

ARKANSAS EXTENSION HOMEMAKERS COUNCIL
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Official transcript of:

Patricia Wilson, Julia Murray, Frances Owens and Francille Swilley

Members of Union County Extension Homemakers Council

Original recording made 20 January 2012

at El Dorado, Arkansas

Recorded, transcribed and edited by:

Liz McKay

Union County Cooperative Extension Service Family and Consumer Sciences Agent





Patricia Wilson (From Left), Julia Murray, Francis Owens and Francille Swilley

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Oral History Program

Liz McKay, Union County Cooperative Extension Service Family and Consumer Sciences Agent

20 January 2012

This is an audio recording of Patricia Wilson, Julia Murray, Frances Owens and Francille Swilley, all members of the Union County Extension Homemakers Council. This interview is part of an Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council Oral History Program, and Patricia, Julia, Frances and Francille are answering questions asked by Liz McKay, Union County Cooperative Extension Service Family and Consumer Sciences Agent.

Questions and comments by Liz are in boldface type; Patricia, Julia, Frances and Francille's responses and comments are in lightface type.

I am Liz McKay. This is the interview with Patricia Wilson, Julia Murray, Frances Owens and Francille Swilley for the Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council Oral History Program. This is being done on January 20, 2012, at the Union County Cooperative Extension Service office conference room, El Dorado, Arkansas, in Union 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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All together they answered: Yes.

AEHC Oral History Program
Wilson, Murray, Owens, Swilley/Page 2

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

I'm Patricia Wilson. P-A-T-R-I-C-I-A—W-I-L-S-O-N. I live in Union County, on the Wesson Road, in El Dorado, Arkansas.

I'm Julia Murray. J-U-L-I-A—M-U-R-R-A-Y. I live on the Wesson Road, born and raised there and . . .

Just where you live and county.

Julia Murray: Union County, El Dorado, Arkansas, Union County.

I'm Frances Owens.

[Whispered] **Spell it.**

F-R-A-N-C-E-S—O-W-E-N-S, I live on . . .

You live in the Faircrest Community outside of El Dorado.

I live in the Faircrest Community.

El Dorado, Arkansas.

El Dorado, Arkansas.

Union County.

Union County.

OK.

I'm Francille Swilley. F-R-A-N-C-I-L-L-E—S-W-I-L-L-E-Y. I live about 10 miles from El Dorado on the Mt. Holly Road and that's in Union County.

EHC members, this is going to be a formal—informal interview. I would like for you to share your memories of your involvement with the

Extension Homemakers Program—the good times and the challenges. What has been your association with the Extension Homemakers Program? What have you learned? How long have you been associated with the program? What was your first club in which you were associated and what year? Are you presently a club member? And if so, please give the name of the club, county and district. And do you have any special remembrances of that first club? Why did you join? Why do you continue to be a member?

Patricia Wilson: I'm Patricia Wilson. I actually feel like I have been as long as I was just a little girl when I went with my grandmother and my mother. And then I joined after *[unclear words]*. Well, I finished high school and I was in 4-H all that time. And then I went to school and became a RN and at that time I was not really associated with, but when I finished school, I got married and moved into that community of Newell. So I joined the Newell and then it was not the Extension Homemakers, it was Home Demonstration Club. And that was about 1955.

Of course, my mother and my grandmother were still there and we went to each homes each month and served refreshments. Each person was responsible for that and we went with my mom and me and . . . The girls really enjoyed doing that. The boys didn't get to go and they were a little jealous of that. I have two brothers. But we learned a lot from that just from listening to the older people and we knew from that that's what we wanted to do. I did especially. And so when I had children and stayed at home then I really became a full—an EHC member then. I've been president and I've belonged to several committees and right now I am president of the council [Union County Extension Homemakers Council]. So I guess right now is what you want to know.

Julia Murray: I'm Julia Murray and Pat [Patricia Wilson] is my sister whom you just heard and she pretty much covered all of it. I can remember as a small child that, in fact, I can't remember how young I was. I figured grandma and mother carried us to the club meeting and each club meeting was held in one of the neighbors' houses because, well, most of us didn't have cars. Mom and dad didn't have—I mean mom and grandma didn't have access to a car. They had to walk to the club meetings. We liked that. And we loved going to the houses because these ladies who were a lot older than I was then, made the best

desserts you ever ate. And we didn't have access to that growing up. But we knew when we went to club meeting, we were going to get it. And they would make punch for the drinks and probably Kool-Aid if it was invented back then. But we learned to sew, to decorate and as we were growing up this all rubbed off on us 'cause [because] we all learned how to do it and went from there into 4-H.

