

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Appliances of the Past Project

Personal Experience with Appliances

O. H. 399

ESTHER SCWEISBERGER

Interviewed

by

Robert Fabian

on

May 29, 1985

## ESTHER SCHWEISBERGER

Ms. Esther Schweisberger was born in Carey, Ohio, located in Wyandot County. Her father was a minister who traveled throughout Ohio causing Esther to attend a variety of grade schools. Esther graduated from Doylestown High School in Wayne County. In 1923, she attended the Massillon Commercial Institute. Esther moved to North Canton and began working at the Hoover Company as a file girl in the credit department. After several years in this position, Esther became secretary to the Treasury Executive. Her total years of service to the Hoover Company was 42 years. Esther never married, and lived with her sister at their North Canton home. Today, Ms. Schweisberger is retired and belongs to the Zion United Church of Christ, and the North Canton Ladies Literary.

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INTERVIEWEE: ESTHER SCHWEISBERGER

INTERVIEWER: Robert Fabian

SUBJECT: Work at the Hoover Company, Development of  
Appliances, Appliances are Beneficial

DATE: May 29, 1985

F: This is an interview with Ms. Esther Schweisberger for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project, Appliances of the Past, for the Hoover Company. This interview is being conducted by Robert Fabian on May 29, 1985.

Just to get started would you like to give me some background information, like, when you were born, where you grew up, when you came to North Canton, where you worked, and general things like that?

S: I was born out in Wyandot County in Carey, Ohio. My father was a minister and we moved around quite a lot. I went to schools in different locations, but my first school was in Mesopotamia, Ohio. It was written up in the Ohio Magazine this month and it's very interesting.

F: Where's that located at?

S: It's up in, I think, Trumbull County. It's in the northeast part of the state. It was a very little town called, really, a western reserve town. It has a commons and then all of the houses in the town are in a circle around this park. I went to school there for my first year because we only lived there the one year. Shall I tell you this?

F: Sure, go ahead.

S: One thing that was written in the Ohio Magazine this month, was about the cemetery that is there. There was some man

who lived in this town who decided to make monuments for in the cemetery. In this cemetery, there is one sculpture of a dog that has its paw on a little boy's cap, and this was put over the grave of a little boy who died. The boy had this dog who wouldn't give up the cap. It was rather a fascinating story.

There are a lot of maple trees around this town and I've gone back many times in the fall because of the beauty of the coloring in the trees. I also lived in a small town by the name of Winterset. It is down close to Cambridge. I went to school there, and in a place called Richmond, Ohio, which is near Steubenville. I lived in Doylestown and graduated from Doylestown High School. I lived in Dalton, Ohio, then Uniontown. I've made North Canton my home since 1929.

I started to work at the Hoover Company in 1925, and I worked there for 42 years before I retired. My sister and I lived together and we have gone to Florida for a good many winters during our retirement. She had been a teacher. We had a mobile down there, but she passed away in 1983 and I sold our mobile because I didn't want the responsibility of the mobile and my home here.

I went to business college in Massillon, Ohio. At the Hoover Company, I started as a file girl in the Credit and Collection Department. I worked there for a number of years and then I was given the opportunity of being a secretary. I took a brushup course on my secretarial work. I worked for different men that were treasurerers of the company. When I retired, I was working for Mr. Rawson, who is now the head of the company. He was the treasurer at the time I worked for him.

F: So, that was the work that you did at the Hoover Company. Did you see the development of the Hoover Company, the expansion of it?

S: A lot of it.

F: What was it like? What was it first like when you were there?

S: When I first went there, there were just a couple of buildings on North Canton Square. I think they had factories in Canada and England at that time. They put companies in France, South America, and different places. I remember when they first started to take trade-ins, they called them boxjacks. They would take any kind of a cleaner as a trade-in, if someone bought a Hoover cleaner. That started when I was there. Of

course, a lot of things have changed even since I've retired, but I saw them make a lot of their appliances that were being introduced occasionally.

F: What kind of appliances does Hoover make besides the cleaner?

S: I don't know if they are in the appliance business now or not, but they did some of the appliance business because they had to compete with the other companies. The coffee pot, toaster, electric blankets, fry pans, can openers, washing machines and dryers, I think they still make them, but not here anymore, I don't believe. I think they make the washers and dryers in Canada, but I won't say for sure. I know that they did make some of the washers and dryers in England, Scotland, and Wales.

