

Rebecca Clark - Country Life

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In this oral history interview excerpt, Rebecca Clark describes her childhood during the 1920s in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. As a child, Rebecca didn't realize they were living on hard times. However, her stories of not even having enough animal fat left over from cooking to make lye soap, picking cotton to afford shoes, and using paper sparingly illustrate her impoverished conditions.

Audio

File:

Duration: 3:40

Transcript:

Audio Transcript

Rebecca Clark

Even when I was in the country, living in the country, we hardly knew what a notebook was. Our dad would buy us tablets and we had to use the paper very sparingly. Our books then was old books. We didn't know what newspapers was, we didn't know what magazines was. I'll never forget: we got a magazine one time - not a magazine, it was ()'s catalog. That was before my daddy died. We had to pick cotton before we could go to school to buy our shoes. And picking cotton, and to buy shoes, our daddy would measure our feet because then we weren't allowed to put, well, try on shoes in the stores. So our daddy would put our feet down on a piece of cardboard and measure our feet and come to the store to get our shoes. And he used to get them at the place we call Tim Pearson, which is out here at the forks of Smith Level Road and 15-501. There was a big department store there. When he didn't get them there, he got them at Hearn's in Carrboro. Hearn's was noted for its own department store. Those days I do remember. We picked cotton and I'll never forget the last year I think I was in the country, somebody gave us a () catalog. My family helped me order a coat. That's the first time I remember a coat. I don't know where our clothes came from and what kind of coats we had. And I remember I ordered a coat. The mailbox was about two miles from us. When it came, somebody would tell somebody it was there, because you paid for it. Back then, we thought we were happy. We didn't know anything about hard times. Even in the country, we had to bring our water from down on the hill. Little children. For drinking water, for cooking water, and for wash water. In the summertime, we'd take our tubs and pots down to the spring branch. And there we would put a fire under the pot to boil our clothes, be sure we got 'em clean with lye soap. And back then, the older people made the lye from the fat of the grease and stuff that they had left over and stuff like that from hog-killing times and whatever you had left over from your cooking and pots. But in our house, there wasn't much grease left over because my daddy, to feed us, to make it go, he would take what's left and put a little flour in it, brown it, make some biscuits - put some salt and pepper in it and make some biscuits. We had that for supper: gravy, biscuits, molasses.

Bob Gilgor

You didn't waste much?

Rebecca Clark

We didn't waste anything. And I can't see wasting now. I had cooked a cake and put it in the refrigerator here last month. And it kind of dried out. I took it out, and somebody said to me, just the other day, "It's too dry to eat," she said. "Don't throw it away," I said, "un-unh. I'm going to pour some milk over it, put some () in it, some flavor, some sugar, and make a pudding out of it." I'm still not throwing anything [laughs]. How do you think I made it? I had to save.

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