Beginnings of Home Economics Extension in Mississippi (A Review of the History of Home Economics Extension in Mississippi from 1900-1940)

Christine Coats

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BEGINNINGS OF HOME ECONOMICS EXTENSION IN MISSISSIPPI

(A REVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF HOME ECONOMICS EXTENSION IN MISSISSIPPI FROM 1900-1940)

Submitted by Christie Coats
AEE 5103/7103
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April 25, 1977
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BEGINNINGS OF HOME ECONOMICS EXTENSION IN MISSISSIPPI

Before the history of Home Economics Extension can be discussed some basic groundwork must be laid. The Cooperative Extension Service had to be established before Home Economics could become an active part of this agency. There are several factors which occurred which aided in the formation of the Cooperative Extension Service. These factors will be referred to as forerunners.

Forerunners to the Cooperative Extension Service:

Agricultural societies, Farmers' Institutes and the American Lyceum served to inspire the formation of a competent agency in the area of agriculture.

1862-established the forerunner of the U.S.D.A., one of the partners in the cooperative endeavor. This act recognized the fact that agriculture needed some assistance.

1862-also saw the passage of the Morrill Act. This Act provided grants of land to the States. The money would go to the establishment and maintenance of colleges of agriculture and mechanical arts (land-grant colleges). To extension Congress had provided two governmental institutions which would eventually render an extension type of educational service to farm people.

1890-was the year in which a second Morrill Act was passed. The second act established a State-Federal relationship within the field of agriculture. This relationship has
developed and intensified in the Cooperative Extension Service today and has contributed to the success of extension work.

1887—was the year in which the Hatch Act was passed. This Act was another link as a forerunner to the development of cooperative extension work. The Hatch Act provided for Federal financial assistance to States for the establishment of agricultural experiment stations. Federal-State cooperation again came through in an effort to provide service and assistance to farm people.

1904—saw two developments, the U.S.D.A. and the Land-Grant College Association. These two developments were later to merge into the Cooperative Extension Service of today.

1914—On May 8, the Smith-Lever Act was passed establishing the first thorough scientific educational service for farm people.

1917—The Smith-Hughes Act was passed establishing programs in agriculture, home economics and trade and industry in public schools.

Beginning of the Cooperative Extension Service:

Dr. Seaman Knapp can truly be called the father of Extension. Through this man the idea of teaching by demonstration methods was introduced to Mississippi. Mississippi played a very significant part in the beginnings of farm demonstration work. After 1914 this work was known as the Cooperative Extension Service in agriculture and home economics. Mississippi State was also notable in providing much of the leadership and
information which went into the first demonstration methods. This demonstration work incorporated scientific methods of agriculture and homemaking into the family unit.²

The first county agents or demonstrators, as they were called earlier, began their work in Mississippi in 1905. In 1907, "Corn Club" Smith organized the first corn club in Holmes County. This simple club served as the major stepping-stone in the development of the 4-H Club for boys and girls. After the addition of more agents and progress in club work in 1910, new light was thrown on the extension movement. In 1911, a bill was passed which enabled home demonstration agents to be employed by the government with county cooperation. Home culture clubs had been organized previous to this time, but their enrollment was far below the boy's corn clubs. Organization and leadership had been lacking in women's demonstration work.³

Again Dr. Seaman Knapp became responsible for the beginnings of a new movement. He had seen the necessity for girl's demonstration clubs, but had decided his program would be more effective if he put all his efforts into the boy's clubs first. After establishing the boy's clubs Knapp said,

"If much can be done for boys to interest and instruct them in their life's work, more can be done for girls. Teach them to mend and sew and cook, how to doctor; how to adorn the simple home and make it appear like a place; how to make a simple arrangement so the environment of the home can be transformed into a place of beauty..."⁴

After making the previous statement Dr. Knapp called in Miss Susie V. Powell to become a collaborator and plan girls' canning clubs in Mississippi. Miss Powell has become known as the cornerstone of Home Economics Extension. She previously had been working with the schools and in the State Department
of Education. Dr. Knapp felt she was well qualified for the job. He told Miss Powell that the tomato plant could be used to reach many different areas of the home.

