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A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A TEXARKANA, U.S.A., HOMEMAKER FROM 1900 - 1917

by *Judy Hoofman*

“Let'er boom! Let'er boom!” These words, published almost daily by the editor of a Texarkana newspaper, expressed the theme of life early in the 1900s in Texarkana. Texarkana, Texas, was chartered in 1873 with the coming of the Texas and Pacific Railroad. Texarkana, Arkansas, its rival and closest neighbor – only one hundred feet away across the “State Line” – was established in 1880.

From 1873 to 1900, Texarkana had a reputation for crime, saloons, and gambling like few cities anywhere. Because of the easy access for criminals to escape from one state to the next by merely crossing a state boundary line, Texarkana attracted “idlers, thieves, burglars, and n'er-do-wells”² as well as “gamblers, gunmen, and other lawless individuals... .”³ In 1881, a group of Texarkana businessmen “ordered every known bad character to summarily leave the city.”⁴ Even though this did much to cleanse the area of crime, by 1900 Texarkana still had its share of saloons and gambling halls, especially in the “red light district” in the Swampoodle Creek area, but not to the extent that had existed earlier.

The timber and railroad businesses brought people and prosperity to Texarkana. By 1900, the population had grown to almost 10,000. In 1881, 2400 immigrants poured into Texarkana in one month alone.⁵ By 1917, Texarkana was the home of approximately 20,000 people.

During this pre-World War I era, Texarkana boasted many goods and services, including the Union Station, which the twin cities shared, and a mule-drawn streetcar. The city replaced the mule with electricity in 1902. For five cents, the streetcar took patrons to Spring Lake Park, a showplace with a skating rink and other forms of entertainment. The city also provided electricity, gas, water, and telephone service for those living “in town.” “Town” included the homes from Broad Street to Ninth Street. Woods surrounded the area from that point. Businesses such as department stores, drug stores, and grocery stores were in operation on the boardwalk along Broad Street, along with the ever-present saloons. Private and public schools and many churches had been established by this time. Texarkana had several doctors, and Michael Meagher Hospital (now St. Michael Hospital) and Abell's Sanatorium were available to provide medical service. There was no library, but several newspapers provided reading material, which was very important to the Texarkana family, and became more important as World War I drew near.

The Texarkana homemaker from 1900-1917 enjoyed a fulfilling life centered around her home and family. She could not vote yet, and did not enjoy the many modern conveniences of women today, yet she had a useful

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life in which she was able to find purpose and wield a positive influence over her family.

The homemaker of early twentieth-century Texarkana lived in a thriving community, but her life centered around her home and family. R.P. Merrill, a long-time resident of Bowie County, described a typical homestead of the Texarkana area at the time:

large rooms with high ceilings, open hallway, front porch, and back "gallery", huge oak trees left standing, bee hives in the orchard, the smokehouse, the bored well, the spring under the hill. Inside, high beds with feather mattresses and handmade coverlets. Seth Thomas clock, pine cupboards, stoneware dishes, colonial rockers, family Bible and oil lamp at the reading table.⁶

This describes the homes of many Texarkana families in 1900. One such resident was Mrs. Jenny Simmons, who was born in 1893 and came to Texarkana on a train at the age of three. She lived in a farmhouse located on eighteen acres in Texarkana, Arkansas. Like the Merrill home, her's had fireplaces and a wood-burning cookstove and no electricity or telephone. The home had coal-oil lamps and a well on the back porch. She said that they had "every type of fruit and nut tree native to the area, as well as many types of berries."⁷ Like the Merrill homestead, the Simmons family had a smokehouse and barn. VeLora Harrell, who was born in the Rose Hill section of Texarkana, Texas, in 1911, had a home much like Merrill described, but with more modern conveniences. Because she lived near "town," she had running water, a telephone, and an indoor bathroom. Instead of electricity, her family used "gaslights and a gas cookstove."⁸ Wilbur Smith, a Texarkana native born in 1902 and who grew up "in town," lived in a two-story house with electricity, a telephone, running water, an indoor bathroom, and even a washing machine.⁹ Like the Merrill family, the Harrells, Simmons, and Smiths all possessed "high beds with feather mattresses and hand-made coverlets," often made by their mothers. Each had a family Bible and rocking chairs. The home reflected the lifestyle of the wife and homemaker of Texarkana.

