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Interview with Mary Schlariet

Molly McNamara

Mary Schlariet

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Researcher's Name: Molly McNamara
Event: Interview with Mary Schlariet
Place: Her home at 4 Ash in Mount Vernon
Co-workers present: none

Molly McNamara: This is Molly McNamara interviewing Mary Schlariet on February... is it...

Mary Schlariet: Sixteenth.

MM: sixteenth at eight PM. Could you explain the role that you played in the fair last year?

MS: I was a co-coordinator for the arts and crafts division of fair, which includes arts and crafts things and the culinary.

MM: Okay, and what kind of arts and crafts?

MS: We have all kinds of entrees. We have sewing and...we've added some things. We have tried to change as crafters change. Like we added scrapbooking and stamp art as a thing last year. Some people do cross-stitch. Rugs, pillows, there's all kinds of things that fall under arts and crafts. We've had some people do caned chairs even. Woodworking. We've had a couple scrollsaw items. So there's all different kinds of things that fall into arts and crafts.

MM: And what kinds of things do people enter for the culinary arts?

MS: For the culinary arts we have, we also have a pretty wide selection in terms of variety. We have pies, and cakes, cookies, gourmet desserts, muffins, all kinds of breads. You have white breads, you have wheat breads, you have the different kinds of rolls. And then we also have a category that's just bake-it-with-lard. We have a few people that, that enter that every year as well. We also have just a cake-decorating section so people can just decorate on styrafoam forms and then enter those."

MM: What do people bake for the bake-it-with-lard?

MS: They can bake breads and cakes and cookies. I think that's those are the...and pies, I forgot pies. Pies is a big category, a big overall category.

MM: How did you become involved in that role.

MS: Accidentally-no. [She laughs]. I was a co-chair, a friend of a friend, you know that's kind of how you recruit when you get people to help out. Several years ago one of my friends was a co-chair and she moved away and so a couple of us other people got recruited into it. And I've been about four years now as a co-chair, so.

MM: Okay. How many of you co-chair?

MS: Crystal Rardin and I right now are co-chairing it. Lot of times there's three, three people. Helen Rosser [sp?] will be doing all the keyboarding, all the computer work that needs to be done. The one year that I co-chaired it, the gal that I was co-chairing with who was the computer expert had a baby just before the fair. Came a little early, and I had to do all of the computer stuff as well as be out there during the day. I mean, it was awful. It's a lot, a lot more work than people realize when you think about the inputting of all the awards and making sure they get the right premium and everything. It's quite a, it's quite an effort to get it all done. But Helen Rosser has done the computer work the last year, and she's gonna do that again this year.

MM: Okay. What exactly do you do in your role?

MS: In my role we have, I have to...we go through and we decide by looking at past entries if there are categories that need to be deleted or based on people's comments if there are things that need to be added or changed. So as, actually, as a committee of three we usually work and talk about those things. And then we get the, we get all the information ready for the fair book. That stuff all had to be done ahead of time. In fact, that has to be to them by the end of this month right now for this year. And then when it comes close to the time that the people have to start making their entries to the fair, we try to publicize, you know, that we want entries and that entries need to be in by a certain date by way of posters or radio announcements or things like that. Excuse me. And then we have to secure people to help us because the exhibits come in before fair...the arts and crafts things. The culinary come on in during the fair, but you still have to have more people there to work even the day that like culinary comes in, so we kind of coordinate all that. We have to get the judges and be there for the judging. And have people to help them for that as well. And then we make sure that our building has at least one person there the whole time for security, so that never when the building is open, there is always somebody from the arts and crafts who's watching things in the building even though it's...things are still pretty much locked up, but behind, you know like gates, but we still have somebody in there all the time. And that's part of our job to make sure that they do that.

MM: So how, how long of a process are you working on this?

MS: We, we started, this year we started over Christmas vacation we started looking. We usually try to debrief shortly after fair, so like in early fall. And then we started working on next year, this year's fair book last year. We started in December working on that. We have to get all the sponsors too for the best of shows. I forgot about that. And there's all those little things that you don't remember sometimes until you go through your list and see what it all is you have to do. And then now we're finalizing the fair board book. When it comes out, then we'll have people that'll be calling us, you know, to ask us questions and things like that. The bulk of our work is done I guess from like June. June 'til right after fair is when we're the busiest with doing things.