Miss Powell was put in charge of girls' and women's demonstration work as state supervisor. She was paid $1 per year in order to use the government franking privilege. Miss Powell immediately put two teachers in the local schools to work as the first canning club agents—Miss Mattie Furr in Lincoln County and Miss Mabel McIntosh in Copiah County. These ladies received $50 for their summer's work.

With the aid of her two agents Miss Powell held a public canning demonstration school at Brookhaven. A government expert by the name of Warrington was present to help with the school. Miss Powell's job was not an easy one; she did not possess the modern equipment available today. She used tin cans, a hot iron sealer and capping iron. She processed the cans in a hot water canner which had been assembled from a furnace. Baskets of tomatoes were provided by the girl's involved in the canning clubs.

In the first year the tomato club enrollment was 150 girls. Part of the immediate success of the club was Miss Powell's dedication and her ability to plan and organize. Each girl was given an assignment to grow one-tenth acre of tomatoes for home use, canning, and marketing. The objective of this plan was to aid in providing a higher standard of living for the families involved and also to increase the income. Miss Powell contacted influential people in the county and gained their support when these people realized the value of the work.
As a means of support these people provided funds for canning equipment, supplies, and prizes. In Copiah County invitations were sent out inviting people to the tomato canning demonstration. People of diverse ages and sex came to view the demonstration. The program was a success and Mississippi tomato clubs were on their way as an aid to girls and women. These clubs could serve in making the farm home more prosperous and organized. 6

From the beginning of her tomato club work Miss Powell was under a separate home economics program supervised by the U.S.D.A. Later provisions were made to coordinate the land-grant college and the Cooperative Extension Service. President Hightower of Mississippi A & M College made plans to bring the Cooperative Extension Service under complete jurisdiction of the college. The home demonstration work at this time was headquartered in Jackson under the U.S.D.A. cooperating with the state Department of Education. These provisions occurred after the Smith-Lever Act was passed. 7

Miss Powell was largely responsible for the success of the Mississippi tomato clubs. Her enthusiasm spread to the girls as she taught them songs and yells to add interest to the work. Contests were started on the county level and her girls were encouraged to enter their projects at the Mississippi State Fair in Jackson. 8

After tomato canning clubs were formed a new type of club called the mother-daughter canning clubs were introduced. These clubs became popular and emphasized a closer working relationship in the home. Mother-daughter clubs could be found in most counties in Mississippi. Short courses also tied in good with
this type of club work. In 1918 more than 200 women and girls attended a state short course in conservation of food and economical cookery at A & M College. Short courses offered training to women who in turn could train leaders in various communities. This type of training was the basis of leader training programs of the future.

**Dates and Happenings in Extension History (1900-1940):**

**1911**

Susie Powell called to Washington by Dr. Knapp to plan girls' canning clubs

Miss Powell becomes state supervisor in charge of girls' and women's club work

Miss Mattie Furr, Lincoln County and Miss Mabel McIntosh, Copiah County were appointed by Miss Powell as the first canning club agents.

Public canning demonstration school put on at Brookhaven. Mr. Warrington, a government expert was present.

