

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Appliances of the Past

Effects of Appliances on Life

O. H. 377

ELIZABETH SWOPE

Interviewed

by

Robert Fabian

on

May 9, 1985

## ELIZABETH SWOPE

Mrs. Elizabeth Swope was born on August 2, 1906, in Alliance, Ohio. At the age of six, Elizabeth's parents moved the family to Canton, Ohio. Elizabeth attended McKinley High School, and then worked at the Hoover Company after graduation from 1927-1934. She worked in the Engineering Department of the Hoover Company. In 1934, Elizabeth married John Swope who also worked for the Hoover Company. Because of her marriage, Elizabeth was forced to quit her job. Mrs. Swope never held an outside job after her marriage, yet belongs to numerous organizations in the community.

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Appliances of the Past

INTERVIEWEE: ELIZABETH SWOPE  
INTERVIEWER: Robert Fabian  
SUBJECT: Appliance Aid in Housework, Differences in  
Housework, Differences Between Old and New  
Appliances.  
DATE: May 9, 1985

F: This is an interview with Elizabeth Swope for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Appliances of the Past Project. This interview is being conducted by Robert Fabian on May 9, 1985.

The first question is just to get a little background. Can you tell me where you grew up, some of your family history? Anything you would like to tell me.

S: I lived in Alliance until I was six years old and then I moved to Canton. My dad was from Alliance, my mother was from here. I think that's the main reason we came back to Canton. I went to school here then worked for the Hoover Company after I got out of high school. After awhile, I married John. He worked at the Hoover Company, my father-in-law did also. In fact, the whole family did. After we were married, we lived in Canton for awhile. I worked at Hoover for eight years in the engineering department. Then we moved to North Canton, had two children, not anything real exciting.

F: Did you work at the Hoover Company when you first got married, or after you were married for awhile?

S: No, before I was married. At that time, I was married in 1934, you had to quit when you married. I would have loved to work on; I loved it up there.

F: Two people from the same family, like you and your husband, both couldn't work there?

- S: It didn't matter about that, there was a law that any girl that got married, no matter who she was, had to leave her job. Now they work as long as they want to. It was a great place to work and I loved it.
- F: Did you do any work after you got married?
- S: No.
- F: Did you belong to any social organizations? What church do you belong to?
- S: I go to St. Paul's Catholic Church. I belong to the Canton Sorosis Book Club, North Canton's Women's Club, AARP, two bridge clubs and I don't know what all; I just keep going.
- F: So, you have a pretty busy social life outside the home?
- S: Sure, I don't stay home very much.
- F: That's good. Can you describe for me when you were a child and helped your mother do the housework, what was that like? What kind of work did she have to do? Can you describe a typical day?
- S: She did everything. Housecleaning time, mother took everything outside, all the rugs, and everything. We didn't have carpet then, we just had rugs. We had to beat them with a carpet beater. Everyone just worked like a horse with the springs and the mattresses . . . that's what we did. It was the same way when we did the laundry. When I was a little girl, I had to stand down there when mother was washing and crank that old wringer.
- F: It was a manual washer?
- S: Yes, it was run with some sort of waterpower. My dad would hitch it up to the faucet and run some sort of wooden dolly down there, a round stool it looked like, and when the water would run through it made it work.
- F: Like an agitator almost today?
- S: Yes, sort of. The wringer . . . I used to get so mad because I had to turn this thing around and around.
- F: Did you have running water in your house?
- S: Yes.

- F: That made it a little bit easier instead of going to a well or spring and transporting it. Did your mom have a schedule that she worked on like Monday was the laundry . . .
- S: Yes, absolutely. One day she went to the store, one day she cleaned the house.
- F: And you were there to help her?
- S: Yes, I helped her a lot until I grew up, got a job, and worked all the time.
- F: When you first got married and started doing your own housework, how was your typical workday? Was it the same structured way as your mother's?
- S: Yes, I think so. I just had certain days when I did certain things. Now that I'm living by myself and all, it's different because I just go, go, go, but then of course, we couldn't afford a lot. It was Depression time and everybody was poor. You did what you could do for yourself. I worked pretty hard.
- F: Did you ever have any help when you were married like a maid or anybody?
- S: No, nothing.
- F: You learned everything from your mom, would you say?
- S: I sure did.
- F: I'll start with laundry since we have been talking about that. What was your first type of laundry machine? How did it work?
- S: We lived in the upstairs on the second floor with my mother and I used hers. It was, as I remember, electric; I don't remember. She did a lot of hand washing, I know that. Every Sunday night, (mother washed on Monday) my dad would fill the copper boiler, a great big thing, on the hot plate, to heat the water so when mother got up early, five o'clock, she would put everything that was white in to bowl. Dad would have that water all ready.
- F: It was an early work day?
- S: Heavens, yes.
- F: What about now, do you still have to get up early?
- S: No.

