

Country Memories ^[1]

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We are now going to learn a little bit more about Mrs. Clark's childhood before her father's death. Remember, she is between 5–9 years old at this time. Think of what you were doing when you were her age. Try to imagine how you would feel if your childhood had been more like hers, and listen closely to some of the more surprising details.

Preliminary questions

1. Mrs. Clark remembers making soap from lye and animal fat. Companies who make soap still use this process today. If families had to make their own soap then, what other things might they have made rather than purchased?
2. Mrs. Clark also mentions that the children carried water. It was not common to have a house with faucets, toilets, showers or tubs in those days. What would be different in your life if your house didn't have running water?
3. Mrs. Clark will also mention a certain crop that she picked with her brothers and sisters in order to earn money for shoes. What kinds of crops were commonly grown in North Carolina then (and now?)

The recording

Running time: 3:40

[About this recording.](#) ^[2]

Transcript

Rebecca Clark

Even when I was in the country, living in the country, we hardly knew what a notebook was. Our dad would buy us tablets and we had to use the paper very sparingly. Our books then was old books. We didn't know what newspapers was, we didn't know what magazines was. I'll never forget: we got a magazine one time - not a magazine, it was ()'s catalog. That was before my daddy died.

We had to pick cotton before we could go to school to buy our shoes. And picking cotton, and to buy shoes, our daddy would measure our feet because then we weren't allowed to put, well, try on shoes in the stores. So our daddy would put our feet down on a piece of cardboard and measure our feet and come to the store to get our shoes. And he used to get them at the place we call Tim Pearson, which is out here at the forks of Smith Level Road and 15-501. There was a big department store there. When he didn't get them there, he got them at Hearn's in Carrboro. Hearn's was noted for its own department store. Those days I do remember.

We picked cotton and I'll never forget the last year I think I was in the country, somebody gave us a () catalog. My family helped me order a coat. That's the first time I remember a coat. I don't know where our clothes came from and what kind of coats we had. And I remember I ordered a coat. The mailbox was about two miles from us. When it came, somebody would tell somebody it was there, because you paid for it.

Back then, we thought we were happy. We didn't know anything about hard times. Even in the country, we had to bring our water from down on the hill. Little children. For drinking water, for cooking water, and for wash water. In the summertime, we'd take our tubs and pots down to the spring branch. And there we would put a fire under the pot to boil our clothes, be sure we got 'em clean with lye soap. And back then, the older people made the lye from the fat of the grease and stuff that they had left over and stuff like that from hog-killing times and whatever you had left over from your cooking and pots. But in our house, there wasn't much grease left over because my daddy, to feed us, to make it go, he would take what's left and put a little flour in it, brown it, make some biscuits - put some salt and pepper in it and make some biscuits. We had that for supper: gravy,

biscuits, molasses.

Bob Gilgor

You didn't waste much?

Rebecca Clark

We didn't waste anything. And I can't see wasting now. I had cooked a cake and put it in the refrigerator here last month. And it kind of dried out. I took it out, and somebody said to me, just the other day, "It's too dry to eat," she said. "Don't throw it away," I said, "un-unh. I'm going to pour some milk over it, put some () in it, some flavor, some sugar, and make a pudding out of it." I'm still not throwing anything [laughs]. How do you think I made it? I had to save.

Follow-up questions

1. Before this answer, Mrs. Clark was asked about her school days, and the books she was given. Where did her school textbooks come from? What other school materials did she have, and how did she have to treat them? What does this say about her schooling experience in general?
2. Why wasn't Mrs. Clark allowed to try on shoes?
3. Describe the process she went through to get her first coat.
4. Why did Mrs. Clark and her family go down to the "spring branch" (small place with running water) in the summertime? How much work was involved? What does it imply about overall expectations of cleanliness if washing clothes was so much work?
5. What is Mrs. Clark's attitude about her early childhood and the skills she learned at that time?

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