A typical weekday of the Texarkana homemaker started early. Before she served breakfast to her family, she got dressed. A typical everyday outfit was an ankle-length skirt, usually made of gingham or a calico print, which the woman wore with a high-collared blouse called a "waist." The "waist" usually had lace or ruffles, with puffy sleeves which came to the elbow. All homemakers wore long aprons to protect their clothing. Even for everyday, women wore stockings and some type of heeled shoe. The *Sears Catalogue* of 1906 advertised a "Ladies Button" patent leather shoe, which sold for \$3.50 and buttoned or laced up the ankle, and also had a pointed toe and a wedged heel.¹⁰ Women wore corsets, although most saved these for special occasions. The corsets hooked in front and laced in the back and helped the woman achieve an hour-glass figure. To complete the outfit, the woman wore a hat and gloves. Women wore fancy feathered hats on special

occasions, but for everyday, they wore bonnets. An article in *The Texarkana Courier* on April 30, 1910 humorously described the way a woman dressed. The writer of the article retorted to a man's comment that the woman had an idle life:

"... buckle a strap around your waist so tigh [sic] you can't draw a full breath or eat a hearty meal ... wear high-heeled shoes and gloves a siez [sic] too small for you ... fix a huge hat on with pins, so that every time the wind blows it pulls your hair out by the roots, and then without any pockets and with short sleeves and openwork stocking go out for a walk on a winter's day and enjoy yourself. Oh yes, my word. You would like it!"

After she dressed, the Texarkana homemaker used the products available to "fix" her face and hair. Hats and bonnets helped protect the woman's complexion from the sun. Women wore only a small amount of rouge and powder. Society considered a woman "vulgar" if she wore lipstick. Although women wore little makeup, magazines and newspapers advertised many beauty aides. For example, *The Ladies' Home Journal* advertised "Pompeian Beauty Powder and Day Cream," which promised to produce "Love at First Sight" by keeping the skin "smooth and velvety" and "removing face shine."¹¹ Page six of *The Texarkana Courier*, March 16, 1910, carried a half-page testimonial of how "S.S.S. Blood Purifier" cured a Mrs. Lucy Gooding of acne, pimples, and a "muddy and sallow" complexion. *The Delineator* magazine of May 1916 advertised a "Mulsified Coconut Oil" for shampooing the hair. It promised to leave hair "fine and silky, bright, fresh-looking and fluffy, wavy and easy to do up."¹² All women of these pre-women's suffrage days had long hair. "Pompadour" hairdos, which piled hair on top of the head, were popular. For everyday, the Texarkana homemaker would pin her hair up, or arrange it in a bun at the base of her neck. Some women would backcomb their hair and use "rats," or false hair, to make it look thicker. An article written by Mrs. L.A. Tanlunson and published in the *Texarkana Courier* on February 27, 1910, warned of the dangers of contracting leprosy from handling false braids and "rats." She commented, "Most of us will gladly welcome such a change, as the rats, puffs, and braids are horrid things of which we are thoroughly tired. And we'll all be glad to see our heads reduced to a normal size once more."

After the Texarkana homemaker was satisfied that she was ready to face the day, she prepared the fire in the wood-burning stove to cook breakfast for her family. She built the fire by igniting chips of wood in the stove with a match (and sometimes with kerosene), and then adjusting the damper to achieve the proper temperature to cook the meal. The first meal of the day usually consisted of coffee and hot cereal and milk, or hot biscuits, home-churned butter with homemade jams and jellies, accompanied by fresh eggs with sausage from the smokehouse. Christine Rogers Nelson, a Texarkana resident born in 1902, said the children in her family preferred their mother's homemade biscuits to any other bread, even though their father ran a

bakery! She said, "And my father being a baker – this is just a little incident I'll throw in – we didn't like bread, we called it white bread, or baker's bread. We liked biscuits and cornbread."¹¹ Unlike the family of today, which hurriedly grabs a bite to eat as each member rushes to a different destination, the family of the early 1900s sat down and ate each meal together. Some Texarkana families used meal time to have prayers and Bible readings. In an interview on March 27, 1992, Jenny Simmons said her family sang and prayed before breakfast. She added, "If it was a drought and we needed rain, then we had that prayer before breakfast." In an interview with VeLora Harrell on March 26, 1992, she said that her family had daily Bible readings and morning devotionals. "We kneeled around the bed every morning before we had breakfast," she said. Mrs. Mildred Edwards, a Texarkana native born in 1907, told how her mother prayed for the children in the family every day before they left for school. "We never went to school in the morning without my mother turning us face to face, my sister and I, and putting her hands on our heads. We would bow our heads and she'd put her hand on each one of our heads and she'd say 'Dear Lord, these are my children. Bless each one as I entrust them to your care, Dear Lord. Protect them from all harm.'"¹⁴

