

ARKANSAS EXTENSION HOMEMAKERS COUNCIL

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Official Transcript of:

Willadean Perry

Member of Hilltop Extension Homemakers Club
Baxter County Extension Homemakers Council

Original Recording made 30 November 2011

at Mountain Home, Arkansas

Recorded by:

Barbara Summers
Baxter County Extension Homemakers Council President

Transcribed by:

Kay Sanders-Chic
Member Oakland/Promise Land Extension Homemakers Club
Baxter County Extension Homemakers Council

Edited by:

Willadean Perry





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Oral History Program

Barbara Summers, Baxter County Extension Homemakers Council President

30 November 2011

This is an audio recording of Willadean Perry, member of the Baxter County Extension Homemakers Council. This interview is part of an Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council Oral History Program, and Willadean is answering questions asked by Baxter County Extension Homemakers Council President, Barbara Summers.

Questions and comments by Barbara are in boldface type; Willadean's responses and comments are in lightface type.

I am Barbara Summers. This is an interview with Willadean Perry for the Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council Oral History Program. This is being done on November 30, 2011, at the home of Barbara Summers, 2006 E. 1st Street, Mountain Home, Arkansas, for Baxter 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.

First I'd like to give—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. Give me your name.

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Willadean Perry. W-i-l-l-a-d-e-a-n, one word, P-e-r-r-y. I live in Baxter County.

OK.

Mountain Home, Arkansas

It's going to be real informal. We don't have to worry about saying the wrong word. We just go back and say whatever we want to. OK? And we're going to talk to you about how long you have been in Extension and some of the things you remember about it. How did you learn about Extension Homemakers Program?

Well, my mother joined when I was a kid in grade school.

OK. How long have you been associated with the program?

Most of my life.

Over 60 years?

Over 60 years.

OK. What was the first club you were associated with?

It was ?Wesley? Chapel Club that I joined.

OK. Are you presently a club member? If so, give the name of the club and the county and the district.

Hilltop Club in Mountain Home.

Baxter County.

Baxter County.

And Ozark District. OK. Do you have any special remembrances of the first meeting or the first club?

I remember my mother's first club. She—she went to a friend's home and they—the Home Demonstration Agent brought the pressure cooker. And they killed a chicken and dressed it in the morning, had potluck at noon and then canned the chicken in the afternoon. She was excited about learning to can all the things before she couldn't can.

I'm not going to be able to do this. It's so great [laughs]. Let's see, next question. Do you have any special remembrances. Oh, no, I've already read that one. Sorry about that guys. Why did you join? Do you have certain reasons why you like . . .

Well, I just like to go and learn new things and help teach other people. In the first club I belonged to me and another lady—the Home Economist just sometimes had a lesson and she give it instead of us and me and another lady gave the lesson when we didn't get anything from the . . .

Oh, so you . . .

From the county.

So you didn't always get stuff from the county like we do now?

No, not at all.

OK.

The Home Economist came out and gave the lesson to start with and not every month so we—I got things out of the work basket. You've probably heard about that.

Uh-huh.

And figured it out and taught that.

What—explain the work basket? Maybe everybody doesn't understand that.

Well, it was a monthly small little magazine that told you how to knit and crochet and make things and I read in 50 years ago in the bulletin that I'd made a light. But I don't even remember doing it.

Oh. [Laughs]

[Laughs] But I know that's where I got the information for the night light.

And why did you stay active in the—as a member?

Well, you learn new things through all. In the early days you really learned a lot.

More—more homemaking kind of things like . . .

Yes. How to sew better. Do a better job and how to cook food. Recipes that are healthy.

Uh-huh. Did you have it at people's homes when you did that or . . . ?

No, we had it in the church house in the beginning and later in the homes.

Ah, OK.

We had it, you know, it was a—kind of a community building but it was the Methodist church really.

Did you ever attend state, the state meeting?

When I was Council president I did. That's the only time.

And did you enjoy it?

Yes.

And what—what special things do you remember about it?

Well, I don't remember anything real special, but I liked all of it and we had lessons, but I don't remember what they were.

Well. Well, that's all right.

It's been a long time since I went.

Oh, yeah. How has Extension Homemakers touched your life?

Just by learning new things that I could do and meeting my friends. We always have good friends. Nice people at the EH clubs.

Uh-huh. What was the favorite event or activity that you've ever been involved in? That you can remember. Is there something that sticks out as more fun than . . . ?

Well, making mattresses was a memory, but it wasn't something you really liked to do.

[Laughs]

It was hard work.

You made mattresses. Tell me about that.

Well, the government, I think, gave people the cotton and ticking and then they had a meeting. Everybody came and put it together.

Are you the one that still has one?

Uh.

Somebody.

No.

Somebody in your club—in your club still has one. I'm not sure who it is. No? You don't think so? Who was it that? OK. Never mind [*unclear words*]. K. Yeah, it might have been in one of the other clubs. What changes have you experienced in Extension Homemakers organization? You've seen a lot of changes, haven't you?

Yes, in the beginning the people walked to their club—or. We had a neighbor lady that took her wagon and horses and my mother rode with her to the club. And now we all have our own cars of course.

When you went to the state meeting, where did you stay?

We stayed in a hotel in Little Rock.

OK. Oh, it was in Little Rock?

Yes. it was.

OK. Has Extension Homemakers taught you anything about people?

Oh, yes. They're all different.

[*Laughter*] Absolutely. You were talking about your mother and her organization and things that you learned to do with her. Can you tell us a few of them? You started to talk about a large pressure cooker?

Yes, the county agent owned the large pressure cooker, but she didn't use that. She wouldn't do that. My aunt and her daughter borrowed it, but that's all I know about it.

Just that it was big?

