**Life in 19th Century Rural Virginia: A Glimpse through Maria Jane Gish Frantz's Life (Primary Source Document)**

**Article:** “Roanoke County in the 1840s” by Maria Jane Gish Frantz (Summer 1970 edition of Journal of Roanoke Historical Society)

**SOL’s:**
History - VUS.7g, VUS.9c, VUS.9e
English - 9.5, 9.8, 10.1, 10.5, 11.5, 12.5

**Objectives:**

- To understand the daily life, work, and challenges faced by families in 19th century rural Virginia.
- To analyze the significance of traditional skills and chores in historical contexts.
- To connect historical experiences to modern living and appreciate technological advancements.

**Materials:**
- Copies of Maria Jane Gish Frantz's life account(either as a printed handout or digital text).
- Images of 19th-century rural Virginia for visual context.
- Cornell-style guided notes
- Whiteboard or projector for displaying images and key points.
- Notebooks and pens for students' reflections.

**Lesson Plan:**

1. **Introduction (10 minutes):**

Begin the lesson by discussing the importance of primary sources in historical research. Explain that primary sources, like letters and diaries, provide firsthand accounts of historical events and everyday life. Discuss what life might have been like in rural Virginia in the 19th century. Encourage students to share their thoughts and prior knowledge.

2. **Document Analysis (30 minutes):**

Distribute copies of Maria Jane Gish Frantz's account. Have students work in pairs or groups to read and analyze the text through the Cornell note handout provided.

3. **Whole Group Discussion (10 minutes):**

Engage the class in a discussion about the challenges and daily tasks faced by Maria Jane Gish Frantz and her family. Be sure to address the topics covered in the graphic organizer.

Prompt questions such as:

- What were some of the daily chores and tasks mentioned in the article?
- How did the family prepare food, make clothing, and manage daily life without modern technology?
- What do you find most interesting or surprising about their way of life?
- How did education and social interactions differ from today's standards?

4. **Group or Individual Modern Comparison (30 minutes):**

**OPTION A -**
Have students write 1-2 paragraphs comparing and contrasting Maria Jane's experiences with their own lives in the 21st century.

Encourage students to consider the value of traditional skills and the impact of technological advancements on daily life.

**OPTION B -**
Divide the class into small groups and assign each group a specific aspect of Maria Jane's life (e.g., farming, cooking, education).

Instruct each group to research and write 1-2 paragraphs on how that aspect of life has changed since the 19th century, highlighting technological advancements.

5. **Reflection and Conclusion (10 minutes):**

Have students share their responses to the modern comparison activity. Discuss with the class any broader historical context, such as the Civil War or War of 1812 in the Roanoke area.

**Assessment:**

Notes, discussion participation, and modern comparison paragraphs.

**Options for Differentiation:**

For students who struggle with reading comprehension, provide a simplified version of the article with key information highlighted.
Pair students with a partner who can provide additional support or guidance during the group activities.
Offer graphic organizers or templates to help students organize their thoughts during the elaboration phase.

**Extension Activities:**

**Option 1**
Questions & Possible Answers-

1. What information does this primary source provide about the author's family background and early life? This primary source provides information about the author's parents, siblings, and grandparents, as well as details about their home, farm, and daily activities.

2. How does the author describe the daily chores and responsibilities of the children in their family? The author describes how they and their siblings helped with tasks such as picking wool, gathering sheaves, milking cows, churning butter, and taking care of the livestock. They also mention attending school and helping with the flax and wool spinning.

3. What does the author's description of their family's use of natural resources, such as water from the spring and firewood from pine knots, reveal about their lifestyle? The author's description shows that their family relied on natural resources for various purposes, such as drinking water, keeping milk and butter cool, and providing light for studying and spinning. This suggests a self-sufficient and environmentally conscious lifestyle.

4. How does the author depict the social activities and interactions of their family in the community? The author mentions gathering with neighbors to spin and visit in the evenings, as well as sliding down the straw stack and playing in the snow with siblings. These activities indicate a sense of community and camaraderie among the author's family and their neighbors.

5. What details does the author share about the technology and tools used by their family in their daily lives? The author mentions using a loom, spinning wheel, flax break, and carding machine for textile production. They also mention an oven for baking bread and pies and tallow candles for lighting. This provides insight into the technology and tools available to the author's family during that time period.

**Option 2**
Create a fictional short story based on Maria Jane Gish Frantz's primary source document. The story should explore the daily life and experiences of Maria Jane Gish Frantz and her family in Roanoke County, Virginia during the early 19th century. The story should incorporate details about their farming practices, household chores, education, and social interactions.

**Option 3**
Have students create a report about the historical context and background information of the time that Maria Jane Gish Frantz lived.