First canning club exhibit at state fair—first prize won by Virgie Cogdell. Dr. Julius Crisler bought exhibit for $5.00

Girls' Chicken Club prizes offered at county fair—Oktibbeha County

**1912**

Bill passed enabling county supervisors to cooperate with U.S.D.A. state and other agencies in employing home demonstration agents

13 women extension workers

Bronze medals for best national canning records won by 5 Copiah County girls under direction of Miss Powell

Women appointed in demonstration work: Mary F. Welch, Collaborator in Calhoun County; Mrs. Louise B. Moore, Copiah County; Willie I. Ray and Mrs. Clara Everta, Madison County; Minnie M. Quarles, Harrison; Mrs. Tabitha S. Lemore, Forrest County and Willie B. Love, Winston County

6
Late in 1912 other demonstrators appointed: Miss Mattie R. Welborn, Jones County; Connie J. Bonslagel, Lamar County; Mamie Brickley, Montgomery County; Mrs. Lizzie M. Crowe, Oktibbeha County; Mrs. Lela Edwards, Holmes County and Mrs. Josie O'Fallon, Wilkerson County

1913 Women employed to do county work: Lula Tunnison, Collaborator Panola County; Mittie Fulger, Home Demonstration Agent, Wilkerson County; Mrs. Cord E. Graves, Lawrence County; Nannie Berry, Claiborne County; Mrs. Velma Rogers, Hinds County; Julia E. Robinson, Perry County; Mary L. Allen, Tate County; Sarah L. Dockery, DeSoto County; May Haddon, Clay County; Mrs. Margaret M. Monroe, Newton County and Della B. Alley, Montgomery County

1914 Mississippi delegation to Washington, D. C., including club members and demonstrators assist in passage of Smith-Lever Act

National trophy was won by 10 canning girls from Mississippi

State tomato club champoin - Sallie Mae Strahan of Lincoln County

Connie J. Bonslagel appointed assistant state home demonstration agent

Miss Lula Tunnison specialist in poultry

33 women extension workers

Women appointed to extension work: Katherine N. Bradley, Madison County; Mrs. Mabel McClure, Perry County; Mrs. A. Brown, George County; Emma E. Jones, Rankin County; Mrs. Bonnie Flowers, Lincoln County; Sarah Rowan, Pearl County; Mrs. Lizzie Martin, Copiah County; Anna Speights, Jefferson Davis County; Mrs. Laura Haiens, Jackson County; Mrs. Lucile White, Webster County

1915 Miss Susie Powell prepared the first Extension bulletin to be published with the idea of informing people about home economics Extension

Miss Powell held a state-side agent's meeting at Crystal Spring

1916 January 1, headquarters of extension work moved to A & M College
36 home demonstration agents employed
7,030 girls enrolled as canning club members
700 poultry club members
1,897 women enrolled in home demonstration work
190 home demonstration clubs organized
Short courses held in counties for women and girls
1,168 cooking demonstrations

1917 Food production control and war work
Formation of community organization for war-time activities and cooperative marketing
Mrs. Maude H. Kolb, first home demonstration agent, Monroe County
Alice C. Oliver appointed to work in Delta counties
Coahoma first county in state to supplement federal funds for negro home demonstration work.
Mrs. Della B. Alley Luter appointed district home demonstration agent, Northwest Mississippi; Miss Mae Quarles appointed district home demonstration agent in South and Mrs. Myrtle S. Dodds in Northeast --first district home agents in the state
76 home demonstration agents and 4 district home agent

1918 War work-emergency appropriations-82 extension women workers in state
Short courses taught by Mrs. Anna Felder and Nellie May Wells
Mrs. Myrtle S. Dodds appointed district home demonstration agent
Miss Agnes Donaldson employed to direct dairy demonstration work with farm women

1919 Miss Lula Tunnison appointed specialist in charge of girls'clubs, part of her time devoted to poultry work
Mrs. Della Alley district agent in Delta
Mrs. R.I. Noel district agent in Southeast
Miss Sue Rice district agent in Northeast
Miss Haddon district agent in Southwest

1919-1920 Rehabilitation of soldier trainees under extension supervision

Overview of the 1920's:

Home demonstration agents had done a great work during World War I and the 20's became an important part in the home life of rural Mississippi. During the war, programs had been oriented toward the needs of the times, now the opportunity was at hand for programs to branch out. Emphasis on better food preparation, utilization of vegetables, and better preparation of dairy, meat and poultry products became important. "Better Bread" and "Better Butter" contests were a means of raising the standards of these products in the home. Because of the serious clothing problems programs in this area became of intense importance. Home furnishings and decorating proved to be a constructive area for women and girls. Attractiveness as well as economics was stressed in home decorating. Even recreation found a place when the women and girls came together for home demonstration programs.