And then I became a 4-H leader. And, of course, I had children of my own then, so it was easy. And we had quite a few 4-H Clubs around in our community so that was also a learning process for the children, which I had learned earlier. And then I am now president [of the] Newell Extension Homemakers Club in my town/city, where I live.

Frances Owens: I'm Frances Owens.

What about some of your experiences, Frances.

Well, lets see. I have . . .

When did you become first associated with the EHC Club?

My mother was an Extension [*unclear words*], an Extension, I think they called them called them somethin' [something] else.

Home Demonstration.

Home Demonstration Club back then. I would go with her to the meetings and, of course, I had blonde hair and I, and I would look like a little Indian so I got a lot of—you know things—they, they would pat me on the head and everything like that. And then I, as I got older and in high school and out of high school, went into a catering business and did that for years and and made cakes for people and did weddings and everything like that. And, and all of a sudden, you know, you can get stuff in now town instead of having to have it done. And, and I went back to the house, the home, you know, and just having a good time being a senior, senior citizen [*laughs*].

Francille Swilley: I'm Francille Swilley. I was born in 1933. When I was about 10 years old, Mrs. Myrtle Watson [Interviewees: Uh-huh], Home

Demonstration Agent, came to my grandmother's house to visit because my grandmother, two aunts and mother were club members at Cairo and Schuler Clubs. Ms. Watson asked if I wanted to join the 4-H Club. I did and was a 4-H member until I was about 18 years old. I went to Fayetteville for camp two or three years or a week on the University of Arkansas' campus as the 4-H members of this county got to go on a bus. And I might put in right here that Patricia [Wilson] and Julia [Murray] that have previously spoken, we were all in the 4-H club together *[laughter]*. Their mother was our helper, leader, chaperone, whatever you want to call it. I learned to sew and many other things because we lived on a small farm.

After I married in 1954, I joined the Rose Hill Club near Lisbon. Later we named the club, Lisbon Home Demonstration Club in Union County. I've been a club member ever since. It has been too long ago for me to remember the first meeting that I belonged and it would change the name to Lisbon Extension Club, Union County. During the early years, when my two boys were little—they were born in [19]'57 and [19]'61—I made some of their clothes and mine. We had suits, coats, pants, shirts, my dresses, shirts, suits and the county club council would hold a dress revue in El Dorado. I have some pictures of the mothers with the children modeling their clothes that we made. Also, the women would model the outfits they made for themselves. I joined the club because we lived in the country and it was a good way to get together with neighbor women and learn new ways to do things. The county agent would provide programs. Ms. Maeda Asbell was the agent beginning about 1948 [Editor's Note: 1950]. I have a newspaper picture of my mother and aunt that was made in 1934 or [19]'35 at the fair showing them and their club booth. Since I joined the club, I've been president, secretary and treasurer, 4-H leader. I've attended council meetings and a few district meetings, but I don't remember the dates *[laughs]*.

Entering items in the fair has been the thing to do since I was in the 4-H Club and then after I got grown and an EHC member. The change I've seen in the last few years is that women, other than farm women, have joined and also young women are interested and we the older learn from the younger and the younger ones learn from the older. In the past few years on achievement day, which is when all clubs come together, we have made lap robes, turbans, pillows, wheelchair caddies for nursing homes and cancer patients.

Now I would like to ask you what—what changes have you experienced in the Extension Homemakers organization and what has Extension Homemakers taught you about people?

Patricia Wilson: My favorite activity, I think, is just meeting together once a month either at the council meetings or regular meetings because we always learn something. And the programs have changed, which is not bad because I think they have kept up with the times because a lot of people don't sew, they don't milk the cows, and they don't [grow] churn their butter anymore so that the things that we learn now are different with the times and which I enjoy that, too.

What I've learned about people? Well, I have learned that everybody here is not going to get along with everybody, but you learn to love each other because that's what we're there for. It's the companion and the learning of other people and the learning of things. And I think that has taught me that because sometimes you want to peg people and you know you just can't do that if you're going to belong to an organization.

