

Reflections from the Past: Remembrances of a Past President: The Way It Was in Cooperative Extension

Virginia Zirkle, (OH), NEAFCS Past President - 1977

At the Ohio Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (OAFCS) Annual Meeting in the spring of 2008, Virginia Zirkle, retired Extension Agent and Professor Emeritus with Ohio State University Extension, served on a panel of four professional home economists. Each was asked to share how working with individuals and families changed during their career. The presentation was summarized and revised slightly by Zirkle and is reprinted with her permission.



Pictured left to right: Ms. Norlund, Ms. Zirkle, Ms. Rice and Ms. Henriksen – Milwaukee, Wisconsin (1970)

Prior to World War II, Extension was teaching families how to make mattresses. Did you ever see one of the 30-inch needles? Having started in Extension in Putman County in July, 1947, our Supervisor, Nellie Watts, suggested we schedule sewing machine clinics in September. It was a great introduction for the Home Demonstration Agent for learning the county and people in it.

Most families and 4-H members did home canning. It was an opportunity to teach proper canning methods-especially the use of a pressure canner for all low-acid foods. We recommended testing pressure canner gauges yearly at the beginning of every canning season. Gardens, truck patches and fruit trees were the source of the family food supply. Teaching and demonstrating recommended spray and fertilization practices for a safe food supply was also included.

Programs on foods and nutrition, meal planning for adults, 4-H members and others used a variety of teaching methods.

Commercial canneries wanted low-acid tomatoes for production. Putman County was one of the counties producing a large number of tomatoes for canneries. Homemakers went to the field, picked tomatoes for canning only to learn they had problems. Low-acid tomatoes are not the best for home canning

Most families and many 4-H members did home sewing. Training meetings were conducted for the beginner sewer to advanced tailoring. When women began wearing pants, sessions were held on pant construction. Fitting was a major concern in sewing. Dress forms were custom made so they could fit themselves more easily. They were willing to stand straight and tall for the necessary time to tape and paste together the form. No one ever passed out for us!

New fabrics came on the market, and teaching sewers to properly use, care, sew the nylons and polyesters was commonplace. Child development and family relationships were also an important part of our program.

Wood ranges were still in use after the war. Foods were prepared from "scratch". Home delivered milk was made to households not having their own source of milk. We moved to the electric range and then to the microwave – all requiring changes in cooking methods and time required to cook. Butter was often replaced with margarine. Fast foods and pre-packaged products became more popular after more homemakers worked outside the home.



Virginia Zirkle (2001)

We made home visits for all kinds of concerns and needs of families. Remodeling and plans for new homes were frequent requests. The agent went to the home, visited with the family about their needs, and then drew up floor plans to scale. We also made furniture and equipment models to scale so the family could see the end product. Selection of equipment, furniture, furnishings provided an opportunity to

discuss use and care practices. Meetings and seminars on money management and planning for children's education as well as planning for retirement were held. Monthly meetings for homemakers were held in homes. Workshops were held in Grange Halls, township buildings, churches or other public meeting places.



Virginia Zirkle (2006)

News and information for weekly columns went out of the office every Friday to all newspapers, radio and television stations serving the county. During World War II, young homemakers went to work in the war industry. They came home after the war to be wife, mother and volunteer. As families felt the need for more financial support, wives began working outside the home. This changed our method in reaching homemakers and families

Extension professionals were a very close-knit family. We supported and helped each other in every way we could. People skills were a part of "our package". I wonder if this remains true and will it always be true? People skills are missing in so many areas today. It raises concerns for what is ahead.

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