

## Reflections from the Past: Early Extension FCS Films to be Shown at Annual Session

Jan Scholl (PA) NEAFCS 75th Anniversary Committee

Between 1910 and 1940, at a time Mary Pickford, Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin were popular; over 400 black and white silent films were produced by the USDA to educate farm families and community groups! A content analysis of the films show, as one might expect, many agricultural films about commodities, forests, insects, and crop diseases. A good deal of footage exists about the 4-H program.

Though less in number, there are also many wonderful films related to the home: *Why Eat Cottage Cheese*, (1920) captures the early idea of an Extension Specialist giving a program and an attendee going home, assisted by an Extension bulletin, to make recipes. The focus on cottage cheese during World War I and the early 1920s was to use the food as a meat substitute and even pie filling.

The film *Milk for You and Me* incorporates early animation as protein, mineral, vitamin and chubby sugar and fat molecules hop into the milk bottle at the tap of a fairy's wand. This film also utilizes sports heroes to endorse milk drinking. *Good Posture Wins* (1931) shows how to stand and sit and a slow motion sequence demonstrates how to walk.

In *The Club College Farm and Home* (1927), 4-H members make a garment for a child out of a recycled adult coat. A side-by-side comparison of the garments worn by Victorian and Flapper-era adults and children is featured in *The Family Goes to College* (1927).

A visual tour of homes of famous people (Henry Clay, Thomas Jefferson, John Paul Jones, Francis Scott Key, etc.) can be found in the film *Home* (1926). More practical renovations are demonstrated in *Home is What You Make It* (1929). The before and after scenes of a shed that is transformed into a "villa" are truly amazing!

One of the most unusual films related to home economics shows how cattle dipping vats and how a community might round up cattle to alleviate ticks that resulted in poor dairy yields. The film is unusual as it contains "fist fights" with the grocer, someone falls into the vat, and there is even a "hit man" who shoots the man rounding up the cattle (no one ever said Extension work was easy). Related to family and consumer sciences, the 1922 film shows *Mollie of Pine Grove Vat* (reminiscent of Molly Pitcher in the Revolutionary War who takes over for her soldier husband) and convinces the community to participate so that their children can go to college. In the end, a community center is built and is named for Molly-our heroine!

A film that compares the plights of a farm woman and the ease of her farmer husband's work is *The Happier Way*, (1920). This film gives a rare look into early Extension offices, utilizes information from a real Extension exhibit and illustrates an actual result demonstration that takes place in a home kitchen.

Not all of the motion pictures were filmed in the U.S. One of the earliest films, *American Home Canning* (1919), shows Extension Specialists from Washington, DC going to Grignon, France to demonstrate canning techniques during World War I.

These are just a few of the dozens of films that are interesting, not only for their historical value, but because they share solutions to problems when technology, water and other resources were scarce. The films may be found in Archives II, located several miles east of the University of Maryland campus and south of the National Agricultural Library. Efforts are underway to have the films reproduced and used to support additional historical research. FCS films produced by county and state home economists may be found on the World Cat(TM) library database. Ask a local reference librarian to help you search. If you are interested in the films or have questions about them, contact [Jan Scholl](#).

Jan will be giving a 30-minute presentation and showing films at the 2009 Annual Session's Friendship Event, to be held at the beautifully restored Alabama Theatre in Birmingham.