamas.

Did you husband watch, and he'd see when they were getting ready to have a calf?

We fed them every night, and he'd check every cow. He could pretty well tell.

How many head of cattle did you all have?

Oh, anywhere from 100 to 200. I'd drive the truck, and he'd throw the hay off. He didn't trust me throwing hay off.

What was he afraid you were gonna [going to] do? Hurt yourself?

Fall out. Fall out of the truck.

Well, then he would have had a predicament.

Our family cemetery is right behind the house.

You have your own?

We have our own cemetery.

Is that where your husband . . .

We have about 50 graves there.

Was your husband from this area?

He was born in the old [Fayetteville] City Hospital. And lived on the same farm, except after we were married, we did get an apartment for a while.

Where was that? In Fayetteville?

Uh-huh. But we didn't stay there long. We went ahead and built a house.

The land you all are on now—is that land that was in his family?

Uh-huh.

My goodness, that's quite a treasure.

And me with four kids now out there. Of course, we've got it fixed, the deeds. We divided it—Arthur did, I didn't—into four lots, and got a deed with our name, and their name on each one. So each kid knows what land they'll get.

That's good. Do any of them farm?

No, they fight [*grinning*]. If the fence needs fixing, it's the other one's job.

That sounds like me and my brother. I think that's just normal siblings. Let me go back to these state meetings. When you did go to them, was it in Little Rock? Do you remember which ones you went to?

Seems like we went to one at Harrison a time or two. And Russellville, I went to one down there. But I didn't go to a lot of them. And I couldn't tell you a whole lot. We had demonstrations on how to do things.

Things that then you could come back and teach?

Come back and show the others.

Now this is a big question—I don't know if you could answer it in just a short little bit—but how has Extension Homemakers touched your life?

Well, it's helped me learn to make things. We learned something every month that we didn't know. Tips on what to do, and what not to do. We got acquainted with our neighbors that we probably wouldn't have gotten acquainted with.

That's nice. Did you have a favorite type of activity, or thing you liked to learn about?

I liked the fair. I've worked on the fair booth every year since I've been a member.

Tell me about that, about how you would decide, what ideas you would have for the fair booth.

We would just come up with ideas. I think all the time about what would be a good idea for it. The last time we had a little swimming pool and had this little doll fishing, and the theme was, "Have We Got a Catch for You." We had different things that you—I don't remember what all we did have out there. We got a blue ribbon. We always got a blue ribbon the last several years. Before then, we would get other colors.

That picture you showed me of all the blue ribbons—what was that?

That was ones I had won.

And what did you win for?

Crocheting. Crocheting towels and potholders.

Did you enter something in the fair every year?

Uh-huh. I tried to do 10 to 15 things and enter them.

All of them?

Uh-huh.

And you'd usually take home a prize.

Uh-huh. But I don't know whether I will this year or not. My hands, I've about lost control of them. Arthritis. Old Arthur, he's kinda rough.

Arthur visits me some.

I wear a brace on at night on my arms.

Does that help?

Mh-hmm. My daughter-in-law that's an RN, she said she can't see how putting a brace on your arms helps your arms, but it does. The doctor said if you think it helps, it'll help.

There you go.

Here's them getting the quilt. [Turns to a news clipping in the scrapbook]. That's the quilt that all the clubs made for Mary Gilbert, and it's hanging here in the Extension Office.

She must have been highly thought of.

[still looking at scrapbook] Here's telling her goodbye.

Do you all still keep a scrapbook?

Our president said she had some of them. [looking at photo in scrapbook] This was made out of a pair of jeans.

This is a picture of your fair booth one year, and it says, "Recycle Jeans." That's very clever! A table setting and all the things you can make out of old jeans.

[looking at another photo] There's my back. I had red hair then.

You did have red hair! Do you remember going to the fair when it was out at the old fairgrounds [Editor's Note: On Razorback Road—in 2012 the location is where the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville intramural fields are located.]

Yeah.

I can barely remember that. Was there a building for the displays?

Yes. They was awful small. I don't remember a whole lot about it. We used to out there—then, we'd go to ride the rides. That's what we'd go for.

Sure, that was the fun part.

And see, my husband always wanted to go out and watch the cattle being judged. We spent a lot of our time going through looking at cows.

