

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Appliances of the Past Project

Effects of Appliances on Life

O. H. 710

MARY EVANS

Interviewed

by

Robert Fabian

on

June 4, 1985

MARY EVANS

Mary Evans was born in North Canton in 1903. Her father came to North Canton as a leather worker. The family settled in North Canton where many relatives were located. Mrs. Evans attended Ohio University and earned a teaching degree in 1928. She worked as a teacher for several years, then acquired a Master's degree from Kent State University to teach Special Education in reading. Mrs. Evans also worked as a nurse's aid for several years. She has never married and has lived in North Canton most of her life.

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Appliances of the Past

INTERVIEWEE: MARY EVANS

INTERVIEWER: Robert Fabian

SUBJECT: personal background, comparison between old and
new appliances, benefits

DATE: June 4, 1985

F: This is Robert Fabian doing an interview with Miss Mary Evans for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program concerning the Hoover Company in women's history.

Let's start off with your background, if you can tell me anything about where you grew up, where you were born, your parents, and your family.

E: I was born in North Canton downtown. I can't tell you what is there now in the building. The Hoover Company has it, the union I think. I went to school here all my life and graduated with a kindergarten primary degree from Ohio University. For ten years I tried to help people with their children in the summer. Then in 1930 I got my Master's in reading and collective foreign readers. I have about ten or twelve countries with primary readers. I did nurses aid at Mercy Hospital many years, that was when they had an organization of nurses aids. Then I went to Kent many summers.

F: So you're a well educated person then? In the field of education, I'd say.

E: I should be.

F: What was North Canton like when you were growing up, was it small?

E: It was just a small town. I was related to about everybody in town. When the teachers would come here my first years, they would say, "Don't talk about anybody, they'll be related to Mary." They were. But the Evanses had thirteen children

and then my mother was a Walter, and they had eleven children. Of course, they worked at the Hoover Company. We were allowed to go into the office any time that we needed.

F: Your father worked at the Hoover Company?

E: He worked at the Hoover Company for a while and then he was the postmaster in our county. I have an Uncle Ray who was an Evans who played professional baseball. It's not exactly like it is now, it was different. He played in Syracuse and different cities. My brother and Uncle Ray, many people thought they were brothers because they bowled together; they were great bowlers. My brother owned the bowling alley in North Canton.

F: Are they still living in North Canton now?

E: They're all gone.

F: Did your mother have any kind of outside job than the home?

E: Oh no.

F: Just worked in the home, housework?

E: We had a big, old house and it was like a hotel. Anybody that didn't have a place to stay, they would come down to the house. It was where the Community Christian Church is now.

F: I know where that is at.

E: They tore our house down. It was three floors finished. I had two brothers and two sisters. I have one sister that lives in Loudonville now.

F: Were you the middle child or the oldest?

E: I was in the middle. We were many years apart. My brother and I were many years apart.

F: Is it a pretty closely knit family?

E: Oh yes.

F: Everybody helped out in the house and such?

E: This year is the first that our family has been broken up. One great nephew is in Saudi Arabia working. He loves it over there and he's coming home in June for vacation. My niece, great-niece, they have been traveling all around; they've been in Florida and up on the East Coast and now they moved to Pittsburgh. It's unusual for us to have

them move away; we've always had them as far as Cleveland, and that's it.

F: Do you know how your parents decided to settle in North Canton?

E: My mother was born here. My father came here when he was six years old. If you read the Evans history, he came here . . . Everybody in North Canton was a leather worker at first. My dad was an expert horse collar maker and he never owned a horse in his life. We all expected everybody to just go to the Hoover Company to work.

Years ago you knew everybody. I took the school census and we went from house to house and took it. They don't do that anymore.

F: How long ago did you start working in the school?

E: 1928. That's when I graduated. They weren't going to hire me because I had a degree. They didn't hire people with degrees.

F: How did you get in?

E: Finally, dad went and talked to them. He said, "She can teach just as well as anybody else." My sister was going to graduate, but I went to Parma and she went to Orange. Do you know where Orange is?

F: No.

E: It's in the outskirts of Cleveland, on the east.

F: Why was there a problem with having a degree?

E: Some of them just had a few weeks training.

F: So it would be more money they would have to pay you?

E: Yes. I started to teach for \$1400. I was highly paid.

F: That was 1928?

E: Yes. I think that's when it was. Dates don't mean a thing to me. I think it was 1938 that I got my Master's. Some of the superintendents were very wonderful to me. I have traveled all over the United States to different conventions and things. They sent me. I was very glad for the experience and I met a lot of well educated people that way. Practically everybody is gone now that I was friends with. I'm 82 now.

