

*The University of Arizona College of Agriculture and
the Arizona Historical Society Oral History Programs*

Narrator: Helen Church

Interviewer: Amy Jean Knorr

Transcriber: Beth Thrall

November 13, 1994

I am Amy Jean Knorr, representing the Archives Committee of the College of Agriculture, University of Arizona. This evening I am in the home of Corinne Stinson at 4219 North Limberlost Circle, Tucson, Arizona, for the purpose of interviewing her house guest, Helen Church. Helen, now retired, was the Clothing and Textile Specialist at the University of Arizona, Cooperative Extension Service. She will share with us her recollections of her work and experiences.

Knorr: Helen Church, is it your intention to give this tape and the typed transcript of our interview to the Arizona Historical Society?

Church: Yes.

Knorr: Thank you. Let's just begin with some information about you. Where did you spend your early years, your growing up years?

Church: My growing up years were spent in Kansas, part of it in Western Kansas and the rest of in Southeastern Kansas, at Osage City.

Knorr: Where did you attend college?

Church: I got my A.B. degree from the College of Emporia which is a Presbyterian College. It was close to home and that's where I went.

Knorr: *Did you go there for four years?*

Church: *Yes.*

Knorr: *You said you got your A.B. degree there. I assume that means that you got a Masters degree somewhere else.*

Church: *Yes, that's right.*

Knorr: *Where did you get your Masters?*

Church: *I got my Masters at Kansas State at Manhattan in Clothing and Textiles.*

Knorr: *What was your undergraduate degree?*

Church: *My undergraduate degree was just college prep.*

Knorr: *And your Major at the Masters level was Clothing and Textiles.*

Church: *Yes.*

Knorr: *What was your first job after college?*

Church: *My first job was a very interesting job. I went to the first county high school in the United States, the Dickinson Community High School in Chapman, Kansas. It was interesting and the students all came from all over the county. They would come in, spend the week, have a little apartment, cook their own food.*

Knorr: *It was a residential?*

Church: *No. They rented little apartments all over the town and it was very interesting. It was also an interesting school - that's where the first High-Y was organized. It was between Manhattan and Abilene, Kansas.*

Knorr: *Did you stay in that position long?*

Church: *I was there until I went to get my Masters - six years. Then I went to K-State for*

my Masters.

Knorr: *What did you do after you finished your Masters?*

Church: *I went to Missouri. I got acquainted with Amy Kelly on campus, and she decided I should go to be a Home Demonstration Agent. So I went to Missouri, spent about three months as a Home Agent learning to - in those days you had to have grown up a farm and I had had that experience and I was given three counties to organize and establish enough clubs to organize the county for a Home Demonstration Extension Agent. It was an interesting job and I liked it.*

Knorr: *So you knew you liked working in Extension about that point.*

Church: *Yes, because in teaching school, students had to come and they had to learn, but in Extension work they came of their own free will. It was up to you to make it interesting enough for them to come and they wanted the information. School teaching is not that way always.*

Knorr: *How did you happen to come to Arizona?*

Church: *During the war they combined my work - I worked with 4-H Club work in Missouri and they combined the work of the Clothing Specialist who went into the WAVES. I worked pretty hard because it was difficult. I think I drove too many miles and had a back problem, so I decided I would come to a warmer climate.*

Knorr: *Did you go into Extension again?*

Church: *Yes.*

Knorr: *Where did you work first in Arizona?*

Church: *I started out in Tucson and worked with adult work more than I did - I wrote the bulletins for the 4-H Clubs and trained leaders, but I wanted to get back in my own field. When I doing 4-H Club work I wasn't necessarily doing organizational work and at that time there was no place for a woman any higher. Today I guess it would be different.*

Knorr: *That's one of the big changes.*

Church: *That's one of the big changes, that's right.*

Knorr: *Do you remember the year that you became the Clothing and Textile Specialist in Arizona?*

