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TEXAS' FIRST HOME DEMONSTRATION AGENT

by KATHRYN KAHLER

Yoe High School, Cameron

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DENTON, TEXAS

THE MORRILL ACT of 1862 and the Second Morrill Act of 1890 paved the way for cooperative extension work by establishing land grant colleges which emphasize agricultural and mechanical arts. Senator Morrill, the sponsor, specifically wanted a "system of broader education for American people in the arts of peace, and especially in agriculture and the mechanic arts." The Hatch Act of 1887 granted federal aid to land grant colleges to establish and maintain experimental stations.

Texans were not unlike citizens of other states in their growing interest for educational opportunities. Dr. Seaman Asahel Knapp, father of extension service education, proposed farm demonstrations, which, under his supervision, proved successful. The ideals of extension work, according to Knapp, were "to readjust agriculture, and place it upon a basis of greater profit, to reconstruct the rural home,

and to give life an attraction, a dignity, and potential influence it has never received." He wanted it to influence more adult people and change more practices than any similar education movement in history. Many others felt that the "aim of cooperative extension work was to help families use their own resources and the resources of science, education, government, and society to develop useful and satisfactory lives." Texas' first demonstration farm was established near Terrell, Texas, in 1903.

George Banzhaf, appointed as Milam County's first agricultural agent in February, 1908, began his work with crop demonstrations to determine the type of cotton best suited to the county. His success with his first program earned the confidence of many Milam County citizens. In 1910 Banzhaf organized Corn Clubs for boys to conduct corn demon-

Working under the Department of Agriculture, Knapp saw the possibilities and needs for farm girls and women to be involved in demonstration work. He thought that by interesting the girls in tomato growing, he could also involve the girls' mothers.

Choosing a leader was the first step in starting home demonstration work in Texas. In December, 1911, Mrs. Edna Westbrook Trigg, principal of a school at Liberty (Milam County), Texas, received a letter from the United States Department of Agriculture asking her to supervise the Girls' Tomato Clubs in Milam County, Texas. Her work was to be under the direction of the Department of Agriculture and the New York Board of Education, which was acting as a sponsor for this new project. Mrs. Trigg's salary consisted of seventy-five dollars per month for two months from the New York Board of Education, sev-

Mrs. Trigg was known and respected in Milam County as a "capable, conscientious rural teacher with the poise and self-confidence of the unselfish and possessing a giving personality." She was noted for her deep concern for others and for the courage of her convictions. Nevertheless, her job as the first county home demonstration agent in Texas was not easy. There were prejudices to overcome. Rural women were reluctant to accept help, much less seek help from her. Their knowledge usually came from family members, not from an outsider. Also, transportation and communication were poor.

As collaborator, Mrs. Trigg was responsible for organizing the Girls' Tomato Clubs and demonstrating the production and canning of tomato products. During the summer of 1912, she organized eleven clubs, holding each club member responsible for cultivating one-tenth



cold frames from the farmers' cooperative organization. Mrs. Trigg said, "Soon you could tell the communities having clubs by the white cold frames."

Mrs. Trigg visited Tomato Clubs and Corn Clubs and held county-wide meetings in Rockdale, Cameron, and Milano. At these meetings, club members exchanged ideas and planned group activities for the county. On the home visits, she taught the girls to prune and stake the tomatoes and hand pick worms.

Mrs. Trigg's work continued through the summer. In August, 1912, the first exhibit of girls' products in Texas was held in Milano. The exhibit included everything from canned goods to essays. The Rockdale Fair Association and the 1913 Texas State Fair also drew exhibits from club members.

The first year of work was rewarding, personally and materially. Four girls started bank accounts and others earned college scholar-

Eleanor Breckenridge, a regent of the College of Industrial Arts in Denton. For many girls, the scholarships provided the basis and momentum for their college education.

After the first year, Mrs. Trigg organized Canning and Poultry Clubs, which both boys and girls could join. As the work grew, more people became interested. Unfortunately, the commissioners court would pay nothing toward her salary; so, Milam County home demonstration work was discontinued in 1915.

Mrs. Trigg continued with her former work as principal of a two-teacher school at Liberty. She soon received a telegram from the Childress Chamber of Commerce asking her to teach a canning school for two months at a salary of \$100, hardly enough to cover room, board, and transportation. Despite handicaps, she decided to accept the offer.

This assignment was also a learning experience for Mrs. Trigg. She had first learned a

Mrs. Trigg, seated in large chair, and unidentified members of one of her demonstration groups.

added seasonings and liquid to cover the top, and processed the contents inside the partially opened can. In another and easier process, the raw products were fully cooked and placed in sterilized jars. When she arrived in Childress, she found something she knew nothing about—a steam pressure canner mounted on a gasoline burner. She quickly mastered steam pressure canning and began teaching it, assisted by the secretary of the Childress Chamber of Commerce. People came from as far as forty miles away to work under her supervision. Mrs. Trigg also made several visits to surrounding communities to lecture on gardening and food preservation.

Before leaving Childress to return to teaching, Mrs. Trigg received a letter from her county superintendent asking her to plan and present a five-day teachers' institute. In an effort to have Mrs. Trigg's services a little longer, the secretary of the Childress Chamber of Commerce wrote to the Milam County superintendent asking that she be excused; however, this request was denied. After using more than 10,000 tins in canning, Mrs. Trigg returned to Milam County.