MM: What...could you explain what you meant by debriefing about the fair?

MS: What we would do is go th...as I said before, we usually have at least one person sitting down there. A lot of times people have comments, or like during the judging process, or even when people pick up their exhibits or bring them, there are a lot of comments relative to the categories and all that kind of stuff. So when we debrief, we're going through and looking at those comments, the things that people have just given us feedback about.

MM: Do they give them verbally, or are there like comment cards?

MS: Actually we've never done comment cards, and we've thought about that at different times. In fact we thought about a questionnaire last year. Most of the polling or the information we've gotten just verbally, although I think a questionnaire is a probably a wonderful way to, to secure good feedback about things. We've not taken the time to do that. If people are upset they always tell you anyway. It's the good things that you don't get the comments on unless you actually seek them by a, by way of a questionnaire or whatever.

MM: How do individuals enter the fair?

MS: There's a booklet, a big fair booklet, that comes out, and it lists all the categories of all the different ways that they can enter. And then they mail that back in with their entries. And it costs fifty cents, I mean, so some of it in terms of helps pay for the prizes, the awards that are given later. And for each entry they have, they have to pay fifty cents. Normally people do that through the mail. They just send it out to the fair office. But they can also hand do it after the fair board opens. Deadline is usually the Friday before we accept the entries, so it's usually the second week in July is our deadline. And that's confusing because that's the deadline for culinary also, and culinary we don't even take in until during fair. So sometimes people, especially if they haven't entered before, get confused about that. They don't understand that they have to enter ahead of time so that we have their names and we can make plans for how many things we're gonna have. And it's always a disappointment. You always have at least one person who comes without their entry and stuff and you hate to, you hate to turn 'em away, but at the same time if you start letting that happen and people know that you're doing that it can cause problems later. We're usually pretty strict about not accepting them even though you feel bad. You try to explain to them so they'll know how to do it the next year anyway.

MM: How many items do people generally enter?

MS: It varies significantly. You have some people that only bring one thing. Then you have other people that. I mean, we have a couple ladies that are in the canned goods bring something for every category. And in the baking, in the culinary probably...people have specialties, you know, so there are some people who tend to bake more pies, or there are some people that tend to bake all a lot of the breads and the muffin kinds of

things. And there are some people that do it all. Candy was one of the areas that I had forgotten about in the culinary that we enter and we have some people who like enter the canned goods. They'll enter that part, and then they also enter the culinary, and they'll have, they'll have something in every category. And you, they must of, I mean you can't imagine what time they had to have gotten up in the morning to get all that baked and get it delivered by noon that day because that's how late we, we accept baked goods until noon. I think we're going to change that this year. We're going to open earlier, an hour earlier, and, and close an hour earlier. So it's going to be like eight to eleven instead of nine to just to kind a...we always have people waiting for us when we get there in the morning, especially on the culinary day, people that want to get their baked goods or whatever there and delivered before they go to work in the morning or whatever, so we're going to try it and see. That's the other kind of thing we look at when we debrief, you know, did this time frame work. If we change something.

MM: How many different entries, like things, can they enter?

MS: They can enter as many as they want.

MM: I mean, how many categories are there?

MS: I...there are hundreds. I...

MM: Hundreds, really?

MS: Yeah. I mean, in terms of total. Have you seen a fair book?

MM: I actually, I got one. I haven't looked at it. But I got one from Ella May Bard.

MS: Okay. And that gives you...

MM: Are they all listed in there?

MS: Yes. All the categories are listed in there. All the different categories, but there's, there's lots. When we, when we do our organization we use note cards, and we also do it by age categories. We have three different age categories, so we organize our things by age and by category. You know we color code it. But there are, you know we've got hundreds of cards, and then you just pull out what, if there's...you pull out that card to have for that day if it's one you have an entry in, you know. Not always are you going to have an entry in every category. And a lot of people, you know, they plan big. I mean, you think, "Oh I'm gonna do this," but when they come that morning they may not have everything done according to what they thought they were going to have. That's not unusual either.

MM: How many people usually enter?

