



Country Women Cope with Hard Times: A Collection of Oral Histories (Women's Diaries and Letters of the South)

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"It was hard times," French Carpenter Clark recalls, a sentiment unanimously echoed by the sixteen other women who talk about their lives in *Country Women Cope with Hard Times*. Born between 1890 and 1940 in eastern Tennessee and western South Carolina, these women grew up on farms, in labor camps, and in remote towns during an era when the region's agricultural system changed dramatically. As daughters and wives, they milked cows, raised livestock, planted and harvested crops, worked in textile mills, sold butter and eggs, preserved food, made cloth, sewed clothes, and practiced remarkable resourcefulness. Their recollections paint a vivid picture of rural life in the first half of the twentieth century for a class of women underrepresented in historical accounts.

Through her edited interviews with these women, Melissa Walker provides firsthand descriptions of the influence of modernization on ordinary people struggling through the agricultural depression of the 1920s and 1930s and its aftermath. Their oral histories make plain the challenges such women faced and the self-sacrificing ways they found to confront hardship. While the women detail the difficulties of their existence—the drought years, early freezes, low crop prices, and tenant farming—they also recall the good times and the neighborly assistance of well-developed mutual aid networks, of which women were the primary participants.

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