And I want to share one thought that I have thought about a long time when we were—I'm going back to when we were little, when we were at a club meeting. I think I might have been the oldest that time. But some little boy went out and got the push lawn mower and pushed it across the lawn and the blade was going round and round and round and about the time I got to him, he stuck his finger in it and it cut the end of his finger off. So his mother told me 'til [until] the day she died that you cut my little boy's finger off. And so I have never forgotten [laughter] that as long as I've lived [unclear words]. That's not a good memory but, anyway, it's something I've always remembered and maybe that helped me decide that I wanted to be a nurse, I don't know, but anyway, that's one of the things that I would like to share. [Laughter]

Julia Murray: Oh, yeah, I remember that. [Laughter] I was in that club meetin' [meeting], too, and all the kids were sent outside to play, and, or least we ran outside to play. And I see this young man every once in awhile and he doesn't say anything to me about getting his finger cut off, but it was excitin' [exciting] day at that club meeting.

And people, what about the people we meet and the people we're associated with? Well you know, they come in all sizes and all personalities and you're not going to get to along with all of them, but you will try to get along with everybody. And that's something else we've learned in our club meetings is to be—to be friendly and we work together and sew. We have met in groups that's not club meeting. And we—we cook, we made cancer turbans and these go to the cancer patients in our area and we have made—that's what we do when we sew, we make cancer turbans. We have also sewn baby dolls that go to the children's clinic and little lap robes for the babies and it's always something interesting. And if you can't think of something, somebody sittin' [sitting] there will help you. They'll think of something and we go for it and that's the way the club works.

[LM hands microphone to Frances Owens]

What changes have you experienced as an Extension Homemaker and what has your experiences taught you about people, Frances?

Frances Owens: Well, some you know—you know, they want to be helpful and some are—don't want to be helpful and—but they a lot of them won't in a lot of people and it's kind o'[of] hard sometimes to get around all of that to—if you get—if you having to try to do something, you have to kindly [kind of] explain it two or three times to get it done.

O.K.

Francille Swilley: This is Francille Swilley. I've lived in the country all my life and the—it began with the Home Demonstration Club. And while I was growing up and it was the war was on, people had canning places, places to sew mattresses, and I believe that's probably why Home Demonstration Clubs began back in the country. Because women had to sew, cook, take care of the house, and it was—you were glad to get with meet with other women in the country so you could learn from them and have fellowship with them and it has still carried on in all my years. We meet once a month. We eat. We learn. And we have fun and I don't understand why a lot of other women don't want to do that because it's just been our way of life.

The fair has been a big thing every year. We, even when we were in the 4-H Club, we entered things in the fair. My brother and sister had a calf. But that wasn't for me. I was into the sewing and cooking. But kids learned in those days how to live. And I'm thankful that I lived in the country and I—that I still have friends from way back which that would be and I'm 78 now, probably 60 something years that we have been associated with the 4-H Clubs, and Home Demonstration Club, which now is Extension Homemakers and but that's a good name because that's what we are. We pray to be better homemakers.

Now, I would like for you to share any other memories or experiences or thoughts that you would like to share. I know that Pat and Julia have a unique experience of how their grandmother came to this county. And so I'm just going to turn the—turn it over to each person that's here today and they can tell how their family came to Union County and any other experiences with Extension or just what life was like growing up.

Patricia Wilson: OK. I'm Patricia: Well, I think it was like 1918, my grandmother and—and grandfather [Editor's Note: Maternal grandparents], he was raising hogs in Iowa and it was really cold there and somehow he got word that Arkansas was a warm place to live so they packed all their belongings, furniture and their hogs and put them on a train—they had a train, Wesson—Wesson-El Dorado train—the train came to El Dorado and then they put them on this train for some reason, I don't know and the train came to—it was called Edgar Crossing. There was a saw mill there and that's where they unpacked their belongings and they had their hogs and they put them out in a pen there and started farming [laughter]. And then my mom and dad—well, my mom came with them and my dad came later and then they married after they came here, after my grandma and grandpa came, then my mother and daddy came and married in El Dorado. And dad didn't work on the farm. He, he worked in town. He was—he was—he liked to work with cars so he worked in town. And my grandfather and grandmother did the farming and everything. There had five children, three girls and two boys, and so we had to learn to garden and learn to farm and we had the animals. But dad always wore a white shirt and a buttoned-up tie and he went to work every day and we worked at home. So I'll let Julia tell you some more things about that.

Julia Murray: I'm Julia and I'm going to add to her story. My grandmother and

grandfather [Editor's Note: Paternal grandparents] got married in Omaha, Nebraska. And my grandfather had been down here in April and so he telephoned back to them and said, "Pack up everything you have, we're going to Arkansas." Because it was in April, the flowers were blooming, the trees were budding out and when he left Omaha, I don't want to use the word he used but anyway, the snow was up to whatever [*laughter*] and so they were glad to come south to where it was warm. Now, this is the good part. Our grandpa was a veterinarian. He treated the hogs and that's what he had in Omaha, a hog farm. Well, he brought this huge, huge hog and when he got down to the depot to load it [Interviewee's Addition: Now him and grandma had just got married and they were coming down for their honeymoon], and when they got to the depot to load the hogs on, well, they told grandpa, "You have to stay back in the cattle car with the hogs. You can't stay up here where the passengers are." He said, "But we just got married." "We don't care. You have to stay with your animals and take care of your animals."