F: You don't look 82.

E: Thank you. (Laughter)

F: You were never married?

E: No. I was engaged and was going to be married in June when my boyfriend got appendicitis and died.

F: I'm sorry to hear that.

E: I still hear from his family. I get Easter cards from them.

F: Would you have had to quit your teaching job if you got married?

E: Yes. In those days you couldn't teach and be married. He was from Cambridge, and I haven't seen any of them for while because I don't drive anymore.

F: Did you used to help your mom do the housework?

E: Oh heavens, yes. I had a complete set of dishes that I painted. And my sister and I, when we went to college, we made our own clothes. You just didn't have too many to buy. My mother was a wonderful seamstress and we've always embroidered. My mother rugged a lot. Do you know what that is?

F: Yes.

E: Hook rug. We were always busy doing something; now I'm not, I'm just sitting around doing nothing. I said I do the best job of nothing that I know of.

F: Your house is immaculate.

E: I have a niece whose father was killed when she was a little girl so they came to live with us. She is marvelous to me. I took care of her all of her life. Her mother was there, but she was nervous and upset so I took Caroline as my own. She was down all day yesterday and took me to the bank and the store and every place. She is wonderful to me.

F: That's good.

E: It certainly is. It's wonderful to have people like that.

F: How did you decide to become a teacher?

E: I always wanted to be a kindergarten teacher, always. I don't know why, but I did. I took care of Joe Hoover and Dr. Hoover in Canton. Their mother was my first cousin. She was a Shultz. There is where all the Shultz's come in.

F: I see.

E: There is a Bill Shultz that lives right down here on the corner, and another Shultz boy lives right up the street. There are a lot of Shultz's around. I have another cousin and it's Emett Shultz; he was something at the Hoover Company, I forget now. Treasurer, I believe. Now, since Canton has grown I don't know the people, even when I go to church; my grandpa started it, Community Christian Church.

F: What other organizations do you belong to?

E: One of them is a teacher's organization, Delta Cappa Gamma. I've been former president of most of them. I'm a charter member of the one and I belong to College Club, and I was former officer of that. I belonged to organizations in the church and I taught Sunday school and everything all my life. I've always been busy.

F: Being out of the home as you have been, like teaching for all those years, how did you do your housework?

E: We worked all the time.

F: Did you live by yourself after you got to teaching?

E: No, I lived at home. We had this huge house.

F: Did you have electricity and running water and everything?

E: Oh, yes.

F: Did you have to go . . .

E: When we built our house down there we had gas too, gas jets.

F: What was your old house like when you were growing up? What was the kitchen like, can you kind of describe it for me, the way it was set up?

E: It was just a long room. When we moved down there we had a coal stove and we lived on South Main.

F: Was it the early 1900's?

E: Yes. No, later than that. We cooked on the gas stove. We used our basement a lot for keeping things cool; we kept the butter and all that stuff down in the basement.

F: That was like a refrigerator?

E: Yes. We finally got an icebox and then it had a pan under-

- neath to catch the water. You had to watch it so that it didn't overflow.
- F: But you first had a coal stove and then you got a gas stove?
- E: Yes.
- F: What was the coal stove? Did you ever use wood in it or just coal?
- E: No, when I remember it we used coal. When we had a coal house, it was a little building in the back.
- F: Who had to go out and get the coal?
- E: My brother usually did, and dad.
- F: What about running water?
- E: We didn't have running water for a long time.
- F: Do you remember when you got it?
- E: No.
- F: Was there a pump in the back or in the front?
- E: Yes. We always had a bucket of water sitting on the sink.
- F: What was the stove like, can you describe it?
- E: It was very heavy.
- F: Was it cast iron?
- E: Yes. It had about four places to cook. It has a big oven. We had to do all our baking. They made beautiful things, really, but you can't understand how they could do it with these old stoves.
- F: Did you ever use it when you were at home? Did you ever cook on it?
- E: Oh sure. When we lived on South Main I did. After that then we moved in our other house and we had a gas stove there. We didn't have a coal stove there at all. Then everybody had a hot plate in the basement, and that was just two burners.
- F: That was gas right?
- E: Yes. We had the coal for many years that I can remember.
- F: What was it like doing the laundry at your house when you were little?

E: We used the washboard. Downstairs I have the washboards hanging up and then I have trays and things on there.

F: What kind of soap did you use?

