A 21st Century Pioneer Woman

By Martha Bigham

I recently met a “young” woman of 92 from the small town of Oakwood on the banks of the Auglaize River in the southwest part of Paulding County.

Her life story is filled with determination, adventure, hard work, tenacity and originality.

**The Early Years**

Helen Maddock was born in 1926 and was raised until the age of six in Oakwood, Ohio.

Her father, Alvin Maddock, worked for the Western Union Telegraph Company, building telegraph lines along the railroads, but was laid off during the Depression.

He liked farming so he made a down payment on a 70-acre farm just south of town.

However, after just six-months Western Union called him back to work.

As a result her mother, Doris, took care of the family farm with the help of Helen.

According to Helen, “My two sisters weren’t very interested in tending the animals and doing the outdoors chores.”

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This is the barn that housed the animals Helen helped her mother take care of while her dad was on the road with his job with Western Union. Helen recalled that the barn was painted red.

In 1929, a young Helen Maddock poses with her older and younger sister. Helen is pictured on the right. Her younger sister, Iris (Maddock) Essex, is in the middle and her older sister, Barbra (Maddock) McCullough, is on the left.

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- castrate baby pigs and dock lambs’ tails
- plant and tend a garden
- harness and drive a team of horses
- back up a car and trailer, and more.

She loved the outdoors and wasn’t afraid of hard work.

“We didn’t have electricity or indoor plumbing in our house until 1937.

“We used a hand-cranked milk separator to get the cream ready to be sold.

“Eventually, we just sold whole milk.”

Helen was given a Jersey heifer of her own that she named Magnolia or Maggie for short. Maggie freshened when Helen was in the seventh grade, so Helen began a new business venture selling the milk.

However, Helen had to do other chores to compensate for the costs of feeding Maggie.

She said, “My father would come home on the weekends, traveling by train from Buffalo, Chicago and other places.

“He spent many hours aboard trains just to be able to spend a few hours on Saturday evening and Sunday morning with the family, as well as fixing any problems that occurred while he was gone.”

The year Helen became a senior in high school, the family sold the livestock, packed up their belongings and moved to Chicago because of her father’s job promotion.

She remembered how difficult it was to transition from a small, rural high school to a big city.

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Helen said she was probably one of a very few young women in that day to milk a sow to determine how much antibiotic was in the milk. This she did for her Master Degree Thesis.

In the 1940s during World War II, Helen played slow-pitch softball in the Chicago Parks League. Her Palmer Park team won the Chicago City Park Championship.

Helen worked on some animal research at Iowa State University as a graduate student during the early 1950s.

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Helen graduated fourth in her class and obtained a scholarship to the Illinois Institute of Technology to major in Chemistry.

After High School

During the summer, after she graduated, Helen was offered a job at the Chicago Copper and Chemical Company in Blue Island, Illinois, just a short train ride from her Chicago home.

Definitely, Helen was a pioneer of her day because she was the first woman hired by the company.

“It was during World War II and after I was hired to work there, the company built a ladies room at the plant just for me and for a woman who was later employed as the secretary.”

According to Helen’s niece, Patricia Essex, it was during this time that Helen had to “deal with sexual harassment and environmental hazards (unheralded in those days),” and that’s when she decided she didn’t want to be a chemist after all.

However, she was asked to stay an extra year at the plant because their only chemist had quit.

“‘So, I continued doing the chemical quality control work for 50¢ an hour, with time and a half on Saturdays.’

“I gave up my scholarship for Illinois Institute of Technology and decided I would have enough savings to attend a state university to study animal science (at that time called animal husbandry) instead of pursuing a career as a chemist.’”

While working at the plant, Helen joined a women’s softball team at Palmer Park to play slow-pitch softball.

“My team played the opening game under the lights before a semi-pro, fast-pitch women’s team, and we won the Chicago...
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City Park Championship one year!

Off To Iowa State
In the fall of 1945, Helen was off to Ames, Iowa to attended Iowa State College (now University), majoring in Animal Husbandry, a career very few women pursued.

Her parents paid her room and board but she paid all her other expenses. The first two summers she went back home to Chicago, worked as a waitress on the morning shift in restaurants in the Chicago Loop just so she could play softball with the Palmer Park team.

