ABSTRACT: The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 established the Agricultural Extension Service to disseminate agricultural research to farmers. An unintended by-product of this work was a huge rural history archives: Federal Record Group 33, the Records of the Extension Service, which provides a granular record of life on farms and in rural communities. This article illustrates the use of the Extension Service’s annual reports for researching local history and genealogy and evaluates access to these archival materials and their depictions of rural communities. The study finds that the rural communities documented in the Extension Service materials often are unaware of this resource because of limited local finding aids and online access.

Introduction: The Archives of the Agricultural Extension Service

In 1914, the US government launched an ambitious education program to improve agricultural production and the livelihoods of rural families. An unintended by-product of this work was a huge rural history archive: Federal Record Group 33, the Records of the Extension Service. Two pieces of nineteenth-century legislation laid the groundwork for these Extension Service records. The Morrill Land-Grant College Act, signed by Abraham Lincoln in 1862, provided each state with land or money to endow a college that would emphasize education in agriculture and engineering. The Hatch Experiment Station Act (1887) extended the work of these “land-grant colleges” by providing states with funds to conduct agricultural research. Scientists conducted research at “experiment stations,” publishing the results of their studies and demonstrating them in field trials. However, the impact of the Hatch Act was limited, because the legislation provided no mechanism to disseminate the results of agricultural research. As Wayne Rasmussen observed, “If the research were to be of benefit, its results would have to be communicated to farmers.” Not until the Smith-Lever Act, now a century old, did the federal government begin systematically delivering scientific information from research universities directly to farmers. William J. Spillman, the head of the Office of Farm Management, developed a national system of “extension agents,” also called
“county agents,” paid for by federal, state, and local funds, which delivered scientific agricultural knowledge into the field. Because of the Extension Service’s unique cooperative structure, extension agents are located in virtually every US county, and county offices are affiliated with their nearby land-grant universities. These extension agents also included female “demonstration agents” who shared home economics information with women and were “free to develop programs they saw fit for local needs.” An additional responsibility for extension agents was their supervision of county 4-H clubs, an extension service program for rural youth that provided boys and girls with both agricultural education and leadership training. Because the Extension Service remained segregated until the Civil Rights Act of 1964, many counties also employed additional “Negro Work” male and female agents who performed both agricultural and home demonstration duties. The language of the Cooperative Extension Act tasked agricultural and home demonstration agents with “the giving of instruction and practical demonstrations in agriculture and home economics to persons not attending or resident in said [land grant] colleges” and imparting information “through field demonstrations, publications, and otherwise.” Signing the Smith-Lever Act into law, President Woodrow Wilson called it “one of the most significant and far-reaching measures for the education of adults ever adopted by the government.”

The Smith-Lever Act required extensive documentation of the money spent and work conducted by Extension Service employees; indeed, quarterly federal payments to states were contingent upon the submission of a “detailed statement of the amount so received during the previous fiscal year and its disbursement, on forms prescribed by the Secretary of Agriculture.” As a result, extension and home demonstration agents in every US county filed an “Annual Narrative and Statistical Report” to document activities. For the “Statistical Report” section of their submissions, agents completed several pages of questions that captured data about residents’ participation in Extension Service programs, for example, the number of letters agents received, the number of farm visits agents conducted, or the number of people attending Extension Service events. In contrast, the “Narrative” section required of all agents was less formulaic. In this portion, agents described the projects they had conducted throughout the year, but they also could include county residents’ own descriptions of completed projects. In addition, agents frequently included photographs documenting county residents and their home and farm demonstrations. Agents submitted the ribbon copy of their reports to the Extension Service office in Washington, DC; multiple carbon copies, created simultaneously, frequently were shared with local land-grant universities and also retained in the agents’ local offices.

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) ultimately received the Extension Service agents’ annual reports, preserving them within Record Group 33, the Records of the Extension Service. NARA’s numbered record groups comprise the records of each major government agency, with an agency’s number reflecting the order in which its record group was established. Following the principle of provenance, records are “arranged thereunder as they were filed when in active use.” NARA further arranged record groups into series, organized by “the creating office’s filing system or otherwise kept together by the creating office’s filing system” or in some other way reflecting a specific type of agency activity or function. Using this...
numbering convention for record groups and series, the Extension Service “Annual Narrative and Statistical Reports, 1909–1968” was assigned to Record Group 33.6. This archive, generated during the course of county agents’ daily work, comprises 3,500 linear feet; the corpus is reproduced on more than 7,000 rolls of microfilm, which patrons may request for off-site viewing. The entire archive is available at the NARA site in College Park, Maryland, but land-grant universities such as Texas A&M in College Station, Texas, and Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma, also hold copies of Extension Service documents specific to their states. The politics and effectiveness of the Extension Service policies can be debated, but the massive volume of records in Federal Record Group 33 is undisputed.

The Extension Service archive provides a rich data source for agriculture and social historians, who have examined its photographs, statistics, and first-person narratives for depictions of early twentieth-century rural life. The author of the US National Archives and Records Administration’s Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Extension Service described the “Annual Narrative and Statistical Reports” as “an intimate account of the details of farm operation and rural life in every state of the Union, in the Territories of Alaska and Hawaii, in Puerto Rico, and, to a minor extent, in the District of Columbia.” D. Clayton Brown’s review of the Arkansas Extension Service records at the NARA Fort Worth site illustrated how historians can make use of these county-level reports; his study found that the archive provides an “opportunity to observe the transformation of farm and home life from an undeveloped condition into modern contemporary living.”

While scholars and archivists are familiar with these records, genealogists and local historians appear not to have mined Record Group 33.6. Ironically, genealogists are the primary users of many archives, despite the fact that, as Duff and Johnson have noted, “the traditional archival information system does not meet their needs.” Traditional finding aids, even those with EAD encoding, fail to provide the types of data retrieval that Duff and Johnson identified as crucial to genealogists, who search by name, document type, event, and geographic area. NARA archivist Claire Prechtel-Kluskens promoted the Extension Service archive for genealogists to connect with their family history, declaring that “If your relatives lived on farms in the first half of the twentieth century, you’ll want to read Extension Service annual reports.” Genealogist blogger Robyn Smith illustrated the effectiveness of Prechtel-Kluskens’s outreach. After hearing a presentation on the Extension Service “Negro Work” records at a 2011 NARA genealogy fair, Smith wrote that “I had never heard of these records before, but after her lecture, I knew I needed to look at them.” Elizabeth Yakel’s study of genealogists’ information-seeking methods noted that their processing is “characterized by making connections with other genealogists and family historians” through activities that include participation in genealogical groups, sharing of transcripts, and volunteering at local archives. That Smith, an experienced family historian, had “never heard” of the Extension Service records suggests the degree to which these annual reports remain underused. Extension Service records are effectively hidden from local or family historians conducting online research, presenting what Kate Theimer described as “archival silences,” because they are “not represented in the digital collections that have been marked up in ways that make them useful for this kind of research.” Online
researchers can review the general description of Record Group 33 in NARA’s Guide to Federal Records, or Prechtel-Kluskens’s thorough summary of the Extension Service annual reports, prepared for the 2011 NARA Genealogical Fair. However, these reference materials provide an overview of the entire record group, rather than a description of individual records’ contents. Because the records are not digitized and available for key-word searching, these “intimate” historical vignettes are effectively hidden to the people most familiar with their details: the families and communities profiled in these annual reports.

As an archival body, the Records of the Extension Service remain oddly disconnected from their original, county-level creators. Housed in federal and state university repositories, these first-person accounts of twentieth-century rural life are virtually invisible to the twenty-first-century families whose farms and communities are documented in Extension Service records. This article examines a fragment of the yearly filings of county agricultural and home demonstration agents within subgroup 33.6 to explore how an individual researcher might retrieve these meticulously recorded materials and perhaps reintroduce them to its community of origin. Specifically, I will share what this archival record reveals about specific members of my family and places of significance to my family’s history. Like the many family historians who cannot travel great distances to examine historical documents, I did not view original records housed at the National Archives or the carbon copies found at land-grant colleges such as Texas A&M University. By necessity, I researched records by borrowing and purchasing NARA microfilm and digital copies. My study describes information gleaned from these records and discusses how available technologies make records accessible while at times complicating the research process. Genealogical researchers might expect to retrieve records arranged by individual community, by the names of the Extension Service agents who wrote reports, or by the names of individuals featured in the documents. None of those indexing and searching tools exist for the Extension Service records. Neither were detailed state- or county-level finding aids extant to help locate family members or their rural communities. The general finding aid for the federal record group guided this research, in addition to published and online catalog records for NARA and catalog information provided by land-grant universities. I explored these records with no specific guides to what I might find; nevertheless, because my family fit the demographic described by Prechtel-Kluskens, I took her advice and looked in Record Group 33.6.

The Woodruff Sisters in the Archival Record

My search began with family I knew would be represented in the archival record in some capacity: great-aunts Grace and Reba Woodruff, who served as Texas home demonstration agents. Family records told me that Grace served in Parker County in 1930, Reba in Lipscomb County in 1941. With this essential information, I followed Prechtel-Kluskens’s instructions to select the NARA microfilm ordering page, “Research Our Records,” where, she assures researchers, “you do not need to register, sign in, or buy anything.” From this page, I selected the “Order online” link, at which
I could perform a keyword search for “Extension Service.”\textsuperscript{32} This search returned 54 records from Record Group 33 annual reports: one for each state, in addition to records for Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, “Photograph of Extension Service Activities and Personnel, 1928–1941,” and “South 1913–1914.” Following the link for Extension Service Annual Reports: Texas, 1909–1944 on the search results page, I retrieved a list of the microfilmed records of the Texas Extension Service, numbered T890, which includes 182 rolls of microfilm.\textsuperscript{33} From this page, I identified the microfilm roll numbers for 1930 Parker County (roll 70) and for 1941 Lipscomb County (roll 155), ordered the records through Interlibrary Service, and received them within a month.

Reading NARA’s Extension Service microfilm was challenging. Indeed, roll 70 arrived with the disclaimer that “some images are unreadable.” I deciphered the contents only because microfilm reader workstations at the University of Texas at Austin scan microfilm images and then adjust the reproduction quality with Photoshop software; roll 70 of the Texas Extension Service was illegible before this adjustment. The microfilm contained no index, requiring readers to advance tediously, alphabetically, from Ochiltree County at the beginning of the roll, to Parker County, near the end.

Prechtel–Kluskens advised that “each agent’s report reflects his or her personality, so you’ll never know what you will find.”\textsuperscript{34} What I found was 22-year-old Grace Woodruff, a new college graduate, performing her home demonstration duties with élan. She crafted her account as an Extension Service public relations document, opening the narrative with a highly placed local official’s praise of her county fair exhibit: “‘Parker County gardens have been wonderful this year. We just could not have done without them,’ is a statement made by Mr. D. H. Green, President of the Weatherford Chamber of Commerce, as he viewed a display of twenty-one vegetables covering a floor space of 5 x 15 feet.”\textsuperscript{35} Woodruff emphasized her work’s momentum, describing 4-H spring gardening demonstrations that “capitalize [on] the enthusiasm roused by successful fall gardens.”\textsuperscript{36} Supplementing Woodruff’s summaries were participants’ descriptions of their experiences, which relate their projects in their own distinctive voices. For example, Mrs. Roy Young, who admirably canned 1,000 pounds of cured meat, extolled the virtues of both her pressure canner and her home demonstration agent:

> For some time I had been hearing wonderful reports of the benefits derived from owning a pressure canner. I paid very little attention to these reports until at last the Home Demonstration Agent through her untiring effort finally gained my interest. I consider July 2, 1929, as one of my luckiest days, because on that day I bought a National Pressure Canner. . . . I feel greatly indebted to the Home Demonstration Agent, Miss Grace Woodruff, who has given me such wonderful encouragement and has furnished most of the splendid recipes.\textsuperscript{37}

Woodruff’s report resounded with examples of her “untiring effort.” The statistics for her year of service told one story: 301 homes visited, 565 calls received, 228 days spent in the field. Yet the details of her narrative revealed her drive to succeed with her Parker County projects. For example, 89 county girls participated in the clothing work section of their 4-H projects; each was given “a sample seam suitable for her garment that had been prepared by the Home Demonstration agent.”\textsuperscript{38} Preparing 89 separate
seam samples would have been no small feat; the inclusion of the task in Woodruff’s narrative underscores her determination to ensure county projects’ success.

Woodruff’s narrative highlights the engagement and accomplishment of numerous Parker County citizens, from Mrs. Young’s pressure canner to “Zada Wiggins of Peaster, a first year club girl, [who] raised a flock of 43 chickens.” Parker County residents looking for genealogical details in Woodruff’s records would be rewarded with detailed accounts of fairs, rally day programs, and 4-H activities that offer a wealth of names, places, and dates of potential interest to the area’s communities and families. Woodruff’s depiction of the county’s character, however, is perhaps as significant as the individual names she includes in her account. Her narrative pointedly indicates an awareness of how engagement in Extension Service projects empowered rural women to action. Marilyn Holt has observed how farm women’s home demonstration projects offered them the opportunity to “ease and enhance their lives” while illustrating how they contributed to their farms’ economies “by engaging in home industries, modernizing their homes, and changing work strategies.” Parker County home demonstration projects offered examples of the enhancements Holt described, including multiple reports of upgrading and improving farm homes. In addition, the narrative specifically noted the money and goods farm women created: cash through the sale of poultry and eggs, and savings through gardens and food preservation.

Woodruff’s report highlights the connection between women’s contributions to their farms’ incomes and their ability to upgrade their homes. In detailing a “Home Furnishings” project, she observed that many women overcame the objections of resistant husbands to make over their living rooms, noting the manner in which they funded renovations: “Fifty women earned the money to make this improvement themselves by the sale of poultry, dairy, and other farm products, and one woman sold some of her useless furniture, and two of the women took stenographic work to get their money.” The narrative of Mrs. E. P. Kerby, age 75, emphasizes this independence. Kerby hesitated to enter the countywide “Home Furnishings” contest, noting that “I thought that room that had not been changed in so long was a hopeless proposition. Then Miss Grace Woodruff, County Home Demonstration Agent, came out to our house.” When her husband objected to her changes, Kerby observed that “It is hard to go across a husband’s path, but I saw the paper hanger and he said he would come over the next morning. I just said to Mr. Kerby, ‘The paperhanger is coming this morning.’ Thus the paper went up.” An unrepentant Mrs. Kerby won first prize in the county contest: “I was so pleased with the result that my conscience did not hurt a bit, for I knew that I would not object to anything he [Mr. Kerby] did on the farm.”

In her short tenure with the Agricultural Extension Service, Woodruff produced a fine-grained account of Parker County life during 1929 and 1930. The records that reveal her engagement and enthusiasm may leave readers in agreement with Mrs. D. P. Walker, who ended her 4-H narrative with a hearty encomium: “All of the work has been done under the supervision of our Home Demonstration Agent. We think there is no one like her.” In contrast to Grace Woodruff’s narrative of satisfying rural accomplishment, Reba Woodruff’s record of service in Lipscomb County reflects hardships in the Texas Panhandle during World War II. The underlying theme of her 1941 report is scarcity: key foodstuffs were rationed, scrap materials were gathered.
for reuse, and, because the county’s men had been conscripted, county farmers were shorthanded. Indeed, the Lipscomb County Fair, annual picnic, and Christmas party planned by the Lipscomb County Home Demonstration Agent all were cancelled “because of transportation problems and labor shortages which required the help of many farm women in the fields.” Lipscomb County women engaged in the home improvement work seen in the earlier Parker County reports, but wartime realities severely circumscribed their activities.

Woodruff’s Extension Service narrative describes the full scope of her year’s work with 4-H groups and home demonstration clubs around the county, but a “Contributions to the War Effort” report within that larger work summarizes her home-front responsibilities. In 1941, the “Contributions” report noted that Woodruff assisted with tire rationing, scrap metal and scrap rubber drives, and USO fund-raising. She also helped with war bond sales, held meetings about the farm machinery repair program, and worked with PTA groups to develop family entertainment nights to assist with “keeping up the family morale.” Her emphasis, however, was on helping families produce and preserve food for the war effort through a US Department of Agriculture program called “Food-for-Freedom,” which encouraged the creation of family Victory Gardens to supplement commercial sources of food. In addition, the federal program set wartime goals for specific agricultural products and declared to producers that “every farmer must plan to turn out just as much of each needed wartime commodity as he can.”

Woodruff wrote that she “has discussed the program in every community in the county at least once and in some of the larger ones twice with a different group attending each time.” Seventy-seven county residents planted gardens for the first time in 1941, and Woodruff pragmatically noted that “Not all these gardens were successful, however none were complete failures.” To make the best use of their home gardens, families needed to preserve the fruits and vegetables they produced. The statistical section of Woodruff’s report notes that she assisted 477 families throughout the year with “food preservation problems,” such as canning and freezing. Her Food-for-Freedom efforts, then, reached a substantial percentage of households in Lipscomb County, which had a population of fewer than 4,000 people in 1940.

One telling detail at a time, Woodruff’s Extension Service narrative describes her work in helping her county’s citizens make do with less. References to daily deprivations, such as her success in encouraging the use of honey and sorghum as sweeteners, illustrate the degree to which wartime shortages impacted even rural families who produced much of their own food. Her report speculates that “perhaps use of these substitutes [honey and sorghum] is responsible for the fact that few people have experienced any difficulty in making their sugar ration meet their needs.” Included in Woodruff’s description of food shortages and rationing is an account of her encounters with Lipscomb County immigrant groups as she demonstrated the modern, scientific technique of pressure canning, which was considered safer than the traditional “water bath” canning method. “Every thing possible has been done to discourage the use of the water bath and oven methods of canning non-acid vegetables and meat but people are still using those methods,” Woodruff reported. “This condition is true especially among the foreign-born—German and Russian—people in the county.” Marilyn Holt noted the Extension Service’s emphasis on “erasing traditions and old ways of
thinking,” finding that immigrant groups resisted this change, and Reba Woodruff’s report illustrates Holt’s observation. In this example, Woodruff’s Lipscomb County Home Demonstration Records could enhance scholars’ knowledge of the immigrant resistance to assimilation in wartime Texas. As a member of Woodruff’s family, however, I was fascinated by the archive’s depictions of the Woodruff sisters’ energy and persistence in the course of their service. In their narratives, I discovered the young women I never met but who continue to inhabit family stories. Their records of life in Parker and Lipscomb Counties allow their family to know them through their work; these accounts, if made accessible and easily available, could provide genealogists with similar glimpses of other Texas families at work in rural Texas.

**Extension Service Records of Kingfisher County, Oklahoma, 1941**

To research my home county, where my family began raising cattle in 1889, I followed the same procedure used to identify the microfilm records for the Woodruff sisters. To access Kingfisher County’s records (T881, roll 118), however, I purchased them in CD format from NARA. The CD format offered much better resolution than microfilm, and the Oklahoma records were markedly more legible than those of Grace Woodruff’s home demonstration service (T890, roll 70). However, the CD format presented its own challenges. The four discs of roll 118 contained more than 7,000 JPEG images of the records of multiple counties, but the images were not separated into folders for individual counties. As a result, searching the archival record on CDs was a time-consuming effort that required blindly opening unmarked files to locate Kingfisher County.

Despite this effort, I discovered only two family references within the 1941 archive: my grandfather E. S. Hobbs was listed on two committees making up the Kingfisher County Agricultural Advisory Council, a group of county citizens that set goals to determine the focus of Extension Service programming. This record offered not a single compelling story or colorful anecdote about my family. Indeed, the township maps within the report shows virtually no Extension Service activity within Coronado Township, the location of my family’s ranch. Yet this omission itself tells a story. My grandfather represented the Advisory Council’s Pasture and Livestock Management committees—not Wheat Improvement or Cotton Gin—because his native-grass ranchland was too poor to raise these crops. My family would not have participated in the 4-H activities popular in small towns because they lived too far away, and unpaved roads made travel too difficult. The Extension Service archive confirmed my family’s isolated geography. Indeed, the records of home demonstration agent Edith Smith highlight the difficulty of traveling to Extension Service events. Smith noted how county resident Dave Foster helped women from the Big Four, a community centered around the consolidated Big Four School, attend the Kingfisher County Dress Revue in the town of Hennessey after a heavy rain: he pulled their car with his tractor. Smith’s record describes how more than 200 people braved the poor roads to attend the event, with others, in addition to Dave Foster, using their tractors to assist with transportation.

Although my family is little represented in the Kingfisher County archive, the
Extension Service records enhanced my understanding of farm and ranch life in a time of drought, disease, and economic depression. Extension agent L. J. Cunningham painted an endearingly prickly portrait of farmers’ resistance to the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, a New Deal farm relief program. Cunningham observed that the county was farmed by a “self-reliant group of thrifty people,” and that it never had endured a complete crop failure:

Their homes are mostly paid for and many are equipped with as many modern conveniences as the city home. . . . It is not at all unnatural to expect a people so sturdy and self-sufficient to feel little need of an agricultural governing program and as a matter of fact actually resent its very existence.⁵⁷

Farmers notoriously resented farm relief programs that required them to plow under existing crops or destroy their livestock to raise market prices.⁵⁸ Cunningham’s report clarifies and confirms the family stories passed down about E. S. Hobbs, who resisted New Deal policies that slaughtered brood sows to raise their market price.⁵⁹ Cunningham’s report on the Livestock Management Committee also speaks to ongoing problems with livestock loss, noting that “many of the [committee’s] objectives have not been wholly reached. The outstanding objective of this committee—that of disease control through legislation—failed to pass.”⁶⁰ Cunningham’s report corresponds to family stories noting that E. S. Hobbs stopped raising hogs after losing his herd to cholera. My grandfather’s participation in a committee that lobbied for farm legislation provided me with additional information about his political activities, and it illustrates ranchers’ difficulties in controlling animal diseases before the advent of effective vaccines. The 1941 Kingfisher County records could not provide me with details about individual members of my family, but they deepened my understanding of the material conditions that affected their lives—what they wore, how they traveled, and how they conducted their business. With this context, my own family stories are amplified beyond their Kingfisher County origins and can be read as reflections of the economic and social concerns of their historical period.

**Listening to Kingfisher County’s Archival Silences**

Kate Theimer has noted the “archival silences” that result when records are not represented in accessible, searchable digital collections.⁶¹ I discovered the significance of this silence when I looked for extant copies of the Kingfisher County Extension Service records. Frustrated by the awkwardness of reading microfilm and CD records, I examined Oklahoma State University’s catalog holdings of Extension Service records in hopes of reading them during a visit. Land-grant universities typically are repositories of Extension Service records, although their holdings may be incomplete. Oklahoma State does not hold the Kingfisher County Extension records, but the university archivist suggested that the local extension service office might have retained these documents. When I called the Kingfisher County Extension Service, officials there had no knowledge of an archive of their agents’ annual reports, but they helpfully encouraged me to contact an agent who recently had retired after 30 years of
service. When reached, the retired agent confirmed that the records are indeed extant. Subsequently, the current extension agent located this archive in the county courthouse basement and made them available to me. The Kingfisher County Extension records, beautifully readable carbon copies in excellent condition dating from 1930 to 1970, contain numerous original photographs, images that invariably are distorted by the microfilming progress. Uncataloged and uncurated, this silent archive reveals the voices, images, and aspirations of rural neighbors, of classmates’ grandparents, of long-ago residents whose names still resound for me from family stories. If, as George Eliot claimed, “our dead are never dead to us until we have forgotten them,” then the countrymen and women recorded in the Kingfisher County Extension Service archive remain vital and vigorous.