E: We made it with lye. Sometimes the clothes smelled. We finally got soap that we could buy, and they were in big bars. The cooking was rather difficult. Even in our house down here, we had what we called a fruit cellar. There were big bins on the sides and then shelves. Dad would buy a couple bushels of potatoes and a couple of bushels of apples and put them in the fruit cellar. That was not cemented, it was bricked so it would stay cooler.

F: That's how you had those fruits and vegetables in the winter-time and the summertime?

E: Yes. Then mom had shelves of canning; she canned a lot.

F: Why was the cooking difficult?

E: According to today's cooking it was really difficult. They didn't make any fuss about it, that was what everybody did.

F: It was more of an all day process?

E: Some of the things were, yes. We had to cook all day and watch the fire and check that all of the time. It was hard work.

F: Going back to the laundry and all that, when did you first get your first type of washing machine? Do you remember what it was like?

E: It was terrible. It wasn't like they are now.

F: What did it look like? How did you use it?

E: You did motion with your arm.

F: So it was manual then?

E: Yes. Some of them went the whole way around and the ringers you did by hand. It was hard work.

F: Laundry took all day then?

E: Yes. The funny part of it was, some of the women wanted to see who could get their wash out first, on the line. It got like a game for some of these people. They would get up at 4:00 to do the washing so they could get it out on the line. I was down at Malabar--it's down by Loudonville or Mansfield--and more people had wash out. Well, around here

you don't see any wash hanging out. Everybody had dryers. To me it was odd because I hadn't seen the wash out in ages. It was rather funny.

F: When did you first get an electric washer or water pump washer or something like that?

E: I don't know. I've only lived about three places in my life, and then here. We stayed where we were put. A lot of people moved a lot, especially renters, and dad was always able to buy the house. We did rent a while on South Main, I think.

F: What did you use for refrigeration when refrigerators started coming out in the 1930's?

E: We had an icebox and we had it in the corner of the dining room on South Main, but we didn't have any before that.

F: What did you have after, let's say after an electric refrigerator came in, did you buy it?

E: We got one right away, yes.

F: Did you get a washer, an electric washer about the same time?

E: No, not as soon I don't believe. I'm not a historian. My brother-in-law could tell you everything, who all these people were in history and what they died of. We got our Master's at the same time.

F: Did your mother have a work schedule, one day doing the laundry, one day doing the ironing?

E: Yes, Mondays you washed, Tuesday you ironed.

F: What did she use for an iron then?

E: They were a heavy iron and you heated them on the stove. I know that she ironed. She had a heavy pad and she ironed the straight pieces on the table. They had an ironing board, but it didn't have legs on it; they laid them on the table. Of course, I didn't have to use any of those things.

F: What did you use?

E: We had legs on our's.

F: What about an iron? Did you have an electric iron?

E: We had a mangle; do you know what a mangle is?

F: No, what's a mangle?

- E: A mangle is like they used to use in the laundries, the big, brown . . . They're heated; you put the sheets and tablecloths and things between there. They were mangles. At one time we had a gas mangle, but they were down in the basement. We were lucky, we always had a nice basement. Some people didn't have very nice basements.
- F: Did you have this kind of iron in the 1920's or 1930's?
- E: Yes, I imagine, down at the old house. I should have kept a record of these things.
- F: You didn't know some day you would be asked these questions.
- E: No, I didn't know I was going to get this old. (Laughter)
- F: How much work was it to do the spring cleaning?
- E: Oh, terrible! In those days you took the springs outside and cleaned them. You took everything apart. It was terrible.
- F: How much work did you do?
- E: We always helped. We had to help. We always worked; we always cooked. A lot of the kids didn't have to, but we did.
- F: Did your parents ever send the laundry out to be done? Did you ever after you got on your own?
- E: No. I guess maybe I did some sheets once, but there is no place in Canton to get sheets done now. Everybody is supposed to have their own . . . I believe there is one laundry that you can get sheets done at. Most people have sheets that you don't iron.
- F: Do you think you got most of your training from your mom?
- E: Oh yes! My mother was a wonderful cook. She could do things . . . We were laughing about the pie shells; she made the most beautiful pies. She would go around this fast and she thought she had the dumbest daughters because we couldn't do it. None of us could make them like that.
- F: She made her own pies and homemade stuff like that?
- E: Sure.
- F: Do you still do that now?
- E: I don't do anything.
- F: What about fifteen or ten years ago?