Her third summer she worked in Ames, summarizing research for a swine nutrition professor. She was the only woman to graduate in 1949 with a Bachelor of Science in Animal Husbandry.

She was employed, full time, by the Iowa Agricultural Experiment Station doing research on swine nutrition and went on to obtain her Masters Degree in 1952.

Did you ever milk a sow? To obtain data for her Master’s thesis, Helen did!! Her niece shared, “At that time in our history, very few women sought advanced degrees much less pursued them in agricultural fields.”

A Cutting-Edge Career
In the spring of 1953, Helen was hired by the American Cyanamid Company and worked for them for 33 years until she retired in 1986.

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After that she served as a consultant with them for five years.

When she was hired, the company’s offices were on the 72nd floor of 30 Rockefeller Plaza in New York City – another major transition for Helen.

Her new position was to promote the sales of animal health and feed additive products for livestock. “A major part of my job was translating research into understandable language for salesmen, feed manufacturers and livestock producers,” she explained.

“I worked with advertising agency writers who had never stepped foot on a farm.” She then lived in several locations in New Jersey.

When Helen lived in Fort Lee, New Jersey, in a fifth-floor apartment overlooking Manhattan, she decided to join the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) so

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She noted, “This was in the late 1950’s long before rock climbing became a popular sport with a climbing wall in every gym, plus it was mostly a man’s sport.”

In 1957, Cyanamid purchased 600 acres of ground and started building a research facility near Princeton, New Jersey. Helen moved to Princeton and loved the area. Plus it was an easy drive or train trip to New York City and Philadelphia where she visited frequently for business or pleasure.

“We had season tickets to the New York City Opera for several years until the parking cost more than the opera ticket.

“Eventually, I moved to a six-acre wooded property in Hopewell Township, New Jersey near Princeton.”

And if she didn’t already have enough to keep her busy, she started a side business selling firewood that she cut and split from the trees on the property.

Travels

While being employed by American Cyanamid Company, Helen had the opportunity of traveling throughout the United States and around the world. She traveled to: Yugoslavia, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, England and Scotland. She also traveled to a number of wonderful places for her vacations.

With a friend, she joined the English Wanders for a three week-long hiking vacation in different parts of England.

“I especially liked the Cotswold region.

“After the week of hiking, we toured a number of famous gardens, castles and the like on our own – my friend’s passion.”

One year Helen and two friends backpacked, hiked, camped and using public transportation, toured Scotland.

In 1976, she even took a two-week Safari to Kenya and Tanzania in east Africa.

Back in the States Helen joined AMC members on camping trips to several National Parks – Big Bend, Glacier and Alaska – plus an AMC rafting trip.

One of her most exciting rafting trips was a 12-day trip on the Colorado River through the entire length of the Grand Canyon.

She says “I really enjoyed the Class 5 rapids, they were really fun.”

In 1963, Helen and two AMC friends, climbed the nearly 14,000-foot Grand Teton Mountain in Wyoming.

Some years later, with a guided group, climbed to the hut at

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As a part of Twin Oaks United Methodist Church, she enjoyed sorting potatoes with her fellow church members for a mission in Toledo.

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Helen hoeing weeds in the flower bed she planted in the Oakwood Community Park as part of her Master Gardeners volunteer program.

State University’s Plaza of Heroines, Helen’s professional activities were many and diverse.

Throughout her 38 years in the American Society of Animal Science (ASAS), she was admired by her peers and was chosen as an Honorary Fellow of the ASAS in 1987, she was the first woman to be so honored.

Some of the accomplishments that made her eligible for such an honor were:
• The first woman to be a member of the American Feed Manufacturers Association (AFMA) Nutrition Council
• Served as Chair of the AFMA Swine Research Committee and was on the Executive Committee
• Worked with the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) in establishing the National Pork Queen scholarship program.

Her creative use of Jasper, the 1969 International Grand Champion barrow, in slides, a movie, a booklet and a model helped promote the ideal market hog.

Helen was also on the Board of Directors of the Eastern Chapter of the National Agricultural-Marketing Association, and on the editorial advisory board of AGRIMARKETING magazine.