Church: *I came here in 1946 and I stayed until I retired in 1971.*

Knorr: *That's a wonderful career. Now you worked with developing programs for families in Clothing and Textiles?*

Church: *That's right.*

Knorr: *What were the kinds of problems that families were having in Clothing and Textiles in those early years?*

Church: *I thought I'd never get through remodeling clothing because we went through a war and we went through a depression. I remodeled everything - children's clothes, made suits out of men's pants - it was a lot of fun but it was also lots of work.*

Knorr: *What were some of the other problems that families had as the years went on?*

Church: *One of the things that was interesting, I thought, was that many women had problems of pattern fitting and many of them did their own sewing, had to,*

especially in the lower income areas. They were all shapes and forms so one of the big things I did was teaching the women how to fit and alter patters for figure difficulties. I did quite a lot of work with color and design and developed quite a big program in color.

Knorr: *What kinds of things did you do in color programs?*

Church: *This program was established in Washington by Alice Lynn who was at USDA. I helped her develop this program. She came out and worked with me and we developed this program. It was very interesting. We made color charts for each woman - we took small cardboards and pasted the fabrics and colors on them that were most becoming to them. We got swatches of colors and tried them on the ladies - in fact this was before they had this program - I'm sure they took it from our program. They wrote some books, using this same method. We had lots of fun with that and the women enjoyed it.*

Knorr: *I'm sure they would have. Now you were probably in Arizona, too, at the time that Pima cotton was developed. Did you do any work with the Cotton Council or with the cotton growers.*

Church: *Yes I did. I and the man up at Phoenix who was a Cotton Specialist and who was very interested in my working with him on cotton. We formed the first county Cotton Council.*

Knorr: *Was that in Maricopa County?*

Church: *Yes. I guess I was the President of it.*

Knorr: *What kinds of things did the Cotton Council do?*

Church: We sponsored a girl as Maid of Cotton and she was selected from daughters of cotton growers in the valley. We established that. I helped organize the wool growers. As you know, the Northern part of our state has lots of sheep, especially on the Indian Reservation. I did work on the Indian Reservation with the Indian Home Agent that we had at that time.

Knorr: On what kinds of things did you work with the Home Agent?

Church: One of the things that the women had - they all had Singer sewing machines. If they didn't have anything else, they had a sewing machine. We cleaned and adjusted all of their sewing machines - many of them needed it badly and they learned to take care of their machines. That was a big project all over the state because many people would take the machine to be repaired when all it needed was to adjust the tension, so they learned how to use the machine and how to adjust it.

Knorr: Now, did the women on the reservation work with wool fabric?

Church: Some of them did. The Navajo always had these velvet dresses and people used to talk about the dirty Indians, their being so dirty. Of course they'd have petticoat after petticoat underneath the velvet dress, and they didn't have any place to keep them, anyhow. Like they wore all their jewelry because they didn't have any place else to keep it. They were very interesting to work with. Then the Bureau of Indian Affairs took it over. In fact they took over the whole program.

Knorr: Did you work with them after they took it over?

Church: Not much, no.

Knorr: *I want to come back to the wool growers. How did you work with the wool growers?*

Church: *I can't remember the name of the lady from Australia. She came here and wanted help in organizing wool growers. I told her we've got lots of cotton, but of course the Northern part of the state had wool. I helped organize the Wool Growers Council. I don't know whether it exists today or not.*

Knorr: *I'm quite sure you would have been the Specialist during the time that there was the move from natural fibers to synthetic fibers. Did that make a difference in your work?*

Church: *Yes it did. When the synthetics came along, of course the cotton people didn't like it, but soon they got to combining cotton with the synthetics and they found that there had to be a combination of the fibers and they brought us no more ironing of cotton which was a big saving of time. Of course a lot of people still clung to cotton and there has been a recent trend to go back to all cotton, but they'll have a hard time.*

Knorr: *You mentioned that they began to combine synthetics with cotton and wasn't it about this time that we had the introduction of the labeling laws?*

