

ARKANSAS EXTENSION HOMEMAKERS COUNCIL
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Official transcript of:

Mary Handley

Scott County Extension Homemakers Council President

Original recording made 7 March 2012

at the home of Mary Handley

Interviewed by:

Cathryn Lundy

Good Neighbor Extension Homemakers Club President, Scott County, Arkansas

Recorded by:

Linda Forrest

Pleasant Hill and Scrap Pack Extension Homemakers Club Member
Scott County, Arkansas

Transcribed and edited by:

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Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council

Oral History Program

Cathryn Lundy, Good Neighbor Extension Homemakers Club President, Parks (Scott County), Arkansas

7 March 2012

This is an audio recording of Mary Handley, President of the Scott County, Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council. This interview is part of an Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council Oral History Program, and Mary is answering questions asked by Good Neighbor Extension Homemakers Club President, Parks (Scott County), Arkansas, Cathryn Lundy.

Questions and comments by Cathryn are in boldface type; Mary's responses and comments are in lightface type.

I am Cathryn Lundy. This is the interview with Mary Handley for the Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council Oral History Program. This is being done March 7, 2012, at the home of Mary Handley, in Waldron, Arkansas, in Scott 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.

The recording, transcript, and any other related materials 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.

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, spell it for me, and then if you would, give me the city and county in which you presently

reside.

My name is Mary Lou Handley: M-A-R-Y, L-O-U, H-A-N-D-L-E-Y, Waldron,
Arkansas, W-A-L-D-R-O-N, Arkansas,

Scott County?

Scott County, sorry.

Thank you. Mary, this is going to be a very informal interview. I want you to share your memories of your involvement with the Extension Homemakers— good times, as well as the challenges. What has been your association with the Extension Homemakers program? As a member, professional, agent, specialist, or whatever.

I have been a member of Extension Homemakers for almost 30 years. I joined when I was 29 years old, almost 30. I have gone to every state meeting except for two, I believe, and I have just really grown and enjoyed it a lot.

Wow, impressive, very impressive. How did you learn about the Home Extension Program?

I had recently moved to Paris in 1980, and my husband and mother-in-law had bought me a sewing machine for my birthday. I had never sewn, didn't know how and asked the Home Economist there if she could do a beginning sewing class of some sort. And she got together one and asked ladies what they would like to do, and it turned out to be a tailored jacket. [*Laughter*] I was pretty lost in the class, but I got a lot of one-on-one and I made a jacket and joined a club, an evening club. The ladies—most of the ladies worked and just went from there.

[clock chimes]

What was the name of the club?

It was called Paris After Dark, because it was at Paris, Arkansas.

Oh, interesting, OK. Do you remember what year that was?

I believe it was 1982.

OK. Thank you. How long you have remained associated with some program or some club since that time?

Yes, I belonged to that until 1985 and we moved here to Scott County. And two of the ladies knew that I was coming here because the Home Economist at Paris had been here before she came to Paris and they came to my doorstep about two days after I moved in inviting me (*laughter*) to Pleasant Hill Club and I joined it. That was in 1985 and I have been in—been a member in Scott County ever since.

Great! Are you a, a member of any more clubs other than the Pleasant Hill at the current time?

Yes, I pay my dues to Scrap Pack. I still attend Pleasant Hill, but Scrap Pack is a scrapbooking club, project club, that we started. And we're few in members, so I pay my membership there and I go to Busy Hands, a quilt club, a project club. It's been going on for numerous years, so I'm in three clubs actually.

How interesting. Now, if you can for the interview itself, if you can give the county and the district that these clubs are in, please.

They're all three in Scott County in the Ouachita District.

OK. And as far as your first meeting that you ever attended—do you remember anything in particular about that meeting?

Not really.

How about after you came here to Waldron?

(Clock chimes in the background)

I don't really particularly remember any special meetings. We've just—I've just been in the member a long time. I've been the state vice president for two years—did a lot of traveling, made all the District meetings at that time.

I when—we had the National meeting in 1992. We joined a national group. The Arkan—when we changed our name from Arkansas Extension Homemakers to the Arkansas Association for Family and Community Education, and we had the di—the National meeting in Little Rock that year in [19]’94 and I helped a lot with it. And got to meet Helen Thomas, and I—one of the dinners was my responsibility and we were hostesses for several things and it was really quite a, quite a big thing. [Editor's Note: The Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council changed it name to the Arkansas Association for Family and Community Education at its annual meeting on June 3, 1992, and hosted the National Association for Family and Community Education's national meeting in 1994. In September of 1994, the State Association voted to withdraw from the national organization and on September 24, 1995, voted to change the name back to the Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council.]