In the early 20's, home demonstration clubs came together to organize county home demonstration councils. This organization aided women in keeping in touch with county affairs and in having weight with appropriating boards.
Dates and Happenings of the 20's

1920
94 women in extension work
concerted effort to increase marketing of home products

1921
Extension workers reduced to 55 women with withdrawal
of emergency funds

1922
35 demonstrations held on sewing; 42 on millinery
Kitchen demonstrations

Mrs. Brodie Billingsley won National canning contest

Organization of state home demonstration council
Officers included: Mrs. J. W. Walker, Lafayette County;
Mrs. J. T. Doherty, Harrison County, vice president;
and Miss Adele Fisher, Hinds County, secretary treasurer

1923
Mrs. Maggie I. Noel appointed district home demonstration
agent - South Mississippi
8 egg circles organized in the state

Nora Flowers, Sharkey County, won first in clothing
judging at National 4-H Club Congress

Mississippi 4-H canning team won all southern champion-
ship, Atlanta--Ruby Trigg and Willie Stribling, both
of Hinds County

Gladys Hughes, Sunflower, won National 4-H health contest

Miss Anne O. Jordan appointed nutritionist

Miss Pearl P. Burson appointed organization specialist

Miss Elaine E. Massey first full-time state girls’ club
agent

Short course held at A & M College- “Four Square Home”

1924
Mrs. Della B. Alley district home demonstration agent,
South Mississippi

Mrs. Mary B. Gieson becomes state agent in charge of
girls’ and women’s work

Miss Ella May Cresswell district home demonstration agent
Ines Harden, Sunflower, National 4-H health contest

1925 Miss Mary A. Gordon appointed organization and marketing specialist

1926 Mrs. M. Barkley appointed poultry specialist

Miss Balmayne Taliaferro, Copiah, won $500 in Southern States Garden contest

Miss Jeanette Rushing, Sunflower, National 4-H health contest

1928 Miss Ida Morgan appointed district home demonstration agent

1929 Miss Quida Midkiff appointed clothing and women’s organization specialist

Miss Eva Legett appointed poultry specialist

Miss May Cresswell state agent in charge women’s and girls’ work

Miss Jewell Garland district home demonstration agent

Delta district

Overview of the 1930’s

County home demonstration councils became an important phase of demonstration work. A broadening trend became evident in home demonstration work as such subjects as rural electrification, taxiation, soil conservation, landuse, and consumer education were discussed in council meetings. Conservation of abundant food continued to be a popular subject for programs. Despite low incomes women and girls continued to work at improving their homes and grounds. More bathroom facilities were built as a result of demonstration efforts. Clothing continued as a popular program and dress revues became an important item.
1930 Miss May Haddon nutritionist

Miss Evelyn Taylor, Hinds County, won $400 scholarship in National 4-H farm accounting contest

Home demonstration markets organized in the 30's
Home management stress through 30's
Nutritional programs also stressed

1931 Mrs. Emma Lindsey district home demonstration agent, South Mississippi

Miss Mary E. Doney food preservation specialist

Outlook material prepared to help plan production to meet market demands

1932 Miss Kate Lee district home demonstration agent, North Mississippi

Miss Olive M. Dowell district home demonstration agent, Delta

Miss Ida Morgan rural women's organization and recreation specialist
Community canning plants established by business firms