Church: *That's right and that was a big program.*

Knorr: *What did you do in it?*

Church: *The Labeling Act was enacted which meant that we had to know and I taught the ladies how to read labels and the best combinations of the cotton and the synthetics.*

Knorr: *What was considered the best combination?*

Church: *At least 60% of synthetic in some of them and 50% at least - 50/50 or 60/40 was the best combination.*

Knorr: *What were the greatest changes in the kinds of problems that the people had with their clothing during the time that you were the Textile and Clothing Extension Specialist?*

Church: *Probably the biggest change was to the synthetics. It was awfully hard for some people to accept the synthetics. Of course the first synthetics were rayon - the wrinkles were terrible. It was a very bad experience. That was unfortunate because they were skeptical but now I'm sure there is no more ironing shirts and clothes by the hour. In fact, they won't buy them I don't think - they've thrown away their iron and ironing board. Easy care has been a . . .*

Knorr: *Was there change in the amount of clothing construction that was done in homes?*

Church: *Yes, there was less. More ready-to-wear, but we still had a job to do to teach them in buymanship - reading of labels and buymanship and merchandising. In fact on my sabbatical I did work in merchandising because I wanted to know more about merchandising so I went to New York and NYU and studied merchandising.*

Knorr: *When you say you studied merchandising were you studying it from the standpoint of the merchandisers or of the consumers?*

Church: *Both. Part of my work I had to work, it was at Christmastime, in Bloomingdales as part of my learning merchandising. It was quite an experience.*

Knorr: *Tell about what you did at Bloomingdales.*

Church: *I remember something very funny. I would always be in a different department and I never had a chance to learn all about the particular merchandise. I remember one time working in a - this is a time they wore these big fur hats with a tail on the end of them and they had to be rung up in our cash registers. They had a special tax, an extra tax. I kept asking her to help me to do it so she went on and still hadn't helped me and so I just took all those hats and put them under the counter, so we didn't sell any hats for an hour.*

Knorr: *But you did learn how to do it.*

Church: *Yes, I did later.*

Knorr: *As the Specialist in Textiles and Clothing, you would have worked with the County Home Economist.*

Church: *That's right.*

Knorr: *Can you tell us some of the methods you used in working with them?*

Church: *I worked with the Home Agents in helping to train local leaders. There were some subjects that maybe were a little too difficult for them to do and I did have some workshops individually. For instance, we did tailoring and tailored coats and suits and some of them were not experienced enough. I remember one 4-H leader who came to our training meetings and she went back to the local school and taught the ladies how to tailor suits. She was unusual.*

Knorr: *Was she a volunteer leader?*

Church: *Yes. The volunteer leaders are wonderful to work with because they were eager*

to learn and then, of course, you had to teach them methods of teaching as well as subject matter.

Knorr: Will you describe a couple of the methods of teaching that you taught them to use?

Church: We usually demonstrated many of the things and have them perform the same things that we did. It's an easy method of teaching and you have a chance to correct mistakes and it's a very good way to teach.

Knorr: Did you use demonstrations both with the Extension Home Economists and the volunteer leaders?

Church: Yes. We also had to prepare leaders' guides.

Knorr: Tell me a little more about the leaders' guides.

Church: We tried to organize the material so that they could present the material in the order that it should be taught.

Knorr: So these guides were for the volunteer leaders to use, were they?

Church: Yes, that's right. Many of the Home Agents were not - some of them had very little background in Clothing and Textiles. Really a Home Agent had to be master of all trades, she had a very wide field. She couldn't be specialized and for that reason it was necessary for us to help her to organize the material - present methods of teaching as well as subject matter.

Knorr: Are there some of the Extension Home Economists that you remember particularly?

Church: Yes, I do. In fact just recently a group of us have gotten together. Yesterday we

had a luncheon and it was a lot of fun to chat and recall the things we had done in the past. The Extension program in most of the counties is quite different now than it used to be.