Perhaps the revival reported by *The Texarkana Courier* in 1910 inspired Texarkana homemakers to pray for their children. The newspaper carried many articles and sermons preached by Dr. Ruben A. Torrey from the Moody Bible Institute. He held a city-wide revival in Texarkana that lasted for weeks, and thousands attended. Wilbur Smith, a Texarkana resident and child at the time, said that of the 15,445 people then living in the area, "about a third of the census" became professing church members as a result of the revival. He commented, "I don't thing [sic] Texarkana has ever again reached that high percentage of church membership."¹⁵

Not only did the mother of the house prepare her children spiritually to face the day, she helped them physically by preparing their lunches in buckets to carry to school. Mrs. Ollie Marjorie Markham, another early resident of Bowie County, Texas, described those lunches: "Usually it was whatever Mother had put together, such as a cup of syrup, baked sweet potatoes, biscuits, and, of course, she always cooked up some kind of cookie or pie."¹⁶

After preparing lunches, the mother then helped her children dress for school. In an interview with VeLora Harrell, she said that girls wore "black sateen buttoned bloomers with long black or white stockings and high topped shoes." Jenny Simmons said their school clothes were "pleated skirts with cotton turtleneck sweaters made by their mothers."¹⁷ They reserved gloves and hats for church, but many wore bonnets to school. Boys also wore high topped shoes with a shirt and short pants called "knickers." Wilbur Smith admitted that he was never allowed to wear long pants until he was in high school.¹⁸ Boys wore a "Union Suit" underneath their clothes, which was a one-piece, cotton knit underwear suit, which buttoned down the front and had a flap in the back. After the mother helped the children dress

for school, she sent them off with their lunch buckets. Most children walked to school.

Most homemakers in Texarkana valued education highly and saw to it that their children went to school. Since there were few public schools when they were children, most had only a few years of schooling. Jenny Simmons said that her mother attended grade school in Nevada County, Arkansas, and "loved to read more than anything in life." She added, "She and her sisters were educated in the Bible, and had read it through many times."¹⁹ Of the seven children in her family, Simmons was the only one who did not graduate from high school. She quit in the ninth grade to run the household when her mother went into the hospital (Dale Sanitorium) to have a hysterectomy. Wilbur Smith said that when his mother was a child, there were few public schools, but that she attended classes in the Roseborough home in Texarkana. She also attended one of the first public schools in Texarkana, the College Hill School.²⁰ VeLora Harrell said that all five children in her family graduated from high school, and she participated in the first graduation exercises held at the Texas High School Auditorium in 1930.²¹

Although Texarkana had private schools, most children went to public schools. VeLora Harrell began school in the Rose Hill Grammar School in Texarkana, Texas, which included grades one through seven. She studied Reading, Writing, Physiology, Geography, History, Arithmetic, and Penmanship there. She added, "I wish they would teach Penmanship today!"²² Simmons said that she started school at North Heights Elementary in Texarkana, Arkansas, a one-room schoolhouse with one teacher in 1910. The girls sat on one side of the room and the boys on the other, with an aisle between them. The teacher, a Professor Winham, taught all six grade levels.²³

Mr. and Mrs. Hearol Markham, who attended school in Bowie County, Texas, and later graduated from college, described their experiences in a country school near Texarkana. Markham said that the school calendar revolved around the crops. [They] "started school immediately after the cotton picking season and then closed it before the cotton chopping season. School lasted six and one half months of the year."²⁴ The two-room, two-teacher school was divided into elementary and high school levels, with approximately forty-five students in each. There was no library or cafeteria. They had subjects similar to those studied by students in the "town" school, and also had spelling bee competitions between schools. Ollie Marjorie Markham said she loved sports and participated in basketball and volleyball in high school. Her husband said he also played basketball and baseball in high school.

Sports was not the only extra-curricular activity offered by Texarkana's high schools. A scrapbook belonging to Miss Eva Wilson, who graduated from Arkansas High School in 1916, includes memorabilia of such activities as a Shakespearean Club, a senior play entitled "A Nautical Knot," concert piano and violin performances, and dramatic readings. Miss Wilson also

included an "Order for Dancing" card with various names on it as a memento from her high school days.²⁵ Forty-eight seniors graduated that year, half of them girls.

The mother's work at home was by no means done after her children left for school. In addition to breakfast, the busy homemaker spent much of her time in food preparation. A cookbook published by the Saint James Guild of the Saint James Episcopal Church of Texarkana in 1908 prefaced their recipes with the words of Arnold Bennett: " 'Until the nature of man is completely altered, cooking is the most important thing for a woman.' " Whether or not the homemaker agreed with that statement, she spent much of her time in food preparation.