- E: No, I didn't make pies, but I baked all the time. I have a complete kitchen downstairs with a gas stove.
- F: You still have the gas stove downstairs?
- E: Yes. That's my stove here. It folds down.
- F: I've never seen something like that. How long have you had that?
- E: I got it when I moved here.
- F: What is that kind of . . . It's just like a portable little stove, an electric one. That's really nice.
- E: My cousin Clara Scuver, her kids over in Chicago had these. She said, "I want you to have one of those stoves." We couldn't get one here. She ordered it through Chicago. Her one daughter . . .
- F: Is the old, gas stove the one that you had a long time ago?
- E: No. It's not real modern, but it's modern. Do you want to see it?
- F: No.
- E: It's a mess down there.
- F: Do you find it easier to cook on this little stove, this electric one instead of a gas one?
- E: No, not when you cook for a lot of people.
- F: I mean just like in the procedure.
- E: I'm used to it, yes.
- F: There's no difference then?
- E: I've lived here about eighteen years now.
- F: By yourself?
- E: Yes.
- F: How do you think you have the housework now compared to what your mother had?
- E: It's simple now.
- F: Why is that?
- E: There are so many conveniences to use. They used to use a

broom and then the broom raised dust and you had all that to clean up. Now, you don't have that. The carpeting was always hard to clean.

F: So the new carpeting and that is easier?

E: Yes. And you have the sweepers.

F: When did you first get your first vacuum, since you lived in North Canton with Hoover?

E: The first one we had was so heavy. The old ones were very, very heavy. Some of them today are very heavy too, but I have a lightweight one that was made in England. It's easy for me to use. Some of these old Hoovers I couldn't handle today.

F: When did you get your first one? When you were living with your parents did they have one?

E: Yes.

F: What did it look like, do you remember?

E: It was a big, bulky thing; I have a little one now.

F: Did it have a hose attached to it?

E: Oh sure, it had everything.

F: What kind of job did it do?

E: Fine. It was wonderful. Housework is easy now. It's one of those things that has come along. You just keep after it every day and do a little bit and it's not hard.

F: Do you think that if some of these appliances weren't made that women wouldn't be able, like a lot of these thirty year old women wouldn't be able to go have these jobs that they have?

E: Oh sure, they couldn't do it. Until you sweep a room with a broom, you're worn out.

The cooking wasn't as easy then either you see. The cooking was quite difficult.

F: Do you think these frozen dinners and these frozen vegetables, you just pop them in, do you think that has helped?

E: Oh heavens, yes. My one niece is married to a Bigger, who is president of Stouffers in Cleveland. He's a salesman; he's a nice kid. He's a man, but to me he's a kid. They

have two children. They're the ones who have been going from place to place. They were sending him to all of Stouffer. Right now they're over in Pittsburgh.

F: How is your niece's work day in the home compared to your's? Does she have a job outside the home?

E: Oh no, she doesn't.

F: What's her work day like?

E: She has never worked.

F: But she does her housework?

E: Yes, she has a lady come in once a week, I think.

F: Did you ever have anyone come in and help you do your work?

E: Every two weeks I have a woman come in now, since I'm older. I used to do my own work.

F: How long has she been coming in?

E: Three years.

F: Do you like her doing the house?

E: She does a beautiful job.

F: So you don't have to go over it later on?

E: She does my washing. The first thing she does is strip my bed and go to the basement and start the washing. Then she comes up and does my curtains and takes care of everything. She's not old; she's a younger woman. Her husband was in the Navy and she has been all over the world. she's a mighty smart looking gal.

F: Did you ever think about buying a microwave oven?

E: I had one.

F: You had one?

E: I sat it right in that corner there. My niece had two children and she needed it. She wanted it so bad. Dumb me, I gave it to her.

F: How did you like it?

E: I'll tell you, it was a long time ago, before they had many recipes, and it was hard work; you had to learn how to use it.

- I gave my dishwasher away too because the kids needed them.
- F: Don't you think the microwave was pretty convenient for you though?
- E: Oh yes, it was wonderful. The niece that has it is the one that's going to California. She took it with her. She just does everything with it.
- F: Do you miss it now that you don't have it?
- E: No, I don't.
- F: Why not?
- E: I don't know. I didn't get used to it much. It was so long ago, so I don't miss it too much. Every once in a while I think, would you ever buy another one? Then I think, well what's the use of spending that money, I'll go out to eat instead.
- F: Do you go out to eat now a lot?
- E: Yes, but right now I'm not driving so much so I have to wait for somebody to take me.
- F: Do you think housework is pretty important work for a family?
- E: I do. You have to keep your house clean and there are so many things to do in housework. Of course, our family baked and did all those things; a lot of these young girls don't do that now. We had to as we were growing up. We had certain things we did. Saturday mornings we had our things to do and to clean; we had to clean our own rooms.
- F: How do you feel about these younger ones who are married and don't know how to bake or cook?
- E: I pity them.
- F: What do you think has caused that?
- E: I don't know. My niece in Cleveland that I'm talking about, her kids are wonderful cooks. She was down here yesterday and I said, "Oh, you better get started home now. Your dinner will be so late." She said, "Ann's going to cook; we've got it all planned." The kids are good cooks. Both of the girls have wonderful husbands; their husbands cook. They love to cook. That helps out a lot too.
- F: Did your father do any of the cooking?