MS: Just the culinary you mean? We've been down for the past couple years in culinary. I could tell you exactly if I had my records right in front of me. Is that something that you, that would be helpful for you to know? An exact number?

MM: It would just be interesting to know. Do you have like an estimate?

MS: I don't know. I would say we probably have... it's hard, it's hard to know if it's fifty or if it's that high. A lot of times we have things organized by how many entries there are and the last couple years we've been down on culinary. That's why we did a few shifts this year. We were, we're trying to see what's, you know, when you have a drop in something you try to discover what caused the drop. We changed some things last year, and some of it we changed on purpose because we thought that there were some people who were adults and then their children were bringing the same things. And, you know the idea is that each person is supposed to be making their own entry. And we were a little skeptical as to whether that was happening in some instances, so we changed the categories so there, there are certain categories now that just say the younger age group can do. And then there's another...there's like a junior and an intermediate category and then your adult and your golden. And because we've changed that, that's been confusing to some people. And it also cut down on perhaps the number of things that some of those people will bring in who we did suspect that some of that was going on.

MM: I'm sorry, could you explain what were the categories again?

MS: Junior, intermediate, adult, and golden.

MM: And what are the ages for those?

MS: I believe that the youngest age is eight, and I think it's eight to twelve. I think the other one is thirteen to seventeen. Adults starts at eighteen, eighteen to, I think it's sixty. And then the golden is sixty and up. They're all...those age categories if I've got them wrong are listed specifically in the fairbook also...

MM: Okay.

MS: ...since I'm going from memory. And I'm a 4-H leader. Sometimes it's hard for me to remember some of the age breaks. [She laughs]. We also talked about doing some different things with the age thing. But, and you know I think that it's a good idea. This was one of the things that came from one of our helpers was to put a... we weren't sure what we were gonna call it, but we thought maybe platinum, but for those really elderly folks like seven...we weren't sure but we thought maybe seventy and above. And then maybe bring the golden down to 55 and up or some...55-74. The problem is when you do something like that then you have to get more sponsors because for every age change, then for every big thing, you'd have to get a new sponsor. The other co-chair, Crystal Rierden (sp?) was working on tha, but I think that, I think she's just decided we're going to have wait and just do that another year. That this year wasn't, it just wasn't panning

out that it was gonna work for us. But that is something that we've got in the back of our minds because when you think about it, by the time you get to be seventy and you're, you're making either an arts and craft item or you're baking, you know you're cooking, that's, that's a lot I think. And it's, you know, maybe they do need a different kind of recognition for doing that at that age. You know I think you feel differently as you get closer to those ages too. [She laughs]. As a college student that might be a little harder to understand that, but as you get older it really does, you think "Wow, I hope I can do this when I get to be that old."

MM: Yeah, I can understand that. When you talked about sponsors a little bit. Who...what kind of sponsors do you get and what do they sponsor?

MS: You...they sponsor like the awards like for the best of show. I explained that we have like an arts and crafts division. We also have photography and fine arts within, within that arts and crafts division. So like in the arts and crafts category you have an adult best of show, you have a golden best of show, the junior and the intermediate. So that's four just for the arts and crafts. Then you have four for fine arts, then you have four for photography, then you have four for culinary. So when you have all of those sections then you have to get sponsors for all those. Some of the sponsors are deals where it's, they give a gift certificate, and you come in and you use the gift certificate. Some of them are, you know, actual things. For example, Rosten [sp?] Art Memorial has always sponsored our grand champion. When you have the culinary division, you have a, a best of show in each section, and then you have this overall grand champion winner. And we just do this in the culinary. Well, this overall grand champion gets a marble rolling pin. And there are some women that because that has been the tradition over the years, you know, they will enter until they get that, until they win that. That's their, you know their dream. Especially those people that love to make pies and things and Rosten Art Memorial has done that, they've sponsored that particular thing for years. Grocery stores are some of the sponsors that we have. Every grocery store in Mount Vernon is a sponsor. Walmart, a couple of the flower shops we go to. We've gotten good support, you know. But again those are just extra phone calls, and you've gotta realize, this is just one segment of the fair. 4-H is a huge segment of the fair. You've got your animals, you know, your horses, and people are bombarded in terms of, of stores and things, they're bombarded with requests to sponsor, you know. So you don't want to, you know, you don't want to wear that out. You want to appreciate them and make sure that they know that we appreciate them. Ben Franklin, also Ben Franklin...[undecipherable]. What's it called? Something on the Main. Memories on Main I guess is what it's called now. And Creative Ar...Creative Images, which is a frame shop, they sponsor. And some people are willing to just, you know, there's just no questions asked. You know that when you call them, it's going to be okay and they're just going to say it again. But we always ask everybody each year to make sure that they're still wanting to do it. And sometimes we do have to get other sponsors because sometimes things come up and, you know, you never know what that's going to be.