One of the responsibilities of the mother was to prepare milk products for the home. Every family owned a cow, and usually the mother delegated the responsibility of milking and churning to other members of the family. VeLora Harrell said her mother insisted on doing the milking in the family herself. "She wouldn't let Daddy milk because he would make the cow go dry. It was the way he milked."²⁶ Wilbur Smith told a humorous story of how his brother, much like Tom Sawyer, tricked him into milking the family cow. "I begged him to teach me how to milk, but he wouldn't hear of it. Finally, he 'gave in' and after a few days started to absent himself at the proper time each day. I had completely swallowed the hook and never got off."²⁷

After she or another family member had milked the cow, the mother strained the milk and then made it into milk products. To make sweet milk, she simply poured the strained milk into a stone jar and set it in huge tubs of cool well water to chill. She then put it in the icebox to keep it cool. Horse-drawn buggies delivered ice daily for the iceboxes which almost everyone owned. Wilbur Smith told how his aunt in Atlanta, Texas, refrigerated their food by using a wooden flume built on the back porch. "Butter and other food rested on bricks. The water passing along the flume provided the refrigeration."²⁸

Besides making her own milk products, the woman of early Texarkana made wonderful baked goods for her family on an almost daily basis. A description of Texarkana resident Rilla Belle Bennett Rehkopf typifies many homemakers during the years 1900-1917. "Rilla Belle Bennett Rehkopf was known for her warm hospitality and culinary arts. Everyone was welcome in her home at mealtime, and there were never too many guests for her to feed. For some years, during the latter part of her life, she was a semi-invalid, confined to her chair. Even then she managed to continue baking the wonderful cakes and pies for which she was famous."²⁹ Mildred Edwards, another Texarkana resident, described how her mother kept something baked for her friends after social events. "If it was in the wintertime, Mother made hot gingerbread for us. And if it was in the strawberry season, she made the most delicious strawberry pies in the world."³⁰

Dan Sparks, who grew up in Texarkana, said that the secret to the

baking success was in knowing how to use the damper to regulate the temperature of the fire in the wood-burning stoves. As a boy, he helped his mother by chopping the wood for the cookstove. "... After I made the fire, she knew just how she wanted our fire and she had a damper there, and man alive, she could cook the best biscuits in the world and never knew what a recipe [sic] was, you know."³¹ When the interviewer asked him if it was different to cook without a thermostat, he replied: "Thermostat my foot. My mother could cook a nut cake, and chocolate cakes, lemon cakes, and lemon cake's my favorite. She knew how to make a crust of lemon deal, you know, that smeared in the outside between layers. There's never been nothing like it."

Perhaps another secret to the delicious baked goods was their rich ingredients. In a *Texarkana* cookbook published by the W.H. Booth Company in 1910, a recipe on page sixty-six for "Angel Cake" calls for the whites of twenty eggs. Another recipe for "Jam Cake" spared no expense (or calories). It includes a cup of butter, a cup of sour milk or cream, and one and one-half cups of jam, and two cups of sugar. Flour, spices, and six eggs are added to this. This recipe concludes with the understatement, "Nothing is needed between layers."³²

The mother of the household also kept a supply of homemade bread. VeLora Hartell said her mother made bread at least once a week, and most mothers made bread even more often. *The Texarkana Cook Book of 1910* lists "Breads" as the first recipe, with this caption: "Bread - The very staff of life;/ The comfort of the husband;/ The pride of the wife."³³ Even though one could buy bread at the grocery store or even have it delivered, most women made their own. In an interview Dan Sparks said that his family grew their own grain and took it to the gristmill in *Texarkana* to be ground into flour. "This produced a very nutritious light brown flour that mother used to bake bread."³⁴

Another responsibility of the homemaker was to can and preserve food. Jenny Simmons said that her mother made jams, jellies, and preserves from strawberries, blackberries, plums, peaches, and grapes that grew on their farm in *Texarkana*, Arkansas. Her mother also dried fruits such as apples and made raisins from grapes. She used these in mincemeat pies for the holidays. Homemakers in *Texarkana* canned vegetables such as tomatoes, squash, okra, corn, peas, and butterbeans. They did this by washing the vegetables, heating them on the stove, and putting them into steaming jars. The jars were a clear or bluish color. After the vegetables were put in jars, the mother sealed the jars with rubber rings and lids. She used the jars year after year, but had to replace the lids each year. Jenny Simmons claimed that some vegetables, such as turnips, were not canned. Before a freeze, the family pulled up the turnips from the patch, and stored them in a bed of straw covered with dirt. "This provided fresh turnips and greens until spring."³⁵