E: Not a thing.

F: Why not?

E: I don't know; he couldn't cook an egg. We used to kid him about it. He never did. But then men didn't cook then, when we were growing up.

F: Why do you think that was?

E: I don't know. It wasn't a man's work.

F: It wasn't a man's work? Do you think doing the cooking was woman's work, doing the house cleaning?

E: Oh yes.

F: What do you think about that now?

E: Men help all the time, take care of the kids. When I was growing up there were a lot of men that never helped take care of the kids.

F: What about cleaning the house?

E: No.

F: Do the laundry?

E: No. They didn't do any of that. The women did everything. They didn't work, and they didn't belong to all these clubs and health clubs and all that stuff.

F: What do you think now that men help do some of the cooking? Do you think that has helped women get out of the house?

E: Yes, I do. They enjoy it, a lot of men enjoy doing cooking. I know I used to enjoy making certain things, and kind of show off, you know. (Laughter)

F: Maybe they want to show off too. Do you think if some of these appliances were taken away people wouldn't get along without them now?

E: They would have a tough time.

F: Do you think you could do it?

E: I could because I didn't have these appliances.

F: Yes, somebody took away your microwave, and no problem.

E: I thought the kids needed it. It isn't that I had a lot of

money, but I thought I could get along without it. I've gotten along all these years. They're so happy, and they're still using it.

F: Do you think people are pretty dependent on the new appliances?

E: Yes. The ones I know are.

F: What do you think is the one appliance that was made that really helped women liberate them, get out of the house, kind of cut down on their work? If you could narrow it to one, which would it be?

E: I don't know what it would be. There is a difference in women and what they like to do.

F: Do you think maybe the washing machine?

E: Yes, because some of these people wash every day, that have kids. That has helped a lot.

F: Doing the laundry, I've read some books on this subject and a lot of women said that laundry is the dreariest housework that you could want to do. They don't mind doing the cooking or the dishes.

E: The scrubbing . . .

F: The scrubbing, yes.

E: I don't know, it's just one of those things that you get used to. We just knew we were expected to help around the house, and we did. I have some friends that are very helpless; they don't do this that we do. I'm very lucky to have what I have. I have a complete house downstairs; I'll show it to you if you would like to see it. I have Haviland dishes, hand-painted dishes. I gave my silver to the kids, all my silver. I thought, I'm not going to keep it, and they could use it. I know one of them was going to entertain my tea set. I had silver, two types of silver, and I gave those to the kids, to my two nieces. There is no use in my keeping it here at the house when they could be using it.

F: What kind of coffee pot did you . . . You don't have a Mr. Coffee or anything?

E: No.

F: Why not?

E: I drink mostly tea now, I've had a lot of trouble, a lot of surgery. I had cancer. I had a gallbladder operation, and I had some other ones. I have a very fancy stomach.

- F: So you can't drink coffee? That's another appliance though that's really . . .
- E: I do drink coffee when I go out. Here at home I usually drink tea. Of course, we always drank a lot of tea at home because dad was Welsh. They did drink tea.
- F: That's another appliance that before you would have to get up in the morning to make it. Now in five minutes you have coffee.
- E: I don't mind cooking, I like to cook, but I don't do very much of it anymore because there are certain things I can't eat. I know I can't so I just don't. I have to be very careful. The meats and the raw vegetables I can't eat, but aside from that I can get along.
- F: Do you do any canning?
- E: No, not anymore.
- F: You did though?
- E: Oh yes. We were laughing the other day about pickles. We used to have a big crock, there is one there that keeps papers, and we used to make big crocks of pickles. Then you put a plate on top. Nobody makes those anymore. They were good. We do a lot of things different now than we did. I'm very happy here in my home now.
- F: If there was something that could have been invented what do you think it would have been that helped you?
- E: Gosh, I don't know. I've always been able to get what I wanted, that spoils you.
- F: Do you think that the manufacturers that made these products, they kind of hit the targets that women really needed help with?
- E: Yes. Of course, a lot of my furniture is antique. These cookie cutters are all from my mother's family. I'm very happy here and I hope I can stay here.
- F: I think that's about all the questions that I have for you.

END OF INTERVIEW