F: How was it working at the Hoover Company during the Depression? Were a lot of men working there or did they have to cut back?

S: Yes, they did cut back some. During the Depression, around 1929, and so forth, we had to take days off. Rather than laying us off, some of us had to take off one day of pay so that would cut down and give the other people a job. I can say that I don't know of anyone who really complained about that. They were willing to do it to give jobs to other people. They did lay some people off; they had to. Of course during the war, they went into the manufacturing products for the war.

F: Can you recall what they were?

S: Well, they made parachutes and some type of bomb, but I can't think of it.

F: Could they be like castings?

S: No, they made things for the service and they received a good many awards from the government because of their fine work and for getting it done.

F: For the contribution to the war?

S: Yes.

F: Were there a lot of women working there during the 1940's?

S: Yes.

F: During the war?

S: Yes. When I first went there, if you were married, you

couldn't work. You had to quit, but now anybody can work there.

F: Why did they have that regulation? Was it if you were married to someone that was also working there, or just if you were married?

S: A woman wasn't supposed to work after she got married.

F: This was what they believed in?

S: That was the policy in many places, even in teaching. The teachers were not supposed to teach if they were married.

F: You said your father was a minister?

S: Yes.

F: Did you live in a lot of rural or urban areas?

S: Mostly in small towns, very small towns. The only larger town that I lived in was East Liverpool. We lived there about two years. The towns I mentioned were mostly small towns.

F: Did they have electricity, running water, or gas?

S: I'll tell you that, if you want to know.

F: Oh, definitely, that's what I'm interested in.

S: I remember that we had a coal stove in our kitchen. My mother would heat the iron on the stove to do the ironing. Finally, she got a gas iron, I think. It just about ruined her because every time she would use it she got a terrible headache. We had coal stoves in a number of the places. In one place we lived, we had gas in the house and had gas lights.

One town where we lived in . . . we moved three times because they didn't have a parsonage for us.

F: What's a parsonage?

S: That's the home that the church usually furnishes for a minister. In this one town, we had to carry our drinking water from the neighbors because we didn't have drinking water in our house that we were living in; that was in Winterset.

F: Did your neighbors have running water in their house?

S: They had some running water and we had to go there for the drinking water. The other water I think we did have. My mother never had a refrigerator until my father had retired and we were living on Rose Lane in North Canton.

F: What did they use to store food?

S: We took it to the basement. There was usually a cellar which sometimes wasn't even finished; it was just a hole in the ground. It would be cool down there.

F: Like a root cellar then?

S: Yes. We would take our food down and carry it back and forth, up and down the steps. We've come a long way, baby! (Laughter)

F: Definitely. Did it change with each type of season of the year? Were you able to store different things down there? During the winter time, were you able to store vegetables?

S: Yes, and I remember too that sometimes my dad would dig a hole in the ground and bury cabbage or apples. He always raised chickens, so we always had eggs and chickens to eat.

F: What kind of work did you do when you were helping your mother with the housework?

S: Wash dishes because we didn't have a dishwasher. I had two older sisters and they did the dishes most of the time, but when they got older then I had to. We didn't even have a bathroom.

F: What did you use?

S: We would use a big tub out in the kitchen at night.

My mother did a lot of canning and she would dry fruit and beans. She would do things like that to augment our living for the winter because we didn't have too much to go on.

My father had to have a horse part of the time because some places that he served as a minister . . . he had three or four churches. He would have to drive in all kinds of weather with horse and buggy. He had to provide for the horse as well as his family.

F: Did you learn a lot of your housework from your mother?

S: Yes. My mother had done housework when she went to work at age fourteen. She was one of sixteen children. They didn't all live. Many of them died before they were twenty. When she was fourteen years old, she went to live with a family in Pennsylvania. The women who ran the house taught my mother a lot of things about cooking, sewing, and keeping the house clean.

I had to dust and I hated it. I don't like to iron because my mother would always say that she would rather do the ironing herself than for me to be messing around at night; so I don't like to iron. I like to cook and I learned a lot of cooking from my mother. She always took care of cooking when she was living and able to do it. She would tell me how to do things. My sister Helen had taken cooking in school and had a good knowledge of cooking, so I learned some from her.

F: You never had any cooking classes in school?

S: No, I never had any.

F: How easy was it to take care of your household when you were working at Hoover? You've been single all of your life?