In the fall, the men of the family usually butchered a hog and, after

salting it, stored the meat – bacon, ham, and sausage – in the smokehouse. One of the “delicacies” that the mother made on these occasions was hogshead cheese. Jimmy Simmons described this as a delicious treat that the children took in their lunch buckets. It was made of “the boiled meat from the head of the hog, and mixed with sage, black and red pepper, and packed into stone crocks.” Her mother served this with vinegar. A recipe for “Pig’s Head Cheese” from the *Texarkana Cook Book of 1910* describes this process in more detail: “Having thoroughly cleaned a hog’s or pig’s head, split it in two, take out the eyes and the brains, clean the ears, throw scalding water over the head and ears, then scrape them well ... then take out every particle of bone, chop the meat fine, season to taste with salt and pepper (a little pounded sage may be added) and store in a crock.”³⁶

The Texarkana homemaker used hogshead cheese, or other meats grown on the farm such as beef or chicken to prepare the largest meal of the day, dinner. Dinner was the noon meal, and like breakfast, all the family members ate together. The mother served meat with several vegetables or fruits from a vast array of fresh or canned ones available from the garden. A typical dinner might consist of ham, sweet potatoes, turnip greens, Irish potatoes, and fresh tomatoes with green onions. The mother added cornbread or light bread to make a balanced and delicious noon meal. She always made a dessert, such as peach pie or strawberry cobbler.

After the meal, the mother cleaned up the kitchen and washed the dishes. She stored the leftover food in a “warming closet” in the wood-burning stove, or in a “safe.” The warming closet was a compartment above the range where food could be kept as the woodburning stove slowly cooled off. Dan Sparks described a “safe” this way:

It was a huge thing with perforated holes in the tin all way around it so it wouldn’t sweat inside and that is where you put your food after lunch so flies and varmints and all wouldn’t get to it. And that’s where your supper was...³⁷

To wash the dinner dishes, the mother used hot water stored in a copper reservoir on the wood-burning stove. The reservoir held four to five gallons, and stayed hot for up to twenty-four hours. If she had a gas stove or an oil-burning stove, she heated water on the range and washed dishes in a tub or in the sink. She used lye soap that she had made from the fat of a slaughtered hog. To make this, pigskins were baked and became crisp cracklings which were eaten. The fat drippings were then boiled with lye to make lye soap. After it cooled overnight, the substance hardened and was ready to use as soap for dishes and clothes.

Besides food preparation, the Texarkana homemaker had the responsibility of sewing for the family. Some women were such good seamstresses that they sewed for other people as well. Wilbur Smith said that his mother was “very talented, and could play the piano, sew, or do anything. Her ability to sew was worth \$100.00 to anybody.” Mrs. Jean Craig said, “My mother was a perfectionist. She was such a good seamstress that other people requested that she sew for them.” This brought in extra money for her family, who struggled to live on

a minister's salary. Sewing was a recognized profession among women from 1900-1917. In the *Polk's City Directory of 1912*, the only profession besides nursing and teaching which had only women listed was that of Dressmaking. Mothers made clothing for every member of the family, as well as making tablecloths, quilts, napkins, and rugs. Almost all women had sewing machines, but delicate work, such as lacework, smocking, or tating, was done by hand. The *Sears Catalogue of 1906* advertised a sewing machine that was built in a cabinet of five drawers and was foot-operated. It sold for about \$10.00. Newspapers carried advertisements for threads, materials, and other supplies for the seamstress. One store advertised in *The Texarkana Courier* on April 6, 1910 such materials as gingham or linen from nineteen cents to thirty-five cents per yard. *The Daily Texarkanian* on September 8, 1905 advertised a more select assortment of materials, including silks, which ranged from sixty cents to \$1.50 per yard. Magazines such as *The Delineator* offered a monthly article entitled "Beginning Lessons in Dressmaking," and also produced a Butterick Pattern supplement every quarter.³⁸ With these courses of help, the Texarkana homemaker usually selected the type of clothes or articles she wanted to make and bought the materials from catalogs or dry goods stores in town.

For shopping, the family usually went to town together on Saturdays. Occasionally, the homemaker might need to go to town alone to buy supplies or run an errand. To do this, she would harness the horse to the fringed surrey that most women owned and operated themselves, and then make her way to Broad Street in downtown Texarkana. On sunny days traveling across the unpaved streets to the city was no problem, but if it rained, mud would often bog down the surrey all the way to the rims of the wheels. The downtown area itself, as well as the Texas side of State Line, was paved with red bricks. As she traveled along the streets, she would see streetcars, and she might also see wagons carrying cotton bales or delivering ice or groceries. She might even see boys on bicycles delivering telegraph messages or the horsedrawn fire engine named for the mayor's daughter, "Imogene."³⁹ She might even pass one of the few automobiles in town, owned by such people as W.K. Wadley.⁴⁰ Once she reached Broad and Maple (now Texas Boulevard), she would stop at the tree-lined town well long enough to give her horse a drink. After she had lodged the horse in the livery stable, she would then walk carefully along the boardwalk of Broad Street "to avoid tripping over the nail-heads that protruded on the boardwalks..."⁴¹ She also avoided looking into the swinging doors of the saloons. As she shopped, she would pass the Grand Opera House and several silent movie theatres, which provided entertainment at five cents per movie. To obtain her sewing supplies, she would stop at one of the dry goods stores, such as the O'Dwyer and Ahern Company, which advertised sales in the August 6, 1916, *Daily Texarkanian*, "Waists worth \$1.00 and More at 50¢ each," and "\$1.00 corsets at 79¢." She might windowshop at the exclusive L. Schwarz Department Store at 102 West Broad, which sold "Essanelle Waists" for \$20 each, and "Crepe de Chine Gowns" for \$115.⁴² After she had enjoyed windowshopping (L. Schwarz probably was out of her price range), she might sit in one of the plush seats at the Boyd

Drug Store to drink a soda. Before leaving, she might buy some Epsom Salts or Castor Oil, which she used for the ailments her family suffered. Before going home, she might buy items at the grocery store, although most foods were grown in her garden at home. *The Texarkana Courier* advertised a locally produced syrup which sold for seventy cents per gallon. The advertisement said, "Pure Ribbon Cane, made in Cass County, where they know how to make the genuine Ribbon Cane Syrup." She might buy something exotic which the farm at home did not produce, such as almonds, which sold for thirty-five cents a pound, or a can of salmon, which she could buy for eight cents. After she had completed her shopping, she would then retrieve her horse and surrey and return home, passing by some of the magnificent mansions in Texarkana, such as the Ben Collins home, situated at 1000 Pine Street (the present site of Wadley Regional Medical Center). One Texarkana resident described this estate as a "large two-story white house that was on the beautiful knoll in a wooded section."⁴³ After her trip to town, the Texarkana homemaker would then return to resume her duties at home.

As well as making the clothes, the Texarkana homemaker had the responsibility of keeping the clothes clean. In 1906, the Sears catalog advertised a "Mississippi Washing Machine" for \$5.75, "only eleven cents a week," which promised to save women from "back-breaking and arm-tiring leaning over the washtub for hours at a time."⁴⁴ Despite such a guarantee, most women in the early 1900s washed their clothes with a scrubboard in an iron pot filled with boiling water. They did this on the back porch, in the kitchen, or even at the closest spring in the hot summer months. In an article in the *Delineator* magazine, Georgia Boynton Child explained "Just How to Do the Washing." She said that the mother must sort and mend all clothes as the first step of washing. After that, she advised the homemaker to "Cut up soap needed for next day's washing. Place in a stewpan and cover with water." After the soap had dissolved, women then added boiling water and the clothes to this and scrubbed them on the rub-board. She then rinsed them and hung them outside on the clothesline to dry. After they were dry, she ironed them, using a flatiron heated on the cookstove. Because the process took many hours, the homemaker usually washed clothes only once a week. She often employed her children or hired servants in the task.

It was not uncommon for white woman of early Texarkana to pay a black woman or couple to help with the chores. The couple did such things as help with the planting, harvesting, canning, cooking, and washing. VeLora Harrell, who said that they "were poor but didn't know it," paid a black woman to do the washing and help clean the house.⁴⁵ Wilbur Smith said that his family paid a black lady a few dollars a week to help do housework.⁴⁶ Jenny Simmons said they paid their black help, "Aunt Kittie and Uncle Esau," who did the planting and butchering, in vegetables and meats.⁴⁷ Dan Sparks told how his family loved "Aunt Polly" and the other black people who helped them on the farm: "We kids just loved her like we did our family ... But there was a love and affection and they gave that to the family - transferred it to the family." He also related how his parents had given Aunt Polly the right to discipline him and the other children in the family. "Although some kid - could have been me - if I was a smart

aleck kid, if Aunt Polly had wanted to, she could have, – she was permitted to jerk up a cotton stalk and wear me out and you know my Daddy riding right by there wouldn't have said a word."