MM: You had just mentioned the marble rolling pin, and I was a little confused as to...is best of show is best overall in the culinary? Or...

MS: Okay, best of show...let's say in the adult class, okay, as the judges are judging, everything that they think is top notch, then they'll set that aside. And then through in terms of the judging, all of those things that are set aside will definitely get first place ribbons. Okay? Then one of those things is chosen to be a best of show, meaning that it's the best adult entry that they have, okay?

MM: Okay. Of all the entries?

MS: Of all of the entries. And then for culinary, they look at all of those best of shows. There will be an adult best of show, they'll be a golden best of show, a junior, and an intermediate, and there's also a bake-it-with-lard best of show. The Porkettes, or the Knox County Women's Pork Association always sponsor that one. Anyway, out of those five first, best of shows, then there's one overall grand champion that's chosen, and that's the one that gets the marble rolling pin.

MM: Okay. How are the judges chosen?

MS: Well, I think traditionally for the culinary we have used Home Ec teachers over the years. One of our judges is a retired Home Ec teacher from Fredericktown, and she's just, she's, you know, she's judged for years for us. And Cathy Goeppinger, whose name I gave you, is a Home Ec teacher in Centerburg schools. The other one that we've just started using, we've just st, we've just kind of split it up a bit differently because of, of how stressful that is to taste all those things, and they do taste everything of culinary day. One judge the past two years has just judged all the bread items, and then, and that has been Sabrina Pugh from...she's a Home Ec teacher again at Mount Vernon middle school. They've been real, I mean to me it's easy to use ones, Home Ec teachers. And if, even if one of them can't, nine times out of ten we'll probably, that would probably still be kind of our source in terms of someone we would look at for doing that judging again.

MM: Are the judges given special instructions on how they should judge?

MS: Actually we, we don't give them instructions. They, they, they're the ones that are, that we feel are knowledgeable about the field. It's not something that I'm knowledgeable about, although if we're there as helpers, we certainly do taste sometimes. That's kind of the fun of, of working on culinary day, we get to do some of that. I think that's one of the things, you know, we don't tell them what to do, but at the same time, if the same people have done it for several years, that gets to be helpful to those people entering because I think they, they know. They write comments on the back of the cards in terms of telling them what they think is, is maybe wrong or what could be better or what they really liked on it. You know, sometimes you may get three or four entries in a category and they all might be wonderful, and then you have to choose, you know, one thing. And then your personal bias kind of clicks in a little bit because you just choose what you want. But no we don't give them really guidelines.

MM: Okay. Do you know what qualities are important for how the items are judged?

MS: I don't. I know that, I know when they look at the bread, you know, they look at the texture and make sure that there aren't a lot of holes and things like that. But, no, I'm not good enough to be able to tell you that kind of stuff. Cathy could give you that information when you talk to her.

MM: Could you explain a little bit...I know that Ethel had said that you switched from open to closed judging?

MS: I don't know when they did open judging; I wasn't involved in it. So the past several years its been closed judging. Open judging is when the person who bakes the thing or makes it is right there when the judge tastes it and does it, and I know there are lots of counties that do open judging. I think for, for our purposes at our fair, we don't have the space. It makes it very difficult as it is with the building that we're housed in. We'd love to be housed in a different building, and eventually we may. But under our physical constraints, there's just not space. We're lucky to have room for the entries and the people that are just there to help, the judges...

MM: Right.

MS: Without having other people there. Excuse me. I think...I don't know what the reasoning was when they went from closed, er from open to closed, but I also think it would be really stressful for the judges to be under open.

MM: Have...so you've never been a judge yourself?

MS: I have not.

MM: Have you ever entered into the culinary section?