In February, 1915, during the school year at Liberty, Mrs. Trigg received a telegram asking her to accept the position of home demonstration agent in Denton County. She accepted readily, met with the board of trustees, and told her husband. He was pleased because their daughter, Eloise, was a student at the College of Industrial Arts—now Texas Woman's University—in Denton.

Before moving to Milam County, Mr. Trigg was a skilled machinist and also worked for the railroad terminal in Terrell, Texas. In Milam County, he was seemingly a misplaced farmer. His daughter remembers that he was very proud of his wife's pioneering efforts and helped at home so that she could spend time with her teaching and her extension work. He always worried about how people imposed on her time.

When news broke that Mrs. Trigg was leav-

businessmen to encourage her to stay. She firmly replied that she had accepted the position in Denton County and there was nothing that could be done to change it.

Mrs. Trigg left Milam County, going by College Station, on her way to Denton. While in College Station she learned that the commissioners court and the banks of Denton had agreed to provide salary for three months, beginning February 23, 1916.

Mrs. Trigg recalled that the county judge and commissioners were nice, but not enthusiastic, because they were being criticized for accepting her. Labeled a "government woman" by some, she found skepticism and prejudice on both the administrative level and in the minds of those financing the project. The farmers were dubious of anyone trying to tell their wives and children how to improve their home. It was difficult for Mrs. Trigg, a newcomer, to do her extension work. Many people did not recognize the Extension Service. The situation had been different in Milam County, for she had known the people and had taught them.

For this first home demonstration agent, even prejudices in Denton County were not insurmountable. The county agent, Dr. Craddock, gave her a list of people in surrounding communities who were friendly to the so-called "government people" and a list of those who were particularly prejudiced. He said, "You try to make it to this place to spend the night, and don't stop at this place." Mrs. Trigg slowly succeeded in overcoming prejudices and gained confidence. In one instance, she made one farm family, opposed to extension work, change by visiting, exchanging recipes, and finally spending the night with them. The farmer's daughters joined her club and became enthusiastic advocates of the Extension Service.

Denton County's first real recognition of the home demonstration agent came during a Harvest Home Exhibit sponsored by the City Federation. Mrs. Trigg secured permission for her girls to exhibit their work. As their work was far superior to that of the women, the City Federation recognized Mrs. Trigg and her ability.



mother felt it was essential to know the people, and to do this, she went into their homes. Mrs. Johnson said, "My mother always had a love for people and a challenge for new ideas." Mrs. Trigg was adept at creating an atmosphere where family, relatives, and friends were always welcome. Her family and home were never crowded out by her "out-of-home" responsibilities. She was quick, energetic, ambitious, and full of intuitive knowledge as well as a sensitivity to those around her.

Because she believed that Denton County should "feed herself," Mrs. Trigg borrowed \$350.00 to buy twenty steam pressure canners to be placed in twenty communities to encourage canning. She held canning sessions and sold all of the canners to members of the community.

During World War I, Mrs. Trigg recalled that every county agent earned his pay. She attended several patriotic meetings each week, encouraging the people to buy Liberty Bonds and work so that Denton County could

"feed herself." Each Saturday she held canning meetings in conjunction with the City Federation and Chamber of Commerce. The people gained more and more confidence in her as they saw her methods work effectively.

In an interview with Mrs. Eloise Johnson, she said that her mother never grew old. "She just kept growing—learning new things from research which she passed on to her people."

A particularly amusing incident in support of this fact happened to Mrs. Trigg at her Sunday School class. Upon returning home, Mrs. Johnson could tell that her mother was hurt, and asked her why. Mrs. Trigg said that since she was retired, the Business and Professional Women's Class, of which she was a member, had asked her to join a class of older ladies. Mrs. Trigg never thought of herself as being old and was not about to change classes, although chronologically, she was several years their senior.

In October, 1970, a marker was dedicated to Mrs. Edna Westbrook Trigg on the court-

Mrs. Eloise Trigg Johnson, daughter of Mrs. Edna Westbrook Trigg, speaking at the marker dedication.

house square in Cameron, Texas. Mrs. Sam Speir of Manchaca, president of the Texas Home Demonstration Association, was one of the speakers. She referred to Mrs. Trigg as a "pioneer with a dream." She said that Mrs. Trigg paved the way for joint efforts by the Extension Service and Home Demonstration Club women to help families enjoy a better standard of living.

The marker honoring Mrs. Trigg is the third honoring extension contributions. The first marker was placed on the Walter C. Porter farm near Terrell, Texas, the site of the first method-teaching demonstration which led in establishing the nation-wide Cooperative Extension System. The second historical marker is at Jack County where the International 4-H Youth Clubs were first organized.

Mrs. Trigg was faced with a challenge—a challenge to pioneer her way and the way of her successors in home demonstration work. The marker stands as a tribute to her many years of diligent, unselfish, and outstanding work for which she was named Home Demonstration Agent Emeritus.

Agriculture in all its phases adds an average of more than \$6.6 billion annually to the Texas economy. Rank varies yearly, but Texas usually is third in total crop and livestock cash receipts, after California and Iowa; or fourth, after Illinois. In 1968 Texas was third (after California and Iowa) in total cash receipts.

Texas is the leading producer of cotton, grain, sorghums, rice, grapefruit, and some other crops. Within Texas the average rankings of crops in acreage harvested has been: (1) cotton, (2) sorghums, (3) wheat, (4) all hay, (5) corn, (6) oats, (7) rice, (8) peanuts, (9) barley, and (10) flax seed.—[*Texas Almanac*, Dallas, 1969.]

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