F: What was your washing machine like after you got married and moved out?

S: I got an electric and a lot of things . . . I think mother had an electric iron if I remember right. I remember when I got married in 1934, all the things we had, we were so proud of, a nice stove, et cetera.

F: Did you buy it with cash or did you use credit because it was during the Depression?

S: Yes, we bought on credit.

F: I'm sure a lot of people had to, because it was the only way that they could do it.

S: We bought our things almost a year before we got married because the Depression was on. The furniture company stored it for us, so when we got married it was all paid for. I'm not sure if that was a good idea or not, but that's the way we did it.

F: I've read a few things before I started doing these interviews, and one woman stated that even with the new inventions of the washing machine that laundry was still a drudgery. You still had to do it because the clothes didn't go away, so it wasn't really easier . . .

S: When you have a family--I had two children and of course my husband--you have a lot to do. They weren't any wash and wear clothes like they have now or permanent press. I remember I used to iron and starch those shirts . . . it was just awful.

F: It couldn't get easier but it did.

S: Now all you do is stick them in, dry them, press them a little bit, and that's it.

F: This lady's argument was that even though there were the new inventions of washing machines, people change their clothes more often so . . .

S: I think they do.

F: Well, then it really didn't ease your workload because there were more clothes to wash.

S: Yēs, but it wasn't so hard to finish them up.

F: Being compared to using the manuals that your mother did . . .

S: No, all that ironing, that's what I used to hate to do.

- F: What was the ironer like? Did she have one that you used to heat on the stove?
- S: I don't remember mother having anything like that.
- F: Just the regular ones that were close to the ones today?
- S: Yes, I think.
- F: What was your first type of refrigerator when you first got married? Can you describe it for me?
- S: My gosh, that's over 50 years ago. I don't know if it was electric or not, but I think it must have been, although I don't know. My mother always had an icebox and the iceman would come around, that I remember. I think maybe I had one like that too.
- F: Did you have to keep it on your back porch or somewhere like that?
- S: Yes, we had one that you put ice in. There was a pan, like a great big dish pan, underneath that and you had to be sure to empty it all the time.
- F: What was the type of refrigerator you got when you were first married? Did it have the icebox on the top or . . .
- S: If I remember right, I think it was on the top.
- F: Did it change the type of foods you were able to store?
- S: Sure. You couldn't keep things like we do now in these. No one even heard of a freezer; no, you couldn't. We would keep it cold but that's all.
- F: Did it change what you would eat during the winter and summer times because you couldn't store things . . .
- S: People in those days canned everything. You had most of your vegetables . . . everybody had a garden and you would can all that.
- F: Did you do some canning?
- S: Sure, lots of it. My father-in-law had a little farm and used to bring me stuff all of the time. I used to work like crazy. I always thought that when I got married everything was going to be lovely, but you really worked; we had to.

F: After you got the type of refrigerator you have now, do you still can now?

S: No.

F: How come?

S: I don't have a family with me anymore, for one thing, and I gave it all up after that came about.

F: You can probably go to the supermarket and get these things that you used to can . . .

S: I do; I get whatever I want and put it in the freezer at the top and it just works out great.

F: Do you think that it is comparable to the type of stuff that you canned, the frozen vegetables?

S: Yes, I think so and it's so easy.

F: What was your first stove like?

S: It was a gas one with a pilot light and that was really something. You turn on the gas and the pilot light would light the little burner. I remember one time my mother had a bunch of company at the house and she brought them all in to see my stove--we lived upstairs--and those women just thought that was absolutely the greatest thing they had ever seen.

F: How long ago was this?

S: Fifty years ago.

F: In the 1930's then. What was your mother's stove like?

S: My mother had a gas stove too, but it had a plate you lifted to light the gas, then put this plate back on. It would get real hot and they had a thing to take the plate off, that's what she had.

F: When did you go to electric? How long did you have a gas stove?

S: Pretty long until we built our home and then we got a lot of new things.

F: So when you got the new home, you just went electric with everything instead of gas.

S: This is all electric.



F: Is there a difference in having the electric . . .

S: It's cleaner.

F: So that kind of saved you a little bit of work?

S: Yes, much.

F: Do you think having the electric stove saved you time?

S: Absolutely.

F: Why is that? How did it save you time?

S: You can adjust it more; there are all kinds of adjustments on that thing, what degree you want and all. A gas stove, I think, I burnt a lot of stuff on that one.

F: Was it easier to cook with the electric stove?

S: Yes, it was for me.

F: Did you have a different variety of foods that you would make?

S: No, not really.

F: That didn't change.

S: My husband liked to eat, so we ate a lot.

F: When you had the newer stoves, did you spend more time in the kitchen baking or cooking dinners? Did it take longer?