It was—yeah, real big and they built a fire under it out in the yard and I don't know how they could control the pressure [*unclear words*], but as soon as my mother learned to use one she bought one that you could put pint, quarts or half gallon jars in it and that thing just lasted for years and years and years.

You don't still have it, do you?

No, I don't have it.

Yeah.

I bought one that just uses quarts and pints. I still have it and don't use it either.

How about some more of your memories? Things that you've written down that you can remember. You used to work at the Fair kitchen?

Yes.

Tell me about the fair kitchen when you worked at it.

OK. Well, the first fair I attended was at the Pinkston Middle School Gym. And I took three items and got blue ribbons, but the fair had no money for premiums so they got donations from the merchants and I got a little aluminum pan and some stationery, and then I forgot what the third thing was.

[Laughs]

So that was interesting. And then the Fair got some money, I think from the state, and built a small livestock barn and the Home Demonstration Club Council started building the building—educational exhibit building and whenever they got a little bit of money, they'd buy some lumber and they hired one man to oversee the job and the husbands came and helped put it up. My husband worked out of town so he only got to help once on Saturday and he helped put the roof on it. Then later the fair poured a concrete floor in it.

What did it have before it was a concrete floor?

Just the dirt floor with tables built around the wall.

You had a dirt floor in the kitchen or in the whole building?

We didn't have much of a kitchen then but we did sell a little bit of stuff that the people brought in, all kinds of desserts, before the health wouldn't let us do that. And this one lady, Erie, she had an electric roaster. I think it was a kind of oven that she made that full of Sloppy Joe every night and served Sloppy Joe and drinks and other sandwiches and stuff that was donated. And then after they poured the floor we fenced off one corner with screen wire for—for the kitchen. And I brought my dishes and silverware and my pots and pans and folding chairs and some folding tables; my hot plates to cook on. [*unclear words*] We just had to heat water on there and we—we did have a sink in there, but we had to put a bucket under it and carry the water out to start with.

Goodness.

So . . .

[Laughs]

Well, we enjoyed that. I think most everybody was anxious, seemed like then, to come and help in the kitchen and after the Fair built the new building with a modern kitchen, nobody wanted to come and work, you see.

Uh-huh.

I think I liked it better in the old kitchen, too, because you could see all the people coming and going. I had a lot of friends then.

Uh-huh. You could see it because it was just a screened-in room, right?

Yeah. Then we had a window there, too.

Yeah. And what did you serve? Did you serve like Sloppy Joes and stuff like that or . . .?

Yes, and ham sandwiches, hot dogs and, well, different things. It different—different people come in and want us to serve something different. We'd try a lot of different stuff. Back then we washed the dishes and then they—other people didn't want to do that work, so they wanted to use all paper stuff, you

know, and throw it away. So that was a big change. We went along.

Do you have anything else in your notebook that you wanted to talk about?

Well, in the beginning, you know, we had no electricity except in town, and so if you wanted to have chicken you had to kill it and dress it that day, you know, there's no way to keep it.

Oh, yeah, you couldn't put it in the frig [refrigerator] cuz [because] . . .

Then later on we did get an ice box, but we had to go to town every two or three days and get a big hunk of ice and put it in it. I forgot to write that down, but I remember it.

Yeah, yeah.

I think it was 19—about 45 when we got electricity out in the rural areas and then everybody or most people bought freezers. Then we learned to freeze our fruit, vegetables, meat, chicken and everything. Freezing was less work and most people stopped canning so much.

Uh-hum.

Some still like to can it better.

Do you like it canned better?

Well, yeah, I think so. It's quicker to fix than frozen.

Yeah.

Frozen. A lot of it tastes fresher. There's good sides both ways.

Do you have anything else?

But I always enjoyed working at the Fair, and I worked that first year that we had the building and every year until I was not able to go to it and visit with . . .

You checked items in and that sort of thing? Is that what you did?

Yeah. Well, I worked in the kitchen a lot. Two ladies started the kitchen and they were older and I was young then and they wanted me to help 'um [them] and that's how I got in.

What were their names? You remember?

Erie Statler was one of them. She made the Sloppy Joe in her electric roaster. The other one, Maurene Clements, was from the Colfax Club.

That's all right. How many—do you remember how many clubs there were in Baxter County when it had the most clubs in it?

Well there was 11 that I'm sure of. There may have been more but know there was 11.

OK.

And so many people just started working I guess is one reason.

Yeah.

And they didn't want to learn this stuff that the old people liked to do and was used to doing.

Uh-huh.

And I was on the Fair Board about 40 years.

Oh, were you really?

Yeah, uh-huh. I was secretary for a while and then they wanted me to be treasurer and I think I was treasurer about 20 years and . . .

Oh, my goodness.

And I thought it was time. Well, it was getting bigger and bigger and I was getting older. [*Laughter*] I was afraid I'd forget to do it right.

Yeah.

So I quit that, but I stayed on the Fair Board until I just wasn't able to do it. We always had meetings at night and I couldn't see very well to drive at night. So I quit. And when I was doing the kitchen, the Hilltop—I didn't, belong to it then, I belonged to North Mountain Home, when a club kinda [kind of] like got out of members, I joined a different club and the Hilltop president told me that she could bring me some help if I wanted it. I told her to bring it on.

[*Laughter*]

And she brought Joyce Green in and she helped me as long as we were able to and she was on the Fair Board, too. So we were EHC members and Fair Board past members.

I think they kinda [kind of] go hand-in-hand around here, seems like.

Yeah, it really did back then.

Yeah.

They are not near so much now as we were.

Both of them looking for hard workers.

Yeah. [*Laughter*]

You have anything else?

That's all I can think of.

Well, that's wonderful. Thank you very much.

You're welcome.

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I'm going to stop the recording now, OK?

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