Did he ever show any of his cows?

I think he showed one, one year, and he got mad at the judges because he thought he should have won, and didn't.

Were your kids in 4-H?

Mh-hmm. They didn't work at it real hard, though. They had calves they entered, and that was about it.

I'm interested in you doing these fair booths. How far in advance did you start planning?

Oh, we've already started bringing up ideas—anytime anyone has an idea, they tell us, and we have a committee that fixes it, and hopes it wins. I think last year, everybody got a—but it seems like every year the same club gets the Grand Champion. They're just smarter than we are [*laughs*].

I don't believe that. Was there ever any activity that you didn't like, as far as Extension Clubs?

Not that I really know of. I always try to make the best of everything. If I didn't like it, I left. [*Laughs*]

Did you already know how to can and do all of that?

Yes.

That's a great skill.

I used to have to wash those old fruit jars in an old tub out under a tree, so Mama could can.

You saved those jars and used them again and again.

Mh-hmm.

What did she can?

Green beans. We had big gardens. If we hadn't, we wouldn't have eaten, because we had no extra money. Mama had a house when they moved from Kansas—she rented it for \$18 a month. Three bedrooms. And that's all the

spending money we had, and a tenth of that went to the church.

We've talked a little bit about this already, but what changes—over the years of you being in Extension—what changes have you seen happen?

I notice that we don't work on projects like we used to, because the women, well, they just aren't interested in them like they used to be. Their hands are getting stiff. I'm the same way. Oh, I make a lot of crocheted towels and potholders and give them away at Christmas,

Those are good Christmas presents.

Every time we entertain, I make enough towels, and a potholder to match, for each one who comes as our guest.

Oh, that's nice!

I can't sit and do nothing, or I go to sleep.

You watch TV a lot?

Not a whole lot. I like "Jeopardy," and I like quiz programs. They don't have much but murders anymore.

I know, everything's a police show.

And naked women [*laughs*].

Let's see. What has Extension Homemakers taught you about people? Anything?

Well, there's just lots of kinds of people. I like them all. And I like to make things for the educational booth down at the fair. I like to work there.

Why do you like that so much?

Because you meet more people.

So you volunteer at the fair while it's going on?

Mh-hmm.

What do you do there?

First day I work, I take in exhibits and write them in the book. Then, when they judge, I get to put the ribbons on. I get to watch the judging. I put the ribbons on the items, and put them where they can put them back on the shelves. I work in the scholarship booth, if they need me. One year, we had a hamburger booth down there, and we even sold breakfast. If the club member couldn't go, they had to hire somebody in their place, because we felt like everybody needed to work together.

So you went and helped cook?

Mh-hmm.

With your catering business, that was second nature to you, huh.

Yeah.

Well, anything else? We'll look at your scrapbook, but is there anything that we haven't talked about as far as Extension Clubs that you think we ought to talk about?

Well, I think it's good training for everybody. They learn about things they'd never think of.

Do you think it's relevant for today's women? Young women, could they get something out of it?

If you could get them to go, but most of them have kids and ball games and they can't go, or they work a job and can't go. There's still lots of good members. I don't know how to encourage them to come.

That's a challenge. The busy lives that people leave now.

Mh-hmm.

OK. Let's look at your scrapbook. Take me through that, and we'll talk about it a little. So this is a club scrapbook, this is the Baptist Ford Club?

Mh-hmm, they've got some more. You don't care about these . . .

You've got your bylaws.

Bylaws. I don't understand this. It says that we entertained Serendipity, but it's a different date.

Is the Serendipity Club still active?

I haven't heard lately of them.

So this scrapbook says . . .

A lot of these names, I don't remember.

It's written in the scrapbook, Baptist Ford Extension Club, 1977-1978. There inside the cover is a picture of the Baptist Ford Home Demonstration Club. [Editor's Note: Newspaper clipping from the Washington County Observer, of a photo circa 1930s.]

And look how their hair looked!

Yeah, and they all look like they are farm women, working women, that know how to work.

And wearing dresses.

Yeah, probably made out of feed sacks, do you think?

That looks a lot like my Mama, but then it probably wasn't, because that was taken before [the family moved to Arkansas].

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[SY turned the recorder off at this point.]

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