Corgi

Another interest of Helen’s was being involved with the Pembroke Welsh Corgi Club of the Garden State (New Jersey).

“Although I didn’t own a Corgi, a friend did and was President of the Club for several years.

“I tagged along to the various shows and soon became involved helping with the set up, helping to run the obedience and agility trials, and tearing down when the days were done.”

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“My Aunt Helen was an inspiration to me personally as well as to my friends.

“During different facets of my life, she has been a role model.

“When I was young, I realized how much my aunt had accomplished, due to hard work and common sense.”

It’s very clear education and hard work are important to this 92-year old.

She has also helped several of her relatives and a couple of her friends finance their college educations, as well as establishing Scholarships at three universities.

She continues to encourage young people and adults to be the best they can be through listening, observing and learning as much as they can.

Knocked Down, But Not Out

In 2001, after exploratory surgery, Helen was diagnosed with inoperable endometrial cancer and was given 6 to 12 months to live even with chemotherapy.

She didn’t let this get her down, she did what she had to do to keep living life to its fullest. “And I’m still here,” she noted, adding, “I am one lucky gal.”

Helen says, “I don’t want to make a big deal about being a cancer survivor, I would rather keep positive about the life I’ve been given and to live it as fully as I can.

“Without modern science and the skills of doctors, I probably wouldn’t be here.”

She continues to enjoy life and adventure and mentioned that at age of 87 she jumped out of an airplane. “Yes, skydiving in Florida, for the first and last time – it was way too exciting for this old girl!”

Community Service

Today, Helen keeps busy in her local community.

In 2009, she moved back into the house her mother had built in 1960 on the farm.

Helen soon joined the Oakwood Arbor of The Gleaner Life Insurance Society, which is a fraternal organization that gives back to communities through putting profits back into local arbor.

She was elected Vice President and initiated programs for the public on historical sites in Brown Township including the 1812 Fort Brown and the Indian Reservation at Charloe.

She also initiated a Water Safety Program in cooperation with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

She has been an OSU Extension/Paulding County Master Gardener Volunteer since 2012, and really enjoys the opportunity to help plant trees and flowers, to beautify the Oakwood Park and Post Office, and the Fort Brown site.

Helen is an active member of the Twin Oaks United Methodist Church in Oakwood.

She thrives on being a vital part of her community and in the lives of her family.

In 2013, she was honored by being selected to be the Grand Marshall of the Oakwood Homecoming Parade.

She is full of life and willing to work wherever she is needed. Helen is one special woman!

Martha J. Bigham lives in Van Wert, Ohio and is active in her home church’s ministries.

She enjoys collecting and visiting lighthouses, reading, crafting and writing for Farmland News.

READER RECIPES

Crazy Cake
1 cup sugar
1-1/4 cups flour
1 scant cup brown sugar
1 teaspoon salt
1 egg
1 can fruit cocktail and juice
Crumb Topping:
1/4 cup brown sugar
1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
Chopped nuts

Combine ingredients in a bowl and mix together.

Depending on the amount of batter, pour into a square or rectangle baking pan.

Mix toppings together; sprinkle on top.

Bake at 350 degrees for 40 to 50 minutes.

May be served with whipped topping.

Virginia Smith
Manasass, Virginia

Taco Twist Soup
1-lb. lean ground beef or ground turkey
1 medium onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced, optional
2 teaspoons chili powder
1 teaspoon ground cumin
3 cups beef broth
1-1/2 cups Picante sauce
14-1/2 oz. can diced tomatoes in juice
1 cup uncooked rotini pasta
1 small green pepper, chopped
Shredded reduced or no-fat cheddar cheese

Oven baked tortilla chips

In large saucepan, brown meat with onion and garlic; drain.

Sprinkle chili powder and cumin over meat; cook and stir 30 seconds.

Add remaining ingredients; except cheese and chips.

Bring to a boil, stirring frequently.

Reduce heat, cover and simmer 10 minutes or until pasta is tender, stirring occasionally.

Ladle into bowls; top with cheese.

Serve with chips and additional Picante sauce.

Makes about (8) 1-cup servings.

Georgia Craddock
Napa, California