End of Side 1 Tape 1

Knorr: Helen, what was the name of the Extension person from Maricopa County that you were talking about?

Church: The person I was talking about was from Kansas, Amy Kelly, State Leader. Here it was Jean Stewart.

Knorr: Tell us a little bit about Jean Stewart and the way you worked with her and she worked with you.

Church: Jean was a Nutritionist and she didn't know much about my field. She had never worked with leadership training and was really not an advocate of it. I felt it was the only way you could reach enough people is through leadership. I was given lots of freedom to do my program and even though I was doing Clothing and Textiles, I wrote all the 4-H bulletins.

Knorr: I was going to asked you about the materials and the bulletins that you did develop. Tell about them.

Church: I wrote all the 4-H bulletins in Clothing and then we wrote bulletins for the A Adult Ed program, too. I wrote, I don't know how many, but many of them, both on Textiles and on Clothing and Clothing Construction. I think I wrote some bulletins, too, on - I've been going through my files trying to get rid of stuff and I had a bulletin on Stay Stitching and making Bound Buttonholes.

Knorr: *I've forgotten what stay stitching was.*

Church: *That's keeping stitching in a direction so that it wouldn't stretch. For instance, a skirt you stitch from the bottom up instead of from the top down. It's a very important thing. I can't think of any of the other bulletins.*

Knorr: *It's good for us to know about these.*

Church: *I did write a general bulletin on construction. I remember Director Pickerell - I wanted to use two colors and he said, "Where in the world did you get this idea?" It did mean another run on the bulletin but it also was very important because it was a method of emphasis. I don't know where I got the idea but anyhow he did print them.*

Knorr: *In two colors?*

Church: *In two colors.*

Knorr: *You mentioned Director Pickerell. Are there other State Extension personnel that you remember working with?*

Church: *Yes. When I was in Missouri I worked with a very excellent man, Director Burch who was the Director of Extension. I remember taking bulletins to him, he had to O.K. them, of course. His saying was, "You get to the point very fast." I said, "Thank you, I hope I do." He was a very fine man and quite influential and was missed a great deal in the community when he died.*

Knorr: *You mentioned working with Jean Stewart. Did you also work with Grace Ryan?*

Church: *Yes. Grace had been here a long time.*

Knorr: *What was her position here?*

Church: *She was a Home Management Specialist. In fact I knew Evelyn Bentley who was the first Home Demonstration Agent in Arizona. She used to drive a horse and buggy and ride horseback to meetings.*

Knorr: *Was she all over the state?*

Church: *At that time you couldn't get places very far. I think she was only in this county, Pima.*

Knorr: *Do you remember any faculty members with whom you worked?*

Church: *Betty Barong who was in Clothing and Textiles and resident. In fact I officed with Betty, I had an office with her. She was a grand person, I enjoyed working with her. Faye Jones - I helped her with a project she had on Color. She was doing research and she had to use a guinea pig.*

Knorr: *What did she do with a guinea pig?*

Church: *I'd have to identify colors and analyze them. She was a good teacher but to some people she was hard to get along with but I always got along with her. She was very good, very thorough.*

Knorr: *Faye Jones was a horsewoman, too. Was she here at the same time as Evelyn Bentley?*

Church: *No, she was much after. Yes, she had horses, she always had some hobby and she also did beautiful photography. In fact I have a enlarged picture of a Mariposa Lily that she took that's just beautiful. She always had a lot of hobbies.*

Knorr: *You mentioned that you officed with Betty Barong. Where were you housed when you first came to work at Arizona?*

Church: We were in the new building, when I was with Betty.

Knorr: That's the present building.

Church: Yes, that's the present Home Economics building.

Knorr: Where were you before that?

Church: We were upstairs in Waters Hall, back in a corner - didn't have much room - very small space. Then when they built the new building it was very nice, we enjoyed it. Dr. Hall was the Director of Home Ec.

Knorr: Did you work with her very much?

Church: Oh, yes. I think she was the first Director in the new building. There's a man there now, isn't there?

