



Background

Earliest US time diary evidence in current use dates from 1965. USDA, under the *Purnell Act* made a major diary study (of farm, town and college women) in the 1920s and early 1930s. This material is currently represented in the time-use literature only through the sparse tabular evidence published in the 1930s. It provides unique potential to explore daily life before the diffusion of modern domestic equipment.

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United States Department of Agriculture
Bureau of Home Economics
Washington, D. C.

DAILY TIME RECORD OF HOMEMAKER

Name Mrs. Edward H. Damon
Address Skellytown
Texas
Day of week Saturday
Date April 26, 1930

	Lodging	At meals (including lunches put up)		
		Breakfast	Dinner	Lunch or supper
Family	2	2	2	2
Guests				
Boarders and roomers				
Household help				
Farm help				
TOTAL	2	2	2	2

TIME RECORD FROM MIDNIGHT TO MIDNIGHT

Description of activities	Time of stopping	Time spent Hrs Min	Description of activities	Time of stopping	Time spent Hrs Min
Slept	7:35	7 35	Prepared dinner	6:40	10
Dressed	7:50	15	Ate dinner	7:10	30
Went to town	7:55	5	Went to city	7:45	35
Bought bread etc	8:00	5	Bought groceries	8:05	20
Returned home	8:05	5	Went to movie	9:50	1 45
Prepared husband's lunch	8:30	25	Returned home	10:20	30
Prepared breakfast	8:50	20	Prepared iced drink	10:30	10 5
Ate breakfast	9:10	20	Washed dinner dishes	10:40	10
Washed dishes	9:20	10	Got ready for bed	11:00	20
Took down and washed light globes	9:45	25	Slept	12:00	1
Made beds (changed sheets)	10:15	30			
Checked house accounts	10:25	10			
Dusted and swept house	12:20	1 55			
Read newspaper	12:30	10			
Prepared laundry	12:50	20			
Put pajamas to soak	12:55	5			
Prepared lunch	1:15	20			
Ate lunch	1:30	15			
Washed dishes	1:35	5			
Washed out pajamas	1:45	10			
Went for mail	1:50	5			
Returned home	1:55	5			
Read mail	2:15	20			
Read news magazine	3:20	1 05			
Sewed	4:20	1			
Friend called	5:20	1			
Prepared tea	5:30	10 5			
Cleared away and washed tea things	5:45	15			
Prepared vegetables	5:55	10			
Sewed	6:30	35			

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Research objectives:

1. Recovering original material: Around 1500 women were surveyed. The materials so far located includes survey information, mostly incomplete, for 675 of these. Two sorts of primary data: diary records, and a supplementary questionnaire. Also researcher-produced individual-level diary "summary" sheets giving weekly aggregate times in activities for individual home-makers, coded to a 60-category activity schema, plus weekly totals of help in various specific household tasks.

2. Database for statistical analysis: Aggregate activity totals, and available supplementary information coded directly into SPSS or STATA files. Sequence data files from the own-words diaries coded compatibly with date from 1965 onward). Database will be made freely available to the research community.

3. Single day physical activity comparisons: Physical activity includes a great deal more than sport and recreational exercise. Walking, and other travel activities, some paid employment, many domestic production and caring activities also have substantial physiological consequences. So changes in, among others, occupational employment patterns and in domestic technology and materials can affect physical activity and hence health outcomes. Tudor-Locke has provided a comprehensive set of exercise-level ratings for each element in the *ATUS* activity schema. The *Purnell Study* will allow us to compare the physiological consequences of women's activity patterns in the 1920s and 1930s with single day diary data in the *ATUS*.

4. Seven-day physical activity comparisons: Exercise patterns vary day by day, whereas the medical outcomes turn on the individual's pattern of exercise *through the week (or longer)*. 7-day collection method of the 1920s/30s data allow estimation of activity *distributions*. 7-day survey (for 1998-2001, collected for the Sloan Foundation at the University of Maryland: Robinson, 2006) provides a comparator for modern US women's weekly exercise levels.

Example Diary

Mrs Edward Damon provides a representative example of the College women's diaries. The USDA researchers required seven consecutive days of diary recording. Overleaf from each day sheet is a record of both unpaid and paid domestic work time contributed by household members and others. A separate questionnaire asks about household composition, characteristics, appliances and other equipment, as well as feedback on the performance of the diary instrument,

5 Historical change in women's work: Published estimates of women's work time estimates based on the 1920s-30s materials have been used to cast doubt on the labor-saving effect of domestic electrical equipment. We will use the new information on domestic help contained in the original surveys to revisit this controversy.

Policy Relevance

Obesity and exercise: a missing link in the chain of explanation of the obesity epidemic; the *hypothesis of historically declining physical activity levels*. Purnell act material almost doubles the historical coverage of exercise from diary materials.

Women's unpaid work: Women's disproportionate responsibility for domestic labor is a key source of female disadvantage in the labor market. Previous research findings from tabulations in published reports on the *Purnell Act* studies imply domestic work time actually *increased* from the 1920s-1960s. This project attempts to disentangle the historical effects of increased domestic equipment and of reduced "outsourcing" (use of paid domestic labor) in the home.

Preliminary finding

(on basis of aggregate time use for 199 farm women):

Domestic help is associated, contrary to our expectations, with **extra** domestic work for farm women. We suspect that a different result will emerge once we enter the evidence for the town and college samples.

Women's housework time (mins/day) by specific help received
("no help" = < 10 mins/day)

	prepare meals	clear meals	laundry etc	shopping etc	House work					
	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N				
all	124	199	62	199	93	199	21	199	81	199
no help	125	148	65	140	90	173	21	189	81	130
some help	118	51	56	59	109	26	23	10	82	69