MS: Have I entered culinary? I haven't but my daughters have.

MM: Oh have they?

MS: And the arts and crafts, you know, I've always wanted to. And I guess as long as I'm one of the co-chairs, I probably won't. But after, after I get out of that again, I'll probably enter some things.

MM: Okay.

MS: 'Cause I, I like to do the arts and crafts things. I crochet, but you know, at this point in my life, I'm doing as many things as I used to do. I used to crochet all the time and cross-stitch a lot, and I'm just not at that point in my life right now that I'm doing it. And I, eventually I plan to go back to doing...[undecipherable].

MM: Why do you think that individuals enter the culinary part?

MS: I think some of it is for, you know, to, to maybe be able to say to their friends, you know "I've gotten a first place in this" or I, especially if they've won the best of show, that's kind of a neat honor. I, I don't know, I know that there's a gal, a lady in Fredericktown whose, her name is Kathleen Dean [sp?], and she won like a Pillsbury bake-off contest or something, and she was really excited. She won best of show a couple years ago and just was thrilled even though she's had that big honor of being a Pillsbury bake-off person, you know which... I think, I think some of it's just, be nice and some of it's probably just personal, you know. And some people probably just do it for fun, you know. I imagine that there are people who just do it for that. I know Ethel's real proud of it when she does it, and she sells some of her things. She gives some of her things away, and I think she sells some of it too. But if you are trying to do anything like that you know that kind of... if you can say you've won something like that, it's kind of neat.

MM: Do you cook and bake often for your family?

MS: [She laughs]. I don't, I don't probably cook as much as I should. And again that's just my stage of life in terms of what I'm doing. You probably smell pizza. We had Domino's pizza for supper tonight. I probably cook four out, four out of seven, five out of seven nights. And I, I like to bake. I don't always take the time to do it. This, this year, my girls, one of them's gonna take yeast breads. So that'll be neat for us. We'll be baking a lot with that project this year for 4-H. And cookies, I'm more of a cookie dessert person rather than...I don't do pies. I like, I like like the, more of the fancy bar cookies, that kind of thing. That's more what I get into. And I...

End of side A.

Side B:

MM: I'm sorry, you were saying you like to bake at the holidays.

MS: Holidays, uh-huh. My grandmother was a cook at the developmental center years ago, and she was, she always was a baker. I mean, she baked pies and cakes, and, and I don't think she ever really entered in the fair but she used to do that all the, all the time, you know. I mean, I can remember that. She also made noodles, homemade noodles, and my mother does that, and that's something I want to learn to do before my mother passes away, I really want to learn how to make her noodles, and I haven't done it yet. It's one of those things when you get older, you think about, "Oh I've gotta learn how to do this." And I hate it because she'll say, "Oh you just crack open some eggs and you add a little bit of this, a little bit of flour." You know, that's how they cooked, and they don't have recipes that they follow on some those things, and that's so hard to learn to make that kind of a...you just want to scream.

MM: You said that you enjoy baking? What is it about it that you enjoy?

MS: I think the smell and the accomplishment of I did this. Especially if somebody, you know, if you make it and it turns out good. We just had a...I teach school and we just had a special thing for Valentine's Day where everybody brought in something red or chocolate. And I, I made peanut blossoms and put red food coloring in it, which was kind of dorky, but you know, you feel like if you can do something that kind of follows the theme and it fits along okay that'll, that'll work. But those kinds of things are fun. We do, we do desserts and things like that at school once in a while, so that gives you a chance to do something. And another thing that we often do is if somebody really liked it, then you bring the recipe in and give it to everybody, and that's a good way of collecting different recipes. My daughters doing an action project for her Work and Family Life's class at school which is really Home Ec, but it's got a new name, it's Work and Family Living now or Work and Family Life. But she's putting all of my recipes that have been on like dittoed papers or that I've scratched on the back of an envelope or whatever and is writing them on recipe cards for me for my recipe folder.

MM: Oh that's neat.

MS: It's kind of neat. Towards a good action project. I'm sure she'll get fifteen hours worth of work on it [both laugh] easily.

MM: Where did you learn how to cook and bake?