S: Yes. My parents died in 1940 and 1942. My sister was teaching in Canton, and we lived together. My brother wasn't married at the time and he lived with us too. The three of us lived together. We were living in a big house on Rose Lane.

F: This is in North Canton, right?

S: Yes. We bought a smaller house. My brother was in the service at the time. He had been an administrator at the school up in West Richfield. When he came back after the war, he continued to live with us until after I retired. He didn't get married until 1970. Helen and I maintained our home. We had a rough time because neither one of us were making the kind of salary they make today, but we got along.

F: Did you both do the housework? Did you share everything?

S: Yes. After I retired, and she was retired, each one would take a week at a time doing the cooking. That way we wouldn't be banging into each other or deciding what we were going to have. We could run the cooking the way we wanted to and cook the things that we wanted to. It worked out very nicely and we enjoyed that.



- F: How was it doing your laundry? When your mother did it, what kind of washing machine did she have?
- S: The first one that she got was a gasoline Maytag washer. She had done washing on the board before that, and boiled the clothes in a great, big, copper boiler. When she would clean house, she would have to take the rugs out, hang them on the line, and beat them with a carpet beater.
- F: What was this first washer like? You said it was a gasoline operated Maytag?
- S: Yes, but I can't tell you exactly how it worked because I don't know.
- F: You were too young?
- S: I never operated it so I really can't say.
- F: What was the first type that you used?
- S: I can't remember what she had when we lived on Rose Lane.
- F: Was it one with an agitator or a wringer on the top?
- S: Part of the time you had to operate the wringer by hand.
- F: By hand?
- S: Yes, by hand. She had one that had the wringer you could run with electric. I really can't tell you what kind it was.
- F: What kind do you remember that you used after you lived on Rose Lane?
- S: I got a little Hoover. We sent our laundry out most of the time, but I did the personal things. I usually took care of doing the laundry and Helen took care of the cleaning. We divided up the work.
- F: How did you like doing the laundry? Was it a lot of drudgery doing the work?
- S: No, I didn't mind doing the laundry. Like I said, I didn't like to iron, but I can't say that I minded. In fact, I have a small Hoover washer and dryer now.
- F: Still today?
- S: Yes. I do my own personal things, but I send my other laundry out. I decided to be good to myself.

F: You mentioned earlier that your mother had a cast iron stove, Was it coal that you used?

S: Yes.

F: What can you tell me about that? How easy was it to cook on that, although she did most of the cooking?

S: Yes, she did most of the cooking. There was a reservoir on one side of it where you kept water, so that you would have warm water to wash yourself or take a bath. There was a warmer up above where you could put things to keep warm after they were finished cooking. I can't really tell you too much about it, but I know that when we lived in Uniontown, we had to use a coal stove in our kitchen. That was after 1925. We lived there from 1925 to 1929. We had a small kitchen and it got so hot in there because she would have to heat water in there on the stove to do her laundry. In the summer time they did get a coal oil stove, I think it was. A range with a couple of burners, a hot plate or something like that.

F: Was it hard to keep the coal stove clean? Did it make a lot of mess and add more work?

S: Probably it did, but if you stay at something like that and keep it in order, it doesn't pile up on you.

F: When you first started doing your cooking, what kind of stove did you use? Was it electric or gas?

S: We had a gas Tappan stove on Rose Lane. I did some of the cooking down there, and then we got an electric stove.

F: When did you get the electric stove?

S: I think when we moved into our house we built on 5th Street. We bought an electric stove. I think that was the first electric stove we had.

F: Do you think it was easier to cook with it or about the same?

S: I liked the electric.

F: Was it just as easy to operate as the gas stove?

S: I would think so.

F: How did you store your food? Did your mother ever have an icebox?

S: We bought one for her after we moved to Rose Lane in 1930,

when my father retired. We got a Norge; it was a small one.

F: When did you move on Rose Lane?

S: We moved there in 1929.

F: That's probably about when you got this icebox?

S: It was in 1931 or 1932.

All of my life hasn't been drudgery; I did a lot of traveling. In fact, the three of us, my brother and sister and I, took many many trips. We went to Europe twice and saw how the other half of the world lives.

F: Do you think you have it better off than half of the world does?

S: We've got it so good here in the United States. We should count our blessings because when you see how some of the other people have to live . . .

F: How did you do your housework and work at the Hoover Company at the same time? Did you have to come home and make your dinner?