S: I think it was easier with electric, I really do. No, I think it was about the same really.

F: Did your mother have a vacuum cleaner? When you first got married, did you have a vacuum cleaner?

S: Yes, I had a vacuum cleaner, I think I did. I also had just a carpet sweeper; you know what those were like, you just pushed it around . . .

F: One you used by hand.

S: I don't even think they have those anymore.

F: I think they are still on the market but they aren't as

prevalent as the electric ones. Date as far back as you can to your first electric sweeper, what was it like? Can you describe it for me?

S: It was more or less that you just pushed it around. It had a bag and a brush roll on it; it didn't have an agitator like a Hoover has now. These brushes went around in there. I can remember that from working in the engineering department. It didn't clean as good as they do now, but what were you going to do; we thought they were great.

F: At the time. Did it have any attachments that you could put on?

S: No.

F: Nothing compared to what they have now. What about the vacuum cleaner you have now, how does it compare to . . .

S: It's a Hoover and I've had it for a couple of years, I guess.

F: Did you ever have any problems?

S: No. We all swear by the Hoovers.

F: You're a company person. When all these products started coming out on the markets and you would read a women's magazine and saw a lot of advertisements for a new washer and a new stove, what induced you to buy these? Just the fact that the work would be easier?

S: We moved quite a lot when we were first married and it was tough getting along but it seemed that every time we moved we would change to something better. I think that's the way it just kept going. We saved our money and got something nice.

F: You had the idea that it was going to help you with the work load when you bought it?

S: A little bit better.

F: A little bit better and easier. Do you think it did?

S: Absolutely.

F: Going back to that article I read, the woman was arguing that even though there were new stoves and appliances in the kitchen, a woman is more tied to the kitchen because she was cooking more varieties of foods . . .

S: We never went out to eat; we always ate at home. When we first got married, we couldn't afford it, so we always ate at home. I think then I really worked more. I baked a lot and I had two children to take care of.

F: Did your husband help you do the cooking?

S: Never.

F: So it was your responsibility?

S: Sure.

F: Did you mind doing the cooking?

S: No, I didn't mind. If you have to do something, you do it. I didn't mind at all, really.

F: Do you take pride in your baking?

S: Sure.

F: So it really wasn't work for you. At time it was more a pleasure. You liked to eat the pastries or the dinners . . .

S: Sure, can't you tell. (Laughter)

F: I didn't mean that.

S: Oh, sure.

F: Do you have a microwave?

S: No.

F: How come?

S: I probably would have one if my husband was still here. He's been gone nine years and just for me . . . I eat out a lot.

F: It wouldn't be that beneficial in having one then. What do you think of the microwave though?

S: I think they are great. Both of my kids have them and they love them. A lot of my friends have them too. I've been thinking about getting one. They are quick and easy.

F: Do you think the food tastes as good?

S: Yes.

F: Because it's done so fast.

S: Yes, I do; I think it's wonderful.

F: Do you have a dishwasher?

S: No.

F: How come?

S: Well, I just don't. I don't know why. When we moved up here . . . we've been here about twenty-five years. We built this house. The children were gone then and we talked about a dishwasher, but I just didn't think I wanted one. The only time I wish I had one is when they all come home to eat.

F: Do you think having one would ease your dishwashing load?

S: Not now.

F: When you had your kids and your husband?

S: If I had it then it would have been great.

F: Even though before you put everything in the dishwasher, you have to rinse it off?

S: I know, but now I eat out so much that I don't need one.

F: A dishwasher, when you had your family, would have helped your workload in the kitchen?

S: Yes.

F: If there was an appliance that you thought should be invented and wasn't, what would it be? Was there something that would have helped you but was never made or if there were improvements in one that you could find?

S: I don't know; I just can't think of anything.

F: What's the appliance that you think helped women the most?

S: The electric washing machine, the refrigerator, all of the things we have now.

F: Do you think the washer, mostly?

S: Yes, I think so.

F: Why is that?

- S: Well, that's heavy work. If you have a family, it is a lot of work. You can just go downstairs, stick your stuff in the washer, go upstairs, and do something; it rinses and does everything itself. You used to have to be right there to do all of that.
- F: When you do your washing or your cooking, because that is basically the same time of standing there, what do you do in your spare time? Do you do other work or are you able to relax more?
- S: Sure, I always have something to do around here.
- F: Is it work or is it . . .
- S: No, I love it. If it's nice weather, I go out in the yard for awhile, pull some weeds or clip around a little bit or do the dishes.
- F: Or maybe just relax?
- S: Yes.
- F: You must take pride in your housework; your house is really nice.
- S: Thank you.
- F: Do you think that you have it a lot easier than your mother did in the cleaning of the house?
- S: Yes. She just worked all of the time. She swept her carpets a lot with a broom too; she thought they got cleaner that way. Every couple of days she would have to scrub the floor and she just did it. I used to think it wasn't worth it. Things got dirtier because we didn't have gas furnaces, we had coal. I often thought of all of the dirt it made; the house, the walls, the curtains, and everything.
- F: If we had to have the coal furnaces, we would probably be the same way. We would be cleaning more.
- S: Sure you would be cleaning more, absolutely. I clean a room and you can't even tell that I did it because it isn't dirty enough.
- F: Was your mother able to get out of the house and do things for the church or something?
- S: Yes, she did, but not a lot. Not like they do now.