**Cornell-Style Reading Notes**

| Questions | Topics and Notes |
|---|---|
| Who is Maria Jane Gish Frantz?<br><br>Why is this considered a primary source document? | **Introduction:** |
| What are the names of Maria's parents and siblings? Add details about them here.<br><br>Are there any other family members mentioned? Who? Where do they live? | **Family Life:** |
| How old was Maria when she moved to Illinois?<br><br>Where is her new farm?<br><br>Jot a few notes down about her father's life and death. | **Relocation to Illinois:** |
| What was daily life like on the farm?<br><br>What kind of chores did Maria and her siblings do? | **Daily Farm Life:** |
| Provide details about textile production, including flax raising and spinning.<br><br>What was her school experience and education like in her community? | **Domestic Work and Education:** |
| **Summary** | |
| | |

# Roanoke County in the 1840's

**Maria Jane Gish Frantz**

*This account of girlhood on a Roanoke County farm before the Civil War was written by Maria Jane Gish Frantz in* 1914. *She died the age of* 91 *in* 1929 *at Enid, Okla. Her recollections were preserved by her grandson, F. M. Heironimus of Tulsa, Okla., and passed along to another relative, Mrs. Ola Gish Durr of Roanoke, a member of the Society.*

*Born in the year Roanoke County was formed from Botetourt, the writer was the daughter of Christian Gish, who moved from near Bonsack to what has been known as the R. L. Walrond home, near Burlington, north of Roanoke. It now is owned by A. T. Loyd. About* 1851, *the Gishes moved to Roanoke, Ill., a community named by families who moved from this area. In* 1857, *Maria married Henry Jackson Frantz, son of Jacob and Eliza Petty Frantz, who had moved west from Roanoke County. They lived in Oklahoma and had* 10 *children, including a son, Frank Christian Frantz, who was a captain in the Rough Riders and the last territorial governor of Oklahoma in* 1906.

By Maria Jane Gish Frantz

I was born in Roanoke County, Va. on October 28th, 1838, 8 miles from Salem, the County seat, one half mile from the little Village of Burlington, and 2 miles from Hollins, formerly Botetourt Springs. My father's name was Christian Gish, my mother's name was Elizabeth Houtz, daughter of John and Susan Klein Houtz. I am the youngest of 8 children, Hester, John Henry, Eliza Ann, James Rufus, Susan Frances, Sarah Catherin, Mary Elizabeth, Maria Jane (myself).

I was in my 14th year when father sold his farm and moved to Woodford County, Ill., where we lived on a farm one mile north of Roanoke, Ill. Father lived to be in his 90th year, mother having died some years before. Both are buried in the Roanoke Cemetery together with brother, John Rufus, sister Susan and Elizabeth. Sister Hester, Eliza and Sarah having died in Virginia are buried on the old home place on a little hill in the west part of the orchard. I never knew either of my grandparents on my father's side. (George Gish & Wife Susannah Stover).

My brother John Gish was a very large man, and I remember they used to say he struck back to the Stover family as they were all very large and fleshy men. My oldest sister, Hester, or Hettie as we always called her, married Jacob Smith. Eliza married Isaac Renn, Susan married John Woosa, Elizabeth married John McCauly. My husband was Henry Jackson Frantz. I am the last one living of a family of 8.

My father, Christian Gish, was one of 7 brothers, George, John, David, Jacob, Abraham and William Gish. He had 1 sister who married John Beckner. Uncle George lived near Roanoke, Va. (Vinton). Uncle Abraham lived near Salem, Uncle John once lived in Laporte, Indiana, then moved to Livingston County, Mo., where he died, his wife having died before in Indiana. At the time of his death his 12 children lived around him, so that he could visit them all in one day. He was near 90 when he died. Uncle David lived in South Bend, Ind. where his son, Pike, lives, as far as I know, but I think on a farm. Uncle Jacob lived in Lafayette, Ind. Uncle William Gish, lived in Leesburg, Ohio and we visited them on our way to Ill. He was keeping a Hotel then, afterwards he moved to Atchinson, Kansas, where he died. He had 6 girls, no boys. His girls were Lucinda, Emma, Eliza, Susan, Phoebe or Rachel, I forget which, and Hattie. If those girls all married and changed their names we will never know who they are, as we never saw them after moving to Ill. and we may be living among them and not know it. Neither did we hear from them after they moved to Kansas.

Father (Christian Gish) was born on August 12, 1792, and was a Soldier in the War of 1812. Was in Camp for 16 weeks but was never called out. Grandfather, (George Gish) hired a substitute for him and came and took him home. He received a Land Grant on land of 40 acres in Ill. This was Gov. land. He bought a thousand acres of Prarie land in Ill.