The Extension Service annual narratives will remain underused as a local history resource until they are made available as digital records, or until online finding aids alert researchers to the records’ scope and contents. Archivists could employ a number of strategies to make these records more accessible. One simple aid would be to identify individual counties within the annual reports by pointing to microfilm frame or CD file number. In addition, archivists could provide community users with a broad overview of coverage within individual counties by creating indices with the names of county agents and the communities they served. Most useful to genealogists, of course, would be access to the individuals mentioned in Extension Service records—the “list of names” cited by Duff and Johnson. Genealogists would be avid users of searchable digital records that would allow them to quickly locate individuals such as Zada Wiggins and Mrs. E. P. Kerby buried within the Extension Service’s annual narratives. While the resources and staff time required to provide this data might appear daunting, we as archivists might consider partnering with local genealogical groups and 4-H organizations, the natural constituents of these records, to crowdsource the reports and glean the names and keywords that are most useful to these researchers.

The records created over a century by a small army of county and home extension service agents are not simply static records of a government program; instead, they are portraits of those of communities and of their local character. The continued “archival silence” of the Extension Service narratives is a loss not only to researchers seeking detailed family histories, but also to rural communities facing twenty-first-century economic, climate, and cultural challenges. The Extension Service records reviewed in this article describe living room makeovers, dress revues, and pressure canning taking place in the teeth of the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl, and World War II. The collective message of this archive to local communities is an affirmation of their residents’ endurance and hard-won survival skills. Laura Millar observed that archives are tools for preserving individual and collective memory that help a society interpret and articulate its identity. As such, she argued, “records and archives must be managed so that they can be articulated, mediated, and used. The foundation of individual memory is that it is created, stored, and retrieved. . . . The foundation of archives, then, must be that they are records acquired, preserved and made available” (emphasis Millar). Before I spoke with the retired extension agent, he was perhaps the only county resident aware of the existence of the Kingfisher County Extension Service records. The records had likely not been used, retrieved, or made available to
county residents in living memory. Yet this archive, populated by friends, neighbors, and yes, even my grandfather, contains not just the county’s history, but also the materials of a rural community’s cumulative memory and self-definition. Cultures tell their stories as a means of survival, of preserving the details, and making meaning for their communities. What would happen if archivists could provide Extension Service narratives of Parker, Lipscomb, and Kingfisher Counties to residents challenged by falling crop prices and declining populations; to farmers facing climate change and seeking information about how early-day residents coped with the historic drought of the 1930s; or to relatives searching for family members, such as Reba Woodruff or E. S. Hobbs? Archivists providing access to these site-specific stories, which illustrate the challenges and successes of distinct places and times, could help researchers investigate their families’ rural roots. More significantly, perhaps, archivists facilitating access to this archive could provide a valuable resource for local rural communities: a depiction of their residents successfully coping with historic adversity and change.

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NOTES


2. For a history of Experiment Stations in Texas, see Robert L. Haney, *Milestones Marking Ten Decades of Research* (College Station, TX: Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, 1989).


FINDING YOUR FAMILY IN FEDERAL RECORD GROUP 33.6


14. See for example, Debra Reid’s *Reaping a Greater Harvest: African Americans, the Extension Service, and Rural Reform in Jim Crow Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), which examines the effects of the Extension Service’s segregation policies.

15. Subgroup 33.9, Still Pictures, which contains 29,600 images, is one indication of the size of the record group. See NARA, Guide to Federal Records, “Records of the Extension Service.”