F: Not compared to the amount of free time that you have?

S: No.

F: Did you have a big family?

S: No, just myself and my brother.

F: Can you describe your housecleaning when your husband was still living to when you first got married? What was your day like back in the 1930's or 1940's?

S: No response.

F: How has it changed for you?

S: Only that things don't get as dirty; it's relatively the same. You have to wash woodwork and things like that.

F: Even with the new appliances, the work doesn't go away?

S: It's easier for you; you can take a good Hoover, push it around on the carpets, and it's as clean as can be. Before we didn't have that nice appliance or tool to get into all of the crevices; we had to take a wisk broom to clean all of that out. It's just that everything is easier for you more now than it was then. You get through easier.

F: Do you think if someone would take a lot of these appliances away or put the old ones back in your house you would be able to do the workload?

S: If I never had the new ones, yes, but as the years go on everything gets better, it has been. If I hadn't seen any of this stuff, it would be hard but I would do the same thing. What could you do?

F: Hypothetically, if someone came in as just a test, and said you had to go for a month in your house using an old stove, do you think you would be able to do it?

S: No, I think I would go on a long vacation. (Laughter)

F: Did you ever have any problems with your laundry machine or stove?

S: No.

F: That's good.

S: Once in awhile, something might act up, the refrigerator

or something, but no. You can just call someone and they'll come and do it for you. I really don't have problems.

F: We are more fortunate then?

S: Yes.

F: My mother always tells me how easy we will have it or have it now. Are you the same way with your kids?

S: I tell my children how terrible it was back in the Depression, all the things we couldn't do, and all the things we had to do. We couldn't go out because we didn't have any money and everyone was poor. They just can't believe it.

F: Do they have families of their own?

S: My daughter has three children, but my son doesn't.

F: How is her housework?

S: She has it pretty nice because she has a lady that does all of her work. I just keep doing my own.

F: Are you glad that you are able to do the work by yourself instead of having someone help you?

S: Yes, I love it. There's never anybody here to mess up the house.

F: If you had somebody, do you feel that you would want to go back and not redo it, but . . .

S: No, I wouldn't. If I had somebody come in and do it it would be all right, but what would I do then? I wouldn't have anything to do.

F: You would be able to go out of the home.

S: Yes, I could run around some more.

F: You could get a job.

S: I would love to have a job if I wasn't so old.

F: Do you think that these appliances that came into the home liberated women?

S: Absolutely. You can clean a room now in a matter of ten minutes, dust, run your sweeper, and it's done, but before you couldn't do that. I would hate to go back.

F: You think this is good then?

S: This is great, yes.

F: That more women are outside and in the work force?

S: That's right.

F: Do you think families are as close though?

S: Yes, I think so.

F: I remember when I was younger, my brother, sister, myself, my mother and dad would all clean the house; we would all do it.

S: Yes. My brother never did, but I used to help mother all of the time until I started to work and then I was too busy.

F: Did you miss working when you first got married?

S: Yes, I did because I just loved it up at Hoover's. I miss it because after going every day for eight years . . . it was a different life, but pretty soon my children came along and they kept me busy.

F: Did you think about going back to work after they grew up?

S: I did in a way, but I never did.

F: Did you have the opportunity? Did your husband object at all?

S: I did work at the Ohio Power for two years. It started as a part-time job. A friend of mine asked me if I wanted to help out down there, my son was in college, so I said that I would. I went down there and worked there and enjoyed that. But, other than that, I never did anything.

F: What decade do you think the biggest influx of these new inventions that benefited came in, like the biggest boom for all of this?

S: I think after the war in the 1950's. Everything started getting better. Everybody was getting these new appliances and showing them to everyone else.

F: Are they making improvements on them from what you had in the 1930's?



S: Yes.

F: Did you buy new things?

S: I used to hate to empty the bag on the Hoover with all of the dirt in it. You would have to put it down and shake it on a piece of paper or something. Now they have paper bags where all you do is yank it out and throw it away. All kinds of stuff like that is so much easier. It's just great.

F: If there is something that I haven't covered that you would like to add about appliances or getting out of the home . . . is there anything that you would like to add?

S: No, not that I can think of.

F: Well, that seems to be about it.

S: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW