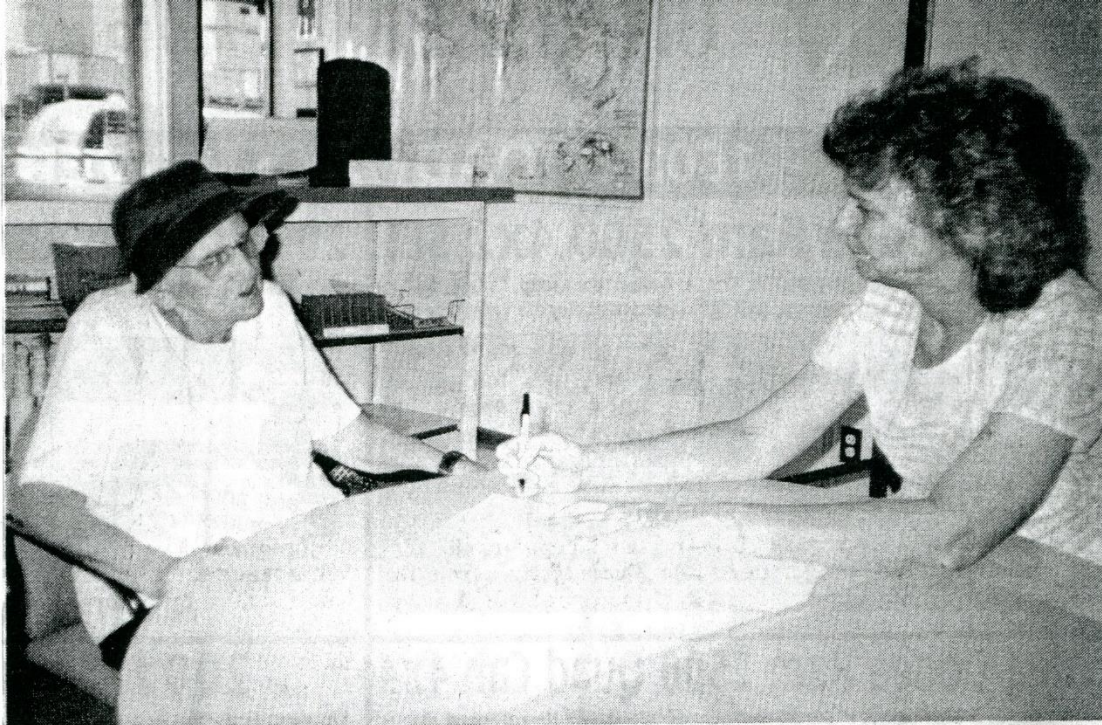


Maxine (Cox) Barksdale share memories in interview with local newspaper



Maxine with her parents, William J. Cox and Hallie (Cannon) Cox



Adorned in one of her trademark hats, Maxine Barksdale recounts her experiences of as a lifelong farm resident. Interviewing Barksdale is Gaye Butler, a guidance counselor from Sandoval school district. Butler was interviewing Barksdale as part of a two-week practicum she participated in earlier this summer at the *Times-Commoner*. (Staff photo by Shae Moseley)

NEIGHBORS UNDERSTOOD GOLDEN RULE

By GAYE BUTLER

Special Assignment Staff Writer

Maxine Cox was born in 1915 to William J. and Hallie Cannon Cox at their small farm in Iuka township.

At this time, Mr. and Mrs. Cox lived on 40 acres and owned an additional 40 acres. They also rented other acreage. Some of this land was untillable since there were woods and creeks.

Instead of using a tractor, Mr. Cox walked behind a plow pulled by a team of horses. The plow, a one-bottom plow, dug only one furrow at a time. Disking was done using a three-horse team.

The binder, pulled by three or four horses or mules, cut hay, wheat, and oats which were then left in the field with string tied around the bundles and stacked up into shocks. Sometimes they were hauled to the barn and stacked. This job was very hot

and arduous, much like it can be today.

Maxine's grandfather, Perry Cox, had farmed with a span of mules. (Maxine Barksdale explained that farmers used a *team* of horses, but a *span* of mules.) Both of these terms refer to a pair of animals.

At threshing time, Frank Clark traveled through the area with his steam-powered threshing machine and crew who worked for farmers.

Each wife was responsible for providing a "bed and breakfast" for the threshing crew. Because there would be several men, all of them dirty from threshing and hot from extreme temperatures, lodging often consisted of pallets in the yard.

It was necessary to serve great amounts of food to feed the threshers. Mrs. Cox had access to a large variety of food that she had canned. Cherries, gooseberries, strawberries, apples,

wild blackberries, and garden vegetables were part of her menus.

Very little beef was served, because cattle were too expensive to slaughter. However, threshing time might find beef and noodles on the table as a special meal for the farm workers.

Pork, on the other hand, was a more common staple in the kitchen. Hams, shoulders, and bacon were hung in the smoke-house and consumed all year. The remainder of the pig was browned and cold-packed, which meant that the canned meat was boiled for three to four hours.

Tea and lemonade, made from real lemons, were made in three gallon buckets to serve to the workers. Sometimes this amount was not enough and had to be replenished.

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The farm's own cream and butter that had been hanging from a rope in the well to cool was pulled up to serve.

Long tables were loaded to serve as many as possible at one sitting. Sometimes it was necessary to feed a second group of workers after the first had finished. Farm wives often teamed up to provide and serve food, and then clean up after the men had eaten.

The cooking process was not as lengthy as cooks of today might think, due to the fact that canned and smoked meat and canned vegetables could be ready within about 20 minutes because industrious cooks had done the lengthy preparation weeks or months before the meal.

Leftover food was not refrigerated after meals, unless there was an icebox. Before 1926, the Cox family traveled to town to

THRASHING TIME FILLED WITH UNIQUE TRADITIONS

buy ice by the chunk and haul it home in a blanket. After that time, it was bought from a delivery wagon that came to the house. During 1926, Mrs. Barksdale remembers watching the current Highway 50 being changed from a one-lane dirt road to a concrete two-lane highway, thus becoming the first two-lane in the area!

After a meal, the bowls of food were covered with inverted clean plates and then covered with table spreads. The term *table spread* described the tablecloth that went over the food, while the one under the food was referred to as a *tablecloth*. Food was left out until the next meal, when it was brought to a full rolling boil and served again.

Entertainment was simple on the farm. A rocking chair in the middle of the room with straight chairs around the perimeter set the stage for spelling bees. The rocking chair belonged to the

person who was the champion speller at the time. However, a misspelled word caused the champion to lose the seat of honor to the next person.

Music parties, another form of entertainment, took place on Saturday evenings. Each guest brought an instrument if he or she had one. Fiddles, guitars, mandolins, banjos, and harmonicas were among the entertainments.

Pound parties provided the opportunity for each guest to bring a "pound," really just an amount appropriate to serve several people, to the home of the person who volunteered to host the party.

Maxine Barksdale taught at Young's School, five miles east of Iuka, in 1935-36. It was during this time that the first gravel road in Iuka township came into being.

On June 30, 1940, 60 years ago this year, Maxine Cox left the Iuka township farm to marry H. Jack Barksdale and live on an Alma Township farm with Dum's Creek running through it. The farm had been contracted in advance of Barksdales' wedding, but they did not actually own it until the next day when the paperwork was signed. As of 2000, she proudly notes that she has lived her entire 85 years on two farms.

Before he married, H. Jack Barksdale and his brother worked on the Plambeck farm in Iowa. When the Plambecks bought a newer piece of equipment, the Barksdale brothers acquired their two-bottom plow, which could plow two furrows at once. They hauled the disassembled plow back to Marion County in a Chevrolet. There was some excitement because the farmer could now sit on the back of the plow while the horses pulled it. No more walking behind!

The Barksdales' first tractor was a 1941 model bought in 1943 or 1944.

Their first home was a log cabin that had been built in the 1830s by the Burns family. Electricity was not installed

until 1942. The home had three rooms downstairs and two rooms upstairs. Maxine remarked that the cabin was so crooked that curtains had to be hemmed unevenly in order to line up with the windows. This cabin has since been moved to be used as part of a museum in the town of Oakland, Illinois.

In order to help produce income when she first married, Maxine used her past experience and training. Her farm experience was put to use when she milked cows. Her 1937 bachelor's degree in music helped when she gave private music lessons. However, being involved in both pursuits was a challenge because hands swollen from milking cows were difficult to use for playing the piano!

Maxine spoke with pride concerning the rewording of the *Illinois State Constitution* during the 1960s. The Farm Bureau, who picked some of the committee members to work on this project, chose Maxine to be a part of this process. A great deal of work was done, and the committee proved to be invaluable since much of their input became a part of the *Constitution*.

The Barksdale family farming tradition continues with son Allen and his family, who live on the same farm where his mother has lived for 60 years.

Maxine's daughter, Janet Harmon, still owns some of the land that belonged to her great-grandfather, Perry Cox, in 1891.

Maxine Cox Barksdale noted that, except perhaps during the oil boom, farming has always been the biggest industry in Marion County.

MAXINE LOVES MUSIC,
LOVES TO PLAY + SING.
AT OMEGA SCHOOL WE
HAD AN EVENING OF MUSIC
ALL PRESENTED BY THE COX
FAMILY, ONCE A MONTH.

SHE STILL SINGS, AND SOMETIMES PLAYS THE PIANO,
AT THE OMEGAS.