27. The Oklahoma State University finding aid lists the county records held in its archives. The level of detail varies by county. See Collection 2011-050 Special Collections and University Archives, OSU Library, Oklahoma State University, Series 10: County Historical Records. Thanks to David Peters of Edmon Low Library for sharing this inventory of county records. The Cushing Manuscripts Collection Database at Texas A&M reflects a number of extension service records within individual collections, as well as partially processed records of the Historical Files of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, accessed May 12, 2015, http://archon.library.tamu.edu/index.php?p=collection/ controlcard&id=592&q=%22extension+service%22. Texas A&M also provides digital images from its Extension Service archive, “Toward a Better Living: African American Farming Communities in Mid-Century Texas,” accessed May 12, 2015, https://repository.tamu.edu/handle/1969.1/91004.

28. Overviews of the Federal Record Group include Richard Clow’s “United States Government Documents and Great Plains Agriculture: A Select Guide,” Government Publications Review. Part A 8, no. 6 (1981); and Baugh’s Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Extension Service. Also useful in understanding the Extension Service record group is the early account by Alfred True, long-time director of the Office of Experiment Stations of the Department of Agriculture. See True’s A History of Agricultural Extension Work in the United States, 1785–1923, Rasmussen’s Taking the University to the People. Seventy-Five Years of Cooperative Extension describes True’s involvement in the organization.


30. Family members reported that Reba Woodruff worked in Lipscomb County, Texas, in the 1940s. I found her employment record through Lipscomb County records digitized by the Portal to Texas History, “A History of Lipscomb County,” accessed May 6, 2015, http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth46830/m1/36/.


33. The National Archives and Records Administration “Publication Summary” pages for individual state Extension Service Annual Reports each contain a link to a PDF document listing record dates and microfilm roll numbers.


35. Extension Service, Annual Narrative and Statistical Reports of the Cooperative Extension Work Demonstration Programs, RG 33 (College Park, MD: National Archives and Records Administration Microfilm Series, Texas); T-890, Roll 70, Parker County, 1930, p. 2. Home demonstration records are paginated independently of county agent records within each county’s report.

36. Parker County, p. 3.

37. Former Texas A&M archivist Charles R. Schultz drew on Extension Service archives held at Texas A&M to provide descriptions and photographs of Texas women’s food preservation during this time. See “Keeping the Wolves from Their Doors and the Shirts on Their Backs: Rural Texas Women at Work, 1930–1960,” an unpublished paper read for the Women and Texas History Conference, Austin, Texas, October 4, 1990, and housed at the Briscoe Center for American History, Austin, Texas.


39. Parker County, p. 5.


41. Parker County, p. 28.

42. Parker County, p. 18.

43. Parker County, pp. 18–19.

44. Parker County, p. 19.

46. Extension Service, *Annual Narrative and Statistical Reports of the Cooperative Extension Work Demonstration Programs, RG 33* (College Park, MD: National Archives and Records Administration Microfilm Series, Texas); T-890, Roll 155, Lipscomb County, 1941, p. 8. This copy of the Lipscomb County record was legible without software enhancement.
47. Lipscomb County, p. 12.
49. Lipscomb County, p. 12.
50. Lipscomb County, p. 6.
52. Lipscomb County, p. 10.
53. Lipscomb County, p. 9.
54. Extension Service records on individual microfilm rolls or CDs are available from NARA for $125 each.
56. Kingfisher County, p. 43.
57. Kingfisher County, p. 56.
59. This anecdote from Sidney Hobbs interview with author, March 11, 2014.
60. Kingfisher County, p. 63.
62. The staff of the Kingfisher County OSU Extension office, including extension educators Zach Meyer and Megan Meyer, graciously answered the author’s queries and made archival materials available for review. Former Kingfisher County extension agent Keith Bovers is the county’s invaluable source of institutional knowledge. The writer gives grateful thanks for the assistance provided by all the Kingfisher County Extension Service staff.
63. Individual carbon copies often contain handwritten notations indicating the date when originals were mailed to the Washington, DC, office. Notations found on these carbon copies, such as “2 of 4,” also can indicate the number of documents originally created by the county agents.
66. Duff and Johnson, “Where Is the List with All the Names?”