S: Well, Helen would usually get the dinner when she was teaching, because she got home earlier than I did. We managed very well. Of course, my mother always had the meals ready for us when we were still living at home and she was still living.

F: What kind of vacuum cleaner did you use??

S: A Hoover, what else? (Laughter) My mother got her first Hoover cleaner in around 1922 or 1923; it was one of the older ones. We got another one, which I still have. Then we got a newer one. It's really not new, it is one of the junior ones. I have the real old one downstairs. I leave it down there because I have an old rug down there that I clean.

F: How are the improvements with them? Have they really improved their cleaning abilities since then?

S: Yes. At first they didn't have the agitator, but then that was added. That's where they get the slogan, "It beats as it sweeps as it cleans."

F: It beats as it sweeps as it cleans?

S: Yes, haven't you ever heard that?

F: No, I never heard that.

S: Didn't you? The magazine that they published for the field--that is for the branch and district managers--was called the Ibaisaic, which is the first letter of "It beats as it sweeps as it cleans." They would bring their salesmen in to train them, and they would always have different songs that they would sing. They had one they sang to the tune of "The Field Artillery Song," "All the dirt, all the grit, Hoover gets it every bit."

F: That's something that you remember all these years?

When you were reading a women's magazine, what did you think of these things that were being advertised in them? What inspired you to buy the product? Was it the ad that said it was going to save you time?

S: I think the main thing is the efficiency and where it makes the least work for you. I think efficiency would be the main thing.

F: Do you think a lot of the appliances put out saved a lot of time?

S: Yes.

F: I was reading in one book that even though there are new washers and all you do is throw the clothes in, people was more and wash their clothes more often so there's really no saving of time. This is one woman's argument. She says that a woman spends just as much time doing her laundry. What do you think?

S: Well, I don't have the real automatic. The Hoover is not automatic; I have to stay right there with it. I only do the laundry about every ten days or two weeks, and it only takes me about an hour to get it done.

F: Compared to how long did it take your mother to do her laundry?

S: She probably spent a whole day. She used to have to hang the clothes out on the line to dry because we didn't have dryers. In the winter, I remember many times she would bring clothes in that were frozen stiff and hang them in the kitchen. She would have a line hung some way in the kitchen where she would hang them up to finish drying.

- F: That had to be a lot of work.
- S: Yes, it was. She baked her own bread; it was good bread.
- F: Did she do a lot of canning then too?
- S: Yes, she did a lot of canning.
- F: Did you do any canning when you were living with your sister?
- S: No, I never did.
- F: Did your sister do any?
- S: She might have done a little, made some jelly or something like that.
- F: What about baking your own bread?
- S: No.
- F: How come you don't have a microwave?
- S: I don't really need one.
- F: Do you think if you had a husband or a family . . .
- S: Maybe, maybe, but the food I've eaten from a microwave, I can't say that I have liked.
- F: Do you think there is a difference?
- S: I do.
- F: You like something cooked in the oven for six or seven hours instead of having something popped in for twenty minutes?
- S: I like things tastily cooked. I don't mean I want them overcooked, especially vegetables; I think we overcook them too much. I like a nice roast done in an oven for awhile.
- F: So, you don't mind spending time in the kitchen for something like that?
- S: No, I don't. I had some company here last Friday; I cooked the food myself and really enjoyed doing it.
- F: How was it in the 1950's? Wasn't there a time when women that were coming out of high school didn't want a career or to work . . . you shouldn't do this; you get married and have a family. How was it with you

because you were single?

S: That's probably what I thought all along too, that I should get married, but I didn't.

F: How come?

S: I just didn't find the right one, I guess.

F: Did you like working outside of the home? You worked for 42 years?

S: Yes, 42 years.

F: You enjoyed working at the Hoover Company, not just there, but just being outside of the home?

S: My first years were not as happy as my last years. When I became a secretary, I was very happy at my work. I had very fine men to work for. I worked for four different men that were treasurers.

F: Probably. Can you compare when you came home from work and had to do something as to when your mother was done doing all of her housework . . . How much harder did your mother work doing her housework than you did?

S: It was a full-time job for her. Not day and night, but her work never really ended because there was always something that she could be doing.

F: Do you think her work in the house was just as demanding as your work at the Hoover Company?

S: Yes, I would say that.

F: I think so too. I would agree with you there. I think a lot of women's work in the home is overlooked . . .