Wow, neat [laughter]. Let’s see, then you have attended several of the state Council meetings?

Yes, I’ve gone to all of them, I think, except for two. We—when I first started going, we went to colleges that were big enough to accommodate us and we stayed in dorms. That meant taking your pillow, that meant taking your soap, your towel, washcloth, everything, bedding. You were just staying in an empty dorm room and somewhere along the way we started going to the Convention Center at Hot Springs and have been going there ever since.

OK. And how has- the Extension Homemakers touched your life personally?

It has made me grow as a person; it has challenged me. I was very shy, bashful—you would not know that now. [Laughter]

I—Diane Jones was our adviser for many years and she got me quite involved and Sharon Heidingsfelder was my adviser and they had me teach two classes, I believe, at state meetings. And before I joined that, I could not have stood up and talked and it’s just been, it’s just been really good for me.

[Cuckoo clock in the background]

OK. Can you tell me—we'll let the cuckoo go by—oh, there it goes. What has been, if you can think back, your favorite event or activity?

I enjoyed going to the state EH [Extension Homemakers] meetings. I, I have made some really good friends through the years and some—a lot of them that's the only time that I see them and we just pick up where we've left off. For many years, I roomed with a good friend that I made at Paris when I was there and we—we would talk the night away, and we have kept in touch and are still great friends. A lot of—I've enjoyed the craft classes. I've enjoyed—it's just been learning experiences, just really good.

Do you bring those things that you learn at the different conventions and things, do you bring those back to Scott County and teach ladies in, in the groups here in the clubs here?

We try to. That's part of our goals is to bring—if we have classes—heritage arts classes, skill classes, to bring them back. Any sort of information, new information, that we can bring back and share with the county, we try to do that.

I remember a, I believe it was a watch class . . .

Yes.

. . . that you conducted at one of the—one of—a club that I was in.

Yes, I've taught several. We've done basket weaving, we've done watch classes, we've (*sigh*) sewing classes of different sorts. There's been a lot of classes through the years.

Neat, OK. If you can, if there is one, what has been your least favorite event or activity through all the years?

I have to think about that one a minute. I just—there was so much traveling with the state vice president, I just didn't quite realize that I would be gone quite so much and do so much traveling. It just became a little bit unhandy to do that. I enjoyed the position, I enjoyed seeing people and meeting people. I just didn't quite enjoy all the travel that went along with it.

OK. And in your several years, can you tell me what changes have you experienced in the Extension Homemakers organization?

Well, as I told you, we changed our name in 1992 when we joined this other—this national group and it seemed to not fit the Arkansas Extension Homemakers and in 1994 we withdrew from that group and in [19]’95 we changed our name back to Arkansas Extension Homemakers. And there was a lot of change going on during that time, some dissension. We felt like they didn’t fit us as Homemakers, as—with our goal being toward family and community—that maybe they were a little bit more business oriented and there was—like I said—there was some dissension, but it worked out.

Good, good. Has Extension Homemakers taught you anything about people?

Oh, very much. You learn to, you learn to cooperate with people. You learn to give and take—have give and take. Yes, you learn a lot about people.

Great, all right, is there any other memory that you have that you’d like to share with us in any, any area?

Yes, in 19, I believe it was 1990, I went to a National meeting. Scott County sent me to Wisconsin to the National meeting. We took a bus; we left Little Rock with a bus load of ladies, and men [*clearing throat*] husbands, some of the husbands went from Arkansas. I don’t remember how many there were—were of us, but I had never been to Wisconsin, and it was just a great time; and we—they took us on tours; they had crafts. I keep saying crafts—skills of some sort for us to learn, and a lot of good, good interesting speakers; and I really enjoyed that trip.

[Phone ringing; chair leg scraping on the floor]

Are we ready?

Yes.

Is there anything else you’d like to share with us?

[Door closing]

Just that it's a great organization of ladies. It's been very good for me. I've made lots of new friends, kept a lot of good friends. It's given me a lot of self-confidence; I have learned a lot. It's just—it's just been part of my life for 30 years. My daughters were part of it; they went to meetings with me when they were younger. They've learned a lot of the things that I learned have been passed on and now it's been passed on to grandchildren. It's just been a really good, a good organization that I have felt to belong to.

That's great, and we're proud to have you by the way in Scott County.

Thank you.

Thank you for all of your contributions to Extension Homemakers and for sharing your time and memories with us, Mary.

Thank you, enjoyed it.

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