1933 Mrs. Emma Lindsey district home demonstration agent, Southwest Mississippi

4-H girls made over 9,000 garments

1934 First vegetable garden leader's contest conducted in accordance with present setup

1935 Miss Addie Hester district home demonstration agent, Southeast

Miss Kate Lee district home demonstration agent, North-east

Miss Jewell Garland rural women's organization and recreation specialist
693 organized community clubs-membership 14,579
1936 Miss Kate Lee acting state home demonstration agent, assisting state agent

Elizabeth Drye McWilliams, Lauderdale County, National Winner—won silver trophy given by Senator Capper, Kansas 4-H Food work

Miss Lorraine Ford home management specialist

Miss Maxine Naugher assistant state girls' club agent

1937 Development of freezer locker plan for storing meats, fruits and vegetables,

Provision of additional cold storage facilities for curing pork through WPA-farmer cooperation

Mattie E. Goodwin, Noxubee, won first in National 4-H home furnishing contest

1938 Miss Blanche Goad state girls' club agent

Organization of county policy and planning committees consisting of representative farm men and women leaders and representatives of business interests

1939 889 organized community clubs—22,660 members

More than 32,000 rural Mississippi farms had electricity

Home demonstration activities engineered by 68 county home demonstration councils

The Progress of Home Economics Extension Continues:

The years from 1940-1970 have seen much progress and improvement in the methods as well as the dispersion of new information to the homemaker. 1900-1940 demonstration work simple—laid the ground work for great happenings in home economics extension. Over these rough and often frustrating years an understanding of the true worth of home economics extension developed.
Extension work today is far different from the first unplanned demonstration conducted by the American Indian. Yet, the basic principle—learning by seeing, and then doing—has remained the same. Farm people have continued to seek better ways of growing crops, and of living better in the home through combining their knowledge with skill and effort. This zeal for wanting to increase knowledge and understanding has insured better rural living, economic gains, and spiritual satisfactions.¹³

Through extension work home economics became a very practical part of balanced farming. The balanced farm plan made finances available to provide family requirements—food, clothing, health, education and recreation. Long-time improvements to the home were provided as financing became possible, not through rapid outlays of cash.

In 1953 extension workers were providing assistance with home planning, selecting furnishings and equipment, ground improvement and budgeting of family time.

In the early years of demonstration club work methods of communication and transportation were handicaps. But, as club activities spread through the improvement of roads and telephones, so the program and its membership spread.

With increased growth, the early individual service of canning clubs had to be replaced by group effort. Each home agent found it necessary to conduct regular training meetings for leaders. Extension specialists were also incorporated to help keep agents up-to-date on relevant subject matter. They also helped in training leaders.¹⁴
The first few years set the stage for something bigger in the way of extension work. Demonstration work fervently practiced the philosophy that people must be reached wherever they are. Extension must reach them at the different back-grounds of education, interest, and even understanding. The philosophy had been set by the early demonstrators—"...teach people how to think and what to think and to do this where they were—on the farm and in the home."15

There are five characteristics of extension work which were established in early years and continue to hold true today. These five characteristics are as follows:

1. democratic principles
2. helping people help themselves
3. flexibility
4. alertness to recognize new scientific research developed and relate it to people effectively
5. desire to serve others16

These characteristics point out the spirit of home economics extension and why this part of the Cooperative Extension Service has become a success.
FOOTNOTES


3 Ibid., pp. 14, 16, 22-23.


5 History of Mississippi, pp. 23-24.

6 Ibid., p. 24.

7 Ibid., p. 35.

8 Ibid., pp. 24-25.

9 Ibid., p. 58.

10 COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS, "Items of Extension History-Mississippi", Mississippi College and United States Department of Agriculture Cooperating, pp. 3-14. (This publication found in the Mississippi Archives)

11 History of Mississippi, pp. 68-69.

12 COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK, pp. 3-14.


15 History of Mississippi, p. 29.

16 J. L. Boatman, "Philosophy", pp. 5-6.
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Miss Susie Powell

Miss Mattie Furr (Lincoln Co.)

Miss Mabel McIntosh (Copiah Co.)

Canning Clubs