So they came to El Dorado to where—to where the train was and people started gathering around when they saw this huge, huge hog unloaded out of that train. It was the biggest one they had ever seen and they nicknamed grandpa, Hog Smith, and that's the name he went by, I guess, until he died. But anyway, he told everybody him and grandma had to spend their honeymoon either in the—in the car with the animals or not together. So they decided not together because he had to take care of the animals. [*Pause*] And it was quite a day. It was in the paper but, of course, I don't have the clipping. But from that day on, he was known as Hog Smith. And, of course, that was before my time. But naturally, it was told in the family. And grandma did have some pictures of this big-old hog with her standing beside it. He was huge. But that's how people came to the South to farm and to prepare their cattle and whatever because of the difference in the temperature from North to South. Now some people still like it cold, but my [*unclear words*] didn't.

Are there any more memories or experiences or thoughts, Frances, that you would like to share or how your family came to Union County?

Frances Owens: My mother's and them came from Union County, North Carolina. And grandpa was real short. He was short. Mama was short [*laughter*]. I got a little tall whenever mama got married and daddy was tall.

And we all were farmers and daddy was a peddler. He, he—he had vegetables in the summer time. He went and he had people that had moved to town that wanted these vegetables because he had lived in the country. And then whenever it got cold, he had the hogs and we had hog killings and everything like that. And, and we'd have to take it and salt it down and everything like that and then hang it up and smoke it to make hams and everything like, you know, bacon and all. And a lot of people thought it was kind of hard, you know, when the ones come to town [Editor's Note: El Dorado] and everything, you know, then they thought. But the thing about it was, Daddy didn't have a problem. He was one of those that if they didn't want it that was fine, you know, and he just went on. And, but we made it and then whenever I come along, I kinda [kind of]—I was almost—almost last on the list. I have a—I have a baby brother and I—so we just made do. In fact, I didn't know until I got in high school that I was poor. You know what I'm saying? And then I—you know—I know, I thought, well, I come to find out that we was better off than a lot of 'em [them] back in those days. At least we had food to eat and a lot of 'em [them] didn't.

Francille Swilley: I'm Francille. I remember I found an article that my mother in 1928 was a 4-H Club member. Mrs. Myrtle Watson was the agent then. And I can remember the curb markets where the farmers [*interviewees agree*] brought their fruits and vegetables to town and there were would be 20 or 30 farmers with their vegetables. I remember as a little kid running up and down the aisles in that little curb market, which was down on South Washington in El Dorado. And like there are a few now that people bring their vegetables into El Dorado and they just call it the farmers market. So we are going back to some old times when people like fresh vegetables and fruits and they are, are a good thing this day and time as they were back in 1930's.

Francille, would you tell us something about your 4-H experience because we—when we had our 100th years celebration for 4-H, you got up and you had some wonderful things to say about 4-H. How did 4-H impact you?

Francille Swilley: I lived in the country. You just had one vehicle and your dad was probably gone to work. So we in the country, they would come around and establish clubs—4-H Clubs. And I joined because I lived on a farm. And I went to school in Mt. Holly, which was a long way off back then. We rode the

bus. And in my 4-H experiences, we would get to go to camps with other kids. We learned to cook and sew and know how to associate with people. You learned how to speak. The boys would have the hogs and the calves in the fair. And it was just a good thing for country kids because we didn't have the means to go anywhere and it was a really good experience for us to get to go a long ways off to Fayetteville for a camp and we had to have chaperones and they were our 4-H leaders. And I'm just thankful that we had that opportunity in the country because you didn't get to go unless you went with somebody else or on a school bus if you went to camps. So it was a way of living for us country folks. And I'm thankful that we had the county agents and leaders and they were interested in young people. And we were *[unidentified interviewee whispers mom]*, yeah, Ms. Smith, Pat and Julia's mother, I remember her. She had the best laugh. She—I can just hear her laughing *[laughter]*. Man, she was more fun. I mean, she just was fun. I'm thankful that we had those kind of leaders.

Thank you all for your contributions to Extension Homemakers and for sharing your time and your words with us.

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