

Nan Snider's Memories of Working on the Farm, Arkansas

As told by Buffalo Island Central EAST Students

Stories YES

Museum on Main Street

Buffalo Island, Arkansas



Nan Snider shares what it was like to pick cotton growing up in Buffalo Island, Arkansas, including what people wore. This story is connected to Buffalo Island Central EAST's story map [From Swamp to Farmland](#) about the the history of agriculture in the area.

Story Narrative:

Nan Snider (00:04): Okay. We would start early in the morning. We'd get up and eat a big breakfast, and we'd go get our clothes on, and get ready to go to the field. We would have a shirt on made of cotton. Everything was cotton. And we'd put it up real high so we wouldn't get our neck brown when we was out in the field. And we would wear a bonnet on our head. It was important that we take care of our skin. We'd wear gloves when we picked cotton, so our hands wouldn't get sunburn, but we cut the fingers out so the tips would show.

Nan Snider (00:37): When we picked cotton, we kept our weights on this little tablet, stick it in our pocket. The little pencil was so tiny, but we'd use it until it just ran out. The children picked right alongside with the adults. The children would... They're just creepy crawlers. They'd crawl along next to mom, pick cotton, and put it on her sack. And so that was just a means of doing it.

Nan Snider (01:03): We'd take a hankie with us in case we needed to blow our nose. We took socks. We wore them, and they were mended on the toes usually. Women mended socks if they got a hole in them. They didn't throw them away. We just took some basic shoes, if they got a hole in them, they'd mend them with sometimes chicken wire, cardboard, and they'd just keep wearing them. We'd wear our jeans. Girls wore jeans, but they had to wear boys' jeans, and use a belt or a rope or something to tie them on them because they didn't go in at the waist.

Nan Snider (01:38): The children, as they got bigger would wear... They would pick cotton in a little, maybe a corn sack. Mama would carry... She would tie... Well, actually, she sewed on a little strap, and they would, well, maybe until about five or six, they'd use that. They get a little bigger, they would put a strap on a 'to sack, or a potato sack, and they would pick in that. And then finally, when they got big enough, they had their own pick sack.

Nan Snider (02:08): Women had a seven-and-a-half-foot sack, men had a nine-foot. We would put it on. I thought all women really looked good in a pick sack. It was very flattering. And we would pick cotton and put it in until it got so full. We could tell our sacks apart, which were important, because we would write our name on them. We would write our names on them with poke berries. And I had Nan Etta Harrell. I would do that in calligraphy, like I thought someone out in the field would really be looking at it. And a cotton, green cotton ball at the end with a wire so that we went up to the wagon, we could hook it onto the scales that hung on the wagon, and it would pull down, and it would tell you how you weigh.

Nan Snider (02:59): So my goal for the morning was to make 76 pounds, my first weigh-in, because it got lighter as the day went on because my sack was wet in the morning from walking through the field. And so by the end of the day, if I could make 300, I get \$9. And I just thought I was so rich, and I would dream of the things that I could order from the Sears Roebuck Catalogue. And I had just almost all the pages memorized. My favorite pages were the men's underwear pages, I think, but we just loved all the things we could get through here, our dresses, our blouses, makeup, just anything. And they'd bring it out to our house on the mailbox, hang it on the mailbox. We'd see it hanging there we'd know our order had came in. So we had a way of making money.

Nan Snider (03:45): It was enjoyable. We made a lot of friends. It was just a way of life. Then we had to buy our own books and our own supplies for school and everything because school struggled. And I went to a children's school, and so I'd make enough

money to my books and things starting back to school. We went split terms. We got out in time to chop cotton, went back to school in the hot months of the year like July, August, for two months, then we got out to pick cotton, then we'd go back. So we had split term school, and everything was geared around cotton. And today, it's pretty important too.

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