Even with the hired help, it took a great deal of work for a woman to run a household early in the 1900s, and the mother had to delegate many responsibilities to the children. Children had chores both before and after school, including feeding and taking care of the cows, horses, chickens, and hogs, and milking the cow. Wilbur Smith not only milked the cow at home, he also milked the neighbor's cow for a small wage. The neighbor eventually hired him to work at the Texarkana National Bank, and Smith humorously said, "that my success was due to udders."⁴⁸ The boys in the family usually helped their father with the crops, and they also had the job of keeping kindling and firewood for the wood-burning stove and fireplaces. Mrs. Dan Sparks commented that in the days before electricity, "Bringing in the wood and cleaning the lamp chimneys were the chores of my brothers after school."⁴⁹ The girls generally did housework such as churning butter and helped with the cooking, sewing, washing, and ironing. Jenny Simmons said, "I had five beds to make before I went to Central School in the seventh grade."⁵⁰ During harvest time, every member of the family worked in the fields. Dan Sparks said, "And harvesting – the girls then just had to work like men... That's what the whole year had been built on."

Even though children had chores to do, work was not the only thing the children did after school. They had many games and activities. William Henry Matthews, Jr., told of amusing himself on the way home from Highland Park School in 1910 by "stopping frequently to fish for 'craw-dads' with a piece of string and bits of meat saved from my lunch."⁵¹ Mrs. Dan Sparks remembered that "one of the delights of young people" in her neighborhood on Olive Street was to meet their father on his way home from work by sliding down the bannisters of the Christian Church. She said, "Of course, we would become so engrossed in sliding down these bannisters that we would never notice that he had passed by... ." As children, Mildred Edwards and her friends amused themselves by chasing bats with fishing canes at twilight. "This was great fun," she said, "but we got knocked in the head as many times as we killed a bat."⁵² She quit this game when a boy convinced her that bats loved to make nests in long red braids such as hers.

After the children had completed their evening chores and recreation, the Texarkana mother would then call them inside for supper. She sometimes made homemade soup or a fresh pan of cornbread to accompany the leftovers from dinner kept in the warming closet or safe. Supper was always a light meal, and often no more than cereal and milk.

With no television or radio, after supper the family participated in quiet activities such as reading, doing homework, sewing, or simply relaxing on the porch or in front of the fireplace. Rilla Bennett Rehkopf's description is of a typical mother of that era. "The writer's earliest recollection of Rilla Benentt [sic] Rehkopf, whom all her grandchildren called 'Bamma,' is seeing her in her

favorite rocker by the window, sewing and telling stories to the children at her knee, or reading the books she loved."⁵³ VeLora Hartell said that in the evenings they read, cut out paper dolls, or listened to stories their mother told.⁵⁴ While the mother told stories, she did hand embroidery, pieced quilts, or crocheted. Her hands were never idle.

Another Texarkana resident of 1900 to 1917, Mrs. E.B. Bickley, who lived in the College Hill section of Texarkana, Arkansas, said, "Instead of T.V. or stereo, we enjoyed the old victrola and piano."⁵⁵ Many families had Victrolas and almost all owned some type of musical instrument – either a piano or organ. Jenny Simmons said they owned a "blonde maple organ" that her mother and sisters played. Hearol and Ollie Marjorie Markham also said their families enjoyed music. Ollie Marjorie Markham said, "We had an old organ and we got around the organ and all sang..."⁵⁶ Hearol Markham pointed out that it was a tradition for the women of the family to play the organ. "We also had the old pump organ and the boys never did try to play it, but the girls played it some and my mother was a pretty good organ player and a pretty good singer."⁵⁷ Wilbur Smith called his mother "an institution," because "she could do anything, and she was a talented piano player in her youth..."⁵⁸

Besides music, reading played an important part of family life in the evenings. A typical home library consisted of a few treasured books such as these described by R.P. Merrill: "The Bible, McGuffey readers, the blueback speller, Peter Parley's Universal History, The Almanac, the family medical guide, the dictionary, and factual reference books made up the home library."⁵⁹ One Texarkana resident said that her family sat in the porch swings every evening and read. "All of us were readers, and it never entered our minds to be bored."⁶⁰

After family Bible reading, which the father usually did, the family often read other materials, such as magazines or newspapers. One Texarkana newspaper of the era, *The Daily Texarkanian*, included a regular feature titled "What Concerns Women," which typifies an article geared toward women during that time. It included these topics: a visit from a cousin, a picnic, the Tuesday Bridge Club Meeting, and an announcement of how "Miss Marie Berger" had broken her finger while playing basketball. It also names participants in a local choral group who performed by singing, playing piano, zither, and saxophone solos.⁶¹

