

About the Exhibition

"Rural Texas Women at Work, 1930-1960" pays tribute to the industrious, ambitious, and hard working women of rural Texas. All of the photographs in the exhibit were selected from a large collection assembled and preserved by the Texas Agricultural Extension Service. The photographs were organized into broad subgroups including Boys 4-H, Girls 4-H, Home Demonstration work of women, Agricultural Demonstration work of men, and what the Extension Service called "Negro Work." Within each of the five subgroups the photographs were further divided into activities, programs, and projects carried out by rural Texans under the guidance of Extension Service agents. In most cases the original negative and at least one print were preserved. The Agricultural Communications Department transferred the collection to the University Archives of Texas A&M University in 1974.

Creating the Collection

The Extension Service began to collect photographs as soon as it was established in 1914 for use in publications and to visually document programs and activities it sponsored or promoted. During the first sixteen years, the photographs seem to have been accumulated from pictures taken by county agents and included in their annual reports. In 1930 a centralized photographic file was established in the Extension Editor's office. At that time the editorial staff selected the best pictures and mounted, labeled, arranged, and indexed them. They also set up a secondary file of photographs they felt might be useful and turned the remainder over to various staff members.

There were several factors in the years after 1930 which had a very positive effect on the collection of photographs. First, George Ackerman and F.S. Knoblock, photographers for the United States Department of Agriculture, made six extended visits to Texas between 1930 and 1938 to photograph Extension activities in Texas. Beginning in 1937, Howard Berry and other Texas Agricultural Experiment Station photographers regularly accompanied Extension Service editors on information gathering visits throughout the state to visually document Extension activities and projects. During the early 1930s the Extension Service purchase good quality photographic equipment for the editorial staff. In addition to using the cameras to obtain desired photographs, the editorial staff conducted workshops on photographic techniques for county and home demonstration agents to help them take better pictures.



Program Information

This program is made possible in part by a grant from the Texas Council for the Humanities, a state program of the National Endowment for the Humanities. "Rural Texas Women at Work, 1930-1960" was fabricated for Texas A&M University by The Institute of Texan Cultures.

Traveling Exhibitions

Humanities Texas circulates traveling exhibitions on a variety of topics ranging from the Women Suffrage Movement and Martin Luther King Jr. to the art of El Greco and the *Lonesome Dove*. Exhibitions are available as freestanding or wall-hanging, and cost \$250-\$1,500. Our goal is to provide high-quality, affordable resources to cultural and educational institutions throughout Texas and the nation. We invite you to consider how these resources might benefit your organization.

Mini-Grants

Mini-grants fund up to \$1,500 of the costs associated with public humanities programs. These small grants, which are easy to apply for and administer, are particularly appropriate for funding a speaker and/or the rental of a traveling exhibition, including those provided by Humanities Texas. Mini-grant applications are accepted on a rolling basis, but applications must be received at least six weeks before project promotion begins. Decisions are made within ten business days of an application's arrival in the Humanities Texas office.



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Rural Texas Women at Work, 1930-1960

Sponsored by Texas A&M University, and Produced in Partnership
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As a result of these developments, there was steady growth in the collection. It numbered 5,600 by 1941 through the regular addition of up to 750 photographs per year. Such rapid growth caused overcrowding in the files. Consequently, in 1942 the staff purged those of poor quality as well as those they considered outdated. During the next two decades, the collection grew by as many as 800 pictures a year and was purged at least once and reorganized and reindexed twice.

The introduction of 2" x 2" color slides into the Extension Service visual aids repertoire in 1947 rather quickly brought about the demise of the collection of black and white photographs. As early as 1948, the Extension Service ceased reporting additions to the old collection. By 1954 the slide collection had mushroomed to 64,300 images. In that year alone almost 17,000 were added.

Television also appeared to have adversely affected the collecting of black and white photographs. The Extension Service estimated in 1956 that over half of all the rural households in Texas had television sets. By then several county agents were involved in local television programs.

Using the Collection

The Extension Service made many uses of the photographs it collected. The first and most obvious use was in its own publications--bulletins, circulars, and annual reports as well as a succession of magazines. Many photographs were sent to newspapers and agricultural magazines throughout Texas and the South to illustrate articles written by Extension Specialists. Some of the photographs were used in film strips and a few were made into lantern slides. For many years, at least one copy of nearly every photograph was sent to the individual pictured.

Because the photographs were taken to document the activities of the rural women in carrying out their projects as members of local home demonstration clubs, certain activities are documented very well while others are covered poorly or not at all. At the peak of such activities in 1940, over 57,000 women were members of nearly 3,000 clubs. Numbers declined so that by 1959 there were only 35,000 members in approximately 2,000 clubs. Demonstration projects included gardening, poultry raising, dairying, clothing, food preservation, and yard, living room, bedroom, and kitchen improvement. All of these activities are well documented.

Probably because doing laundry, eating, and keeping the house clean were such common activities and possibly because the bathroom was a very personal and private place (and frequently some distance from the house), there never were demonstration projects in those areas. Thus there are no pictures of bathrooms or of women doing laundry or keeping the house clean. Very few pictures exist of families eating.

External Forces

During the three decades covered by this exhibit, rural Texas women experienced two cataclysmic events--the Great Depression and World War II--and one major technological breakthrough--the expansion of electric service into most rural areas. Each of these had significant effects upon the population everywhere and tremendous effect upon the lives of rural Texas women. The Great Depression of the early 1930s caused serious economic problems. Prices were very low, but money was scarce. Farmers received very little return on what they produced. Because of this, farm families, especially women, had to produce more of their own food, thereby increasing the burden on rural Texas women.



World War II took many men from the farms to work in defense plants and to serve in the military. As a result, vastly increased numbers of women and girls took on farm chores and field work. In 1943 the Extension Service staff estimated that 60 percent of farm women and girls were doing farm chores, 85 percent were doing field work, and 10 percent were operating power machinery. In peace time only about 20 percent of farm women worked in the fields. If it had been only a matter of taking on these chores, it might not have been as burdensome for rural women, but at the same time they were also asked to produce and preserve ever larger quantities of fruits, vegetables, and meat. In addition they took on the task of making and repairing more clothes for themselves and their families. Some rural women also took on the responsibilities of managing scrap metal, rubber, and paper drives while virtually all of them participated in collecting these commodities needed for the war effort.

Advances in the availability of electricity to rural areas of Texas between 1930 and 1960 also resulted in changes, but they were warmly welcomed. Having electricity meant electric rather than wood burning stoves, washing machines rather than scrub boards, electric lights rather than kerosene lamps, refrigerators rather than ice boxes or spring houses, freezers instead of smoke houses and canning for preserving meat and vegetables, radios and television sets for news and recreation, and ultimately air conditioning rather than natural ventilation. All of these helped reduce the amount of time rural women had to devote to chores or increased the comfort of their homes. Overall the period between 1930 and 1960 was a time during which many changes occurred and some historic events took place. Much of this is visually documented in the photographs of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service.