

Milestones That Mark Our 50th Year

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The following is the first of five installments of the Association's history as compiled by Cleo Bryan. This mimeographed booklet was distributed to members attending the 50th Anniversary Annual Meeting in New York City September 8-13, 1984.

HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL HOME DEMONSTRATION AGENTS' ASSOCIATION AND THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EXTENSION HOME ECONOMISTS

The history of our Association and the moving spirit that inspired its growth are reflected in our Annual Meeting program this week in New York City. The Association was formed to give new agents an opportunity to express themselves and be understood, to keep standards high, to discuss problems with a feeling of unity, and to evaluate Extension work.

Tracing our Beginnings

It is impossible in this narrative to record all our progress since we organized in 1933. However, it is appropriate for us to pay tribute to those early innovators who had the vision and determination to begin out-of-school education and win passage of that constructive legislation known as the Smith-Lever Act of 1914.

The 1890 Colleges and early youth work up to 1910 and 1912 saw "Lady Assistants" as they were sometimes called, working with tomato clubs, canning clubs, cooking schools and other projects. The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 led to cooperative work between Land Grant Colleges and the United State Department of Agriculture. The Act also led to the general demand to carry information and result of discoveries to rural people in the field and in the home.

Various influences directed leaders in Congress to provide an effective means for reaching and teaching rural people. Bradford Knapp, A.C. True, W.S. Spillman, and C.B. Smith developed the Memorandum of Understanding that created the Cooperative Extension Service at each of our Land Grant institutions. This document, the first of its kind in the nation, is still held today as a sacred cooperative agreement between the Land Grant Colleges of the nation and USDA. During the 70 years, many events have occurred to question the fundamental tenets of this memorandum, But Extension offices of the state and USDA point to this understanding as an "Extension Bible," for carrying forward the Cooperative Extension Education System.

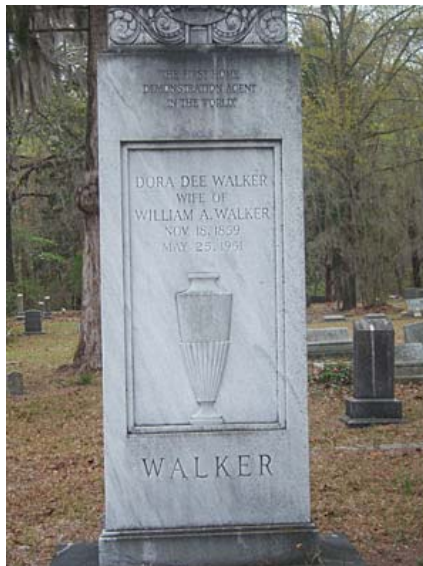
First Agents Appointed

USDA added Extension personnel and the first agents were appointed in counties throughout the nation. From this beginning, our Association began to emerge. From USDA documents, we learned that the first home demonstration agent appointed after the Smith-Lever Act was Mrs. Dora Lee Walker of South Carolina. She had been a collaborator in the Bureau of Plant Industry in USDA at a salary of \$1 per annum, and was appointed on March 20, 1911. On December 1, 1914, she was appointed agent on the miscellaneous roll of the plant industry and was paid \$37.50 by Winthrop College and \$37.50 by USDA per year — a total annual salary of \$75.00.

On July 1, 1915, she was promoted to agent on the roll of the States Relations Service at \$37.50 per month. On May 1, 1919, she was promoted to the position of assistant emergency state home demonstration agent on the Miscellaneous Roll of the Department of Agriculture at \$60 per month. From July 1, 1919 to June 30, 1921, she was given a new title as agent for Extension to simulate and facilitate distribution of products. Mrs. Walker was the first legally employed home demonstration agent in the world and is stated on her tombstone in a graveyard near Allendale, SC. The first home demonstration club she organized was Bethel in Barnwell, SC.



Photo of Dora Dee "Mother" Calhoun Walker from a published speech by Guy S. Ferguson: "A Woman for All Seasons, All Times, and All Generations!" Courtesy of the Allendale County (South Carolina) Family and Community Leaders



Dora Dee "Mother" Walker is buried in Mount Arnon Cemetery (Mt. Arnon Baptist Church), just a few miles from Allendale, SC.
Photo courtesy of Christine Patrick, Bamberg County, SC.

Extension work was inaugurated by Dr. Knapp, in charge of Farmers Cooperative Demonstration Work. On March 20, 1911, Mrs. Walker took the following oath of office in USDA: "I, Dora Lee Walker, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance do the same; that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservations or purpose of evasion; and I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of my office on which I am about to enter. So help me God." At that time, Mrs. Walker, born November 18, 1862, was 48 years of age.

She again took the oath in July 1915. She asked for a salary adjustment and on September 27, 1915, was given \$1000 per year. Her salary increased to \$1200 in 1916 as Assistant State Home Demonstration Agent. The state agent and director of Extension said, "Her work required a woman of unusual ability and she has been successful since 1911." Her salary was increased to \$166.67 per month. In 1917 and 1918, her contract was renewed to \$120 per month. On May 1, 1919, she was transferred from agent to Assistant Emergency State Home Demonstration Agent at \$133.33 per month. On July 1, 1921, her salary was reduced to \$50 per month "without prejudice," the notice said. Mrs. Walker left the service on June 30, 1921.

Many early pioneers are still living, For example, Edith Bangham, 5025 Lake Mendota Drive, Madison, WI 53705, presided at the first Annual Meeting until the President was elected. Myrtle Sibley, Spalding County, Georgia, was known as "Aunt Het." She pioneered programs such as a car lot poultry sale and she developed women's club markets.



In 2004, the ACFCL of Allendale County placed "Mother" Walker's dress, picture and a plaque in the hallway at the Allendale County Courthouse as a tribute to her calling her an "extraordinary citizen who transcends seasons, times and generations."
Photo courtesy of Christine Patrick, Bamberg, SC.

Historian note: In researching history provided by Christine Patrick, County Extension Agent from Bamberg County, South Carolina, Mrs. Walker's (or "Mother Walker" as she is affectionately called by the agents in South Carolina) correct name is Dora Dee (Calhoun) Walker. She remained employed by the Extension Service in South Carolina until her retirement in 1946 after a 35-year career in Extension work. Early records from NHDAA and the South Carolina Affiliate do not show that Dora Dee Walker was a member or attended any Association meetings. However, in 1937 she received a Distinguished Service Award from Epsilon Sigma Phi (ESP). She died in 1951 at the age of 91. A memorial was dedicated to her in Allendale, SC in 1977.

Additional research into the history of Extension work shows that Dora Dee Walker, while among the early home demonstration agents appointed, may not have been the first. Extension work in home economics started well before the Smith Lever Act of 1914. Martha Van Rensselaer (NY) was appointed in 1900. Other records show that Ella Agnew (VA) and Marie Samuella Cromer (SC) were both appointed in 1910. These are just a few of the many who should be recognized for their insight, commitment and dedication in the early years of our profession. For additional information on these early agents see the December 2008 issue of E-News. (CJS 2009)