MS: I think 4-H probably helped me. I, I did take, I did some Home Ec classes too in high school. My mother really didn't want me to be in the kitchen. I don't think that she thought we were good cleaner-uppers, [both laugh] so she didn't really want us around the kitchen. I was the oldest of six kids, so, you know, the more we can be out of the way the better I think, so. Kind of just, and some just trial and error, you know, get up and do it.

MM: Does your family share meals together often?

MS: Yeah. We, we especially made sure at the new house-we've only been here a little over a year-but we make sure that eat together as much as possible. You know, we, we're all busy so there are sometimes we can't do it, but we try to at least the evening meal together.

MM: Why is that important to your family?

MS: It gives you the chance to sit down and talk about what's going on during the day and I think keep together as a family. We're all doing something different, you know, you don't what each other's doing. We were bad at the other house. We sat in front of the TV a lot more and ate our meals, and that was one of the things I said "We're not doing when we get out of the house," and we've been real good about it. And to me it's, it's been important. We've always done it, you know, like whenever we've had company or whenever mom comes over for lunch, or Sunday, that's usually the day for me. With working I, I don't usually have company ever during the week, but on the weekend, on

Sundays, I often have my mom or my sister come over for dinner. But we have holidays at my... well we have Easter, we're going to have Easter here. We had Easter here last year, but my mom won't give up Christmas or Thanksgiving yet. [She laughs].

MM: Do you have any family recipes that have been handed down in your family?

MS: We do have, in fact when I go in to pick my daughter up I'm going to stop at my mom's. She makes chocolate cake with brown sugar icing, and that's my favorite cake. And that icing has been, you know that's something that she learned how to make from her mother. And actually I've found-my mom probably thinks this is nuts because she doesn't ever use a set thing- the recipe in the Good, the Better Homes and Garden Cookbook is really comparable to what she makes. So even though she's tried to pass it down to me, I end up usually going back to that recipe card to make sure I'm doing it right. But that's kind of a thing, and the noodles would be another thing that I haven't learned to do yet but I want to learn how to do. You know, those are the two things that I can think of, you know, that have impacted me, probably my two most favorite things.

MM: Do you ever experiment with cooking, try different things?

MS: I don't a whole lot, but that's because personally I don't eat a lot of different kinds of things. I don't. I know people who do. And we had a fiesta chicken, which is like a chili that's made with, with chicken instead of a beef, and my sister-in-law made it when we were out at her house...it's been a couple years ago now. And I found that I liked it, but it wouldn't have been something that I would have tried on my own. She, she has all her recipes on her computer, so she ran it off and gave it to us, and you know, I've made it a couple of times since then. But I'm usually not an experimenter. Not my bag, I guess.

MM: Does your family ever go to potluck suppers.

MS: Mm-hmm.

MM: And for what kinds of events?

MS: Church has covered-dish dinners where we all bring things in, like if a mission speaker's coming or they're having a, you know like a youth group that's coming in and doing things and they want to have a meal provided. Our family is potluck also sometimes, reunions in the summer, we always have a couple of those. My husband's Chris... my husband's family when they have their Christmas, and they do come out here, we always have potluck. You know, everybody brings a certain thing.

MM: And why do you think like...what do you think like is important when you have those? Why do you think people like to do those?

MS: I think because of the fellowship and the getting together, the community. You, know we're together. And I think when you share a meal, you know that does help with

the fellowship. You know, you're sitting down, you're communing, you're eating at the same times as you're talking and visiting and all that good stuff that goes with it. It's kind of like our dessert at school when we do that. When I was first hired at Fredericktown, we did it once a month. We had breakfast together once a month, and it was wonderful. You know, a different building would provide the breakfast and, and you just sat and you ate and you talked, and it was, you know, to me that helps you pull together as a unit. We don't do it now. It's part of our busyness.

MM: I think those are actually all the questions I have. Did you have anything you wanted to add?

MS: No, but if you wanted me to check exactly in terms of entries and things like that, I could do that. I mean, you can give me a call back.

MM: Okay. If, if...

MS: If you want to talk to Crystal also, you know, she would be another person that would be good to talk to. She's the other co-chair.

MM: Okay. What is her name?

MS: Crystal Rardin. R-A...I'm trying to think of where the A, the I comes in. R-A...I think it's R-A-R-D-I-N.

End of tape.