S: That's right. I think that a woman who really enjoys her work in the home and does it, has a full-time job, especially if she is going to have children.

F: Probably more so. How did your mother clean her floors when you were little? What kind of floors did they have? Did they have linoleum?

S: Linoleum probably in the kitchen, but I'm not sure. Either that or just the bare floor. She would wash that up. You would probably have rugs and they would take them out and hang them on the line. They would use a carpet beater

to beat them because that was the only way. They didn't have a sweeper or cleaner.

F: Do you think all of the appliances have liberated women to go out and find jobs?

S: Yes, I do.

F: Because they don't have to spend as much time cleaning?

S: That's right.

F: Do you think that's good?

S: Well, I don't know. I think it's good that women have less drudgery in the house because it really was a drudgery. They worked so hard to keep their houses looking nice and all. I think that's good. I feel bad that a woman feels like she had to get out and be in the public eye to get recognized.

F: Yes, I think so too.

S: I think it's kind of sad. I like to see a woman in the home.

F: If some of these appliances were taken away, and you had to go back to the old appliances, do you think you could still do it? I know you probably wouldn't want too, but could you?

S: I don't know; it would be really rough.

F: Do you think a lot of women would be able to go back or do you think that they are too accustomed to using what they are using now?

S: I don't think they could give them up now.

F: If there was an appliance that was invented that could be really helpful, what would it be?

S: No response.

F: Do you think everything has been just about invented?

S: I'm afraid.

F: What appliance do you think was probably most beneficial to the woman in helping her with the housework and stuff?

S: I think the refrigerator is my first choice.

F: Why is that?

S: I can remember that your food would spoil. This way, in your freezer part, you can keep things ahead so that you don't have to be thinking about what you are going to eat this and that day.

F: So you can store food a lot then?

S: You could store food better. I think the electric or the gas range, of course. The washer and the dryer are wonderful things, and the cleaner for the floors, that's really a big item.

F: What was your mother's drudgery, doing the laundry or didn't you mind doing the laundry?

S: Me?

F: Yes.

S: I don't really mind it.

F: You didn't like doing the ironing?

S: No.

F: That was the one thing that you didn't like to do?

S: Right.

F: Why was that?

S: I would always get burnt. (Laughter)

F: What kind of iron did you use? Did you use an electric one?

S: Yes.

F: Did your mother ever use the hot iron?

S: Yes. She had to put them on the stove and heat them. You would either get them too hot and scorch the men's shirts . . .

F: Women had to be really talented to do this stuff!

S: They did!



F: Like you said, they had to find the right temperature for that. Cooking wasn't that easy, you couldn't put it on low or something; you had to have the right temperature.

S: Either it was hot or it was cold. (Laughter)

F: I think that that's about all that I have. Is there anything that I haven't talked about for instance, in the home, that's important and you think I should ask?

S: My father always had a garden and that was the way we got our vegetables. You didn't go to the store and buy vegetables.

F: So, like you said before, we've come a long way!

S: I'm liberated.

F: How do you think about how women are today? Younger women just getting married . . . I know my sister and she can't keep the house as my mother can. What do you think about how they live?

S: I don't think that they have the concern of keeping their house like the earlier women did, but I think that if you give them time, they'll develop interest in their home. I have several great-great-nephews and nieces who have children, so I'm a great-great-great-aunt. In fact, one lives over on east Fifth Street and he and his wife have two little children. He hopes someday to build his own home, and I think that they really like their home. Then I have another nephew who lived in Columbus. They bought a new home. Another one went into the R.O.T.C. when he was in college, so that he could get some assistance. He went into law and he is a captain down at Fort Knox. He has to stay in the Army now for several years; I don't know just how long it is. He's an attorney and has taken his bar examination. They have a little child and are interested in a home, but they won't settle in a home, yet.

F: People, you don't think, have really changed? They still are interested in getting a home?

S: There are some and I hope that it does continue because I think when you lose the home, you lose an awful lot.

F: You don't think that these appliances have, I don't want to say ruin the home, but people don't spend as much time at home, especially women?

S: I know, but they deserve to get out.

F: Yes, I think so.

S: I wouldn't say that the appliances . . . it has made it a lot easier for people, but there are some that are . . . I think there are going to be more that see that it is much better to have your home and a home life.

F: The work never goes away; you still have to do the laundry and the cooking. Well, that's about it.

END OF INTERVIEW