Knorr: Yes, there is and they've just employed a new Director for the School, and the new Director is a man. He's from Iowa State, Dr. Rodney Cate. As you think back on it, Helen, what did you consider some of the greatest successes that you had?

Church: Probably, I expect the classes I had in groups that I taught tailoring to. I had another group where we took photographs of individuals and studied the body figures, relationship to help fit clothing and that was very satisfactory.

Knorr: You took pictures?

Church: We took the pictures and taped around the bust, hips and the waistline.

Knorr: What did they wear?

Church: Their slips. Oh, yes, we also went for the making of dress forms. That was lots of fun.

Knorr: How did you make your dress form?

Church: *We put on a shirt and taped it and it was taped all over.*

Knorr: *Brown paper tape?*

Church: *Brown paper tape. We had these sitting around, of course they were helpful in fitting, but it was also something extra to store. I think really it was more learning to alter their patterns and to make a basic which was more beneficial than the other. As you change, your figure changes and you have to have a new form. Maybe it would be an inspiration to diet, I don't know.*

Knorr: *Did you have anything that you considered disappointments?*

Church: *Oh, yes.*

Knorr: *Are you willing to share any?*

Church: *Let's see. One of the other things that I got a lot of satisfaction out of was the dress revues that I planned . . .*

Knorr: *Tell us about them.*

Church: *For the 4-H kids. I think the peak of that was when we had the dress revue at the State Fair. That was great satisfaction and many people learned about 4-H Club work. They had always thought of 4-H Club work as calves and pigs and livestock and not the Home Ec part of it. That was most satisfactory. And disappointments . . .*

Knorr: *Maybe you can think of some more satisfactions, either one.*

Church: *I can't think of any.*

Knorr: *Now you said that you retired. When was that?*

Church: *I retired in 1971.*

Knorr: *So if my arithmetic is correct, you have been retired about 21 or 22 years. What have you been doing since retirement?*

Church: *I live at Friendship Village now in Tempe and I'm busier than I was before I retired, I think. Friendship Village has about 700 residents and it's a Life Care place which means you're taken care of for life. We try to keep out of it but we have a very nice nursing home. I live in a cottage and have kept very busy.*

Knorr: *Do you have activities there that you do?*

Church: *Yes, lots of activities. I do china painting and I've loved it. The only thing is I get so many plates I don't know what to do with all of them. Then I've also tried my hand at weaving, but that's too slow for me. They have lots of activities and I've tried my hand at everything except pool. Silversmithing was fun and weaving and I've just started doing regular painting. One of the ladies at the Village teaches. We have an outsider for the china painting but she's teaching us and I've just started learning to do work with acrylics. We have an art show and they've put up a couple of my paintings. I'm on my third one now - I've got to get busy when I get home. You can be as busy as you want to be, sometimes too busy. And I have a bird. He'll be mad at me because I left him this week.*

Knorr: *Do you have a "bird carer" for when you're gone?*

Church: *Yes. One of my neighbors takes care of him. He's a love bird and he doesn't talk - I've had to learn his language.*

Knorr: *I hear that you did something about making western shirts. What was that?*

Church: *Oh, yes. The ladies wanted to make western shirts and they're not easy to make.*

Knorr: *I can believe that.*

Church: *To find patterns - we had all kinds of designs. It was fun, it was lots of fun and I'm sure they enjoyed it. A lot of women as well as men got nice western shirts.*

Knorr: *Are there special kinds of problems in making western shirts?*

Church: *Yes, all the yokes you have to put in and the bindings and the collars - they're not easy to make. It isn't an easy project but they made a lot of them. I had to make the things right along with them. I guess you just tackle anything if you have to do it. My one supervisor, Amy Kelly, she'd make you think you could do anything. There wasn't anything she wouldn't tackle and she always thought she could do most anything. She came to Arizona from Missouri and retired out at Sun City. She isn't living now but she was a great leader, known all over the country. I think that's all.*