Even though some of these topics may seem trite to the woman of today, some statements made by newspapers of that day would not be tolerated by today's woman. For example, under "Pointed Paragraphs" in the March 16, 1910 issue of the *Texarkana Courier*, it says, "The more you let a woman do as she pleases, the less she is pleased." Despite such statements, all of the women interviewed indicated that their mothers were happy, and lacked nothing where women's rights were concerned. Both Wilbur Smith and Jean Craig said, "My mother was boss of the family!" Mildred Evans declared, "As far as Women's Lib is concerned, I've been liberated all my life ... I can't see what the hue-and-cries are all about."⁶²

Conditions would soon begin to change for women, however, with women's suffrage on the horizon. *The Delineator*, a popular magazine for women during 1900-1917, included articles on many topics – love, inspirational messages, the latest fashions, and women's suffrage. One article, "The Call of the Race," described how women in California were not only fighting for the vote, but for teachers' pensions, and for "a minimum wage bill for women workers."⁶³ The newspapers and magazines exposed the Texarkana woman to life as it was then, and how it would be in the future.

After reading, storytelling, singing, or sewing, the mother of the Texarkana household sent her children to bed. Children often slept in trundle beds, which were slightly smaller than the four-poster double beds of the adults. Trundle beds had rollers and slid underneath the parents' bed, which was almost three feet high. They also had sideboards to keep the children from falling out of bed.

Before they lay down on a featherbed mattress with a quilt their mother had made especially for them, the children would often take a bath. The mother would heat water on the woodstove, or use water from the reservoir on the cookstove, and pour it into a washtub either in the kitchen or on the back porch. The families with indoor plumbing might have a water heater as Velora Harrell described: "It was called an Instantaneous Gas Heater," she said, "which after it was lit, would heat only enough water for one bath."⁶⁴

After the children went to bed between 8:00 and 9:00 P.M., the Texarkana homemaker stayed up a while longer, perhaps to finish some needlework, write a letter to a friend, or discuss the day's activities with her husband. She and her husband would then retire, and she would sleep soundly from a full day of service to her home and family.

The life of the Texarkana homemaker from 1900 to 1917 was a fulfilling one centered around her family. Families lived by moral standards outlined by the Bible. Divorces were rare and teenage alcoholism and runaways were almost nonexistent. Without radio and television to influence the minds of her children, the mother was able to pass on her values and encourage her children to read and become useful citizens. Even though the homemaker of yesterday did not vote or share in the work world on an equal basis with men, she possessed a family togetherness and quiet security that often eludes the fast-paced lifestyle of women today. There was a thread of love and a family bond, perhaps formed through the hard work the family shared, that many women of today long to have. As Mildred Edwards stated, "We never wanted for anything – either materially or spiritually,"⁶⁵ and as Jenny Simmons stated simply, "And we were so happy."⁶⁶

NOTES

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¹¹*Ladies Home Journal*, June 1919, p. 153.

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¹⁸Smith, 1992.

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²⁴Markham, 1992.

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³²Booth, William and Company, comp. *Texarkana Cookbook*, Texarkana Historical Museum, Texarkana, Texas, 1910, p. 66.

³³Booth, 1910, p. 78.

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³⁵Simmons, 1992.

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³⁸*Butterick Quarterly: Winter, 1916-17*, (New York, New York, 1916-17).

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⁴⁰Jennings, 1961, p. 200.

⁴¹Jennings, 1961, p. 41.

⁴²Daily Texarkanian, March 15, 1906.

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⁴⁴*Sears Catalogue, 1906*, p. 548.

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⁴⁹Sparks, 1973.

⁵⁰Simmons, 1992.

⁵¹Jennings, 1961, p. 109.

⁵²Edwards, n.d..

⁵³Jennings, 1961, p. 161.

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⁵⁵Interview with Mrs. E.B. Bickly by Marilyn Housechild. Oral Histories Program, Texarkana Historical Museum, Texarkana, Texas, October 18, 1973.

⁵⁶Markham, 1979.

⁵⁷Markham, 1979.

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⁵⁹Jennings, 1961, p. 120.

⁶⁰Craig, 1992.

⁶¹*Daily Texarkanian*, "What Concerns Women," April 5, 1910.

⁶²Edwards, n.d..

⁶³*The Delineator*. 1915. "The Call of the Race," p. 17.

⁶⁴Harrell, 1992.

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