Father always lived at the same place while he lived in Va. that he bought and moved to when he and Mother were married. (1816). He cleared the most of it himself, having hired hands to help. Mother always had a loom and spinning wheel, and made cloth to sell and help to pay off the hired hands. We raised Flax and had sheep to shear, Wool to wash, pick and Spin. We children took delight in helping to wash the wool. We would all go out in a wagon to the creek, with the baskets, tubs and buckets, and as the water was warm we would each take a basket, put it half full of Wool, and wade into the creek where it was gravel bottom, and get into the baskets with our feet and tramp the wool until the water ran clean from the basket, then the wool was clean. We would walk out, drain the wool, and put it back into the sheets on the grass, fill the baskets and into the water again!

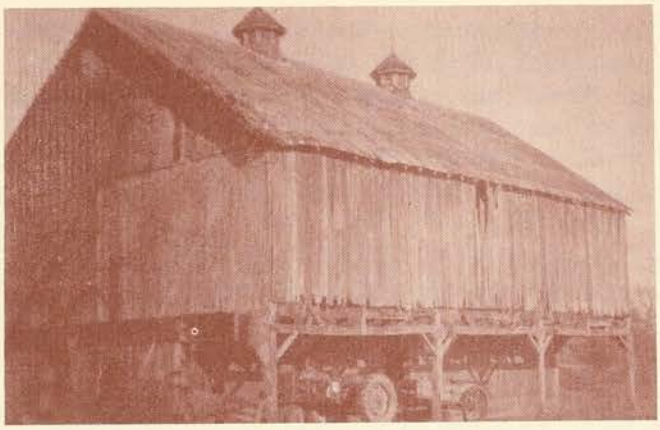
This was great fun to us. Now, as I was the youngest, you may wonder who were the children that I speak of; my oldest sister (Hester) died and left three little girls, Lizzie, Sarah and Susan Smith. These, Mother took to raise, and they were always like sisters to me. Lizzie was older than me, Sarah about my age, and Susie younger. We little girls had to pick wool in the hot summer days and how tired we would get sitting and picking wool. Some times we would slip out to play and Mother would have to call us in to finish our tasks, then we could play. The wool picking had to be done after school closed and before harvest came on. We little girls had to gather sheaves, and carry water to the harvest hands. The wheat was cut with Cradles, perhaps eight or ten Cradles going at the same time. As many rakers and as many men to bind up the sheaves. We had no reapers in those days. It kept my mother and two older sisters busy cooking for so many hands. Then we milked from 6 to 8 cows and made butter for the market. We little girls did the churning down at the spring-house in summer in the early morning while it was cool. We had the old fashioned dash churn and two of us would get hold of the dasher and sing:

Come butter come, Come Butter Come,
Peter's standing at the gate,
Waiting for the butter cake,
Come Butter come.

We thought sure the butter would come quicker if we sang that song.

I used to milk an old Cow named Cherry when I was too little to know the right side from the wrong. It was fun then, but when I got older it was not so funny; I remember how I used to chase the cows up, when I was older, and stand with my bare feet, in the warm place, of a dewey morning. Then away to the pasture with the cows. We little girls had to take the cows to the pasture in the morning, then go for them in the evening. Sometimes we would have to go a long way to the farthest corner of the farm. Often we would find the cows at the bars, waiting to come home. We always had a Bell cow. If the cows would happen to be in the new pasture or over a hill (for it was hilly in Va.) we would have to listen for the bell. The cows would hurry home to get a cool drink of water from the big spring that ran through the springhouse, where we kept the milk and butter, and any thing else that needed to be kept cool in summer, the water being almost ice-cold in the summer, but seemed warm to the touch in winter.

There were big shade trees all around the spring, where father and the hired men would always go for an hour's rest after dinner in the summer time, either sitting or lying down on the grass, for we



**Barn on Roanoke County farm where Mrs. Frantz was born**

had a beautiful bluegrass yard. Many a time we took knives and dug up the plantain and danderlions or any other weed that would happen to come up, so that it looked like a green velvet yard. There was a sweet Briar Rose growing and vining over the west window of the sitting room in the dear old home. It seems to me I can smell its sweet fragrance yet, after 77 years!

How well I remember every nook and cranny of the old house! The Loom house, the smoke house, the hen house, and the spring house, and the bubbling spring, whose waters never, never failed, and was a delight to those who came thirsty for a drink of its cooling waters. The horses too, how they would hurry to the trough on a hot summer day, to quench their thirst, then turn away and march back to the barn to be fed.

We had a large barn where the front projected over like a wide porch, where the cattle would gather under to keep out of rain or snow. Besides there was always a large stack of straw in the barnyard after thrashing time, so that the cattle would have shelter from the cold on any side of it, as it was in the middle of the barn yard.

What fun we children used to have gathering eggs by the dozens in the old barn or on the straw stack, in the hen house too; and what fun we had sliding down the straw stack, for it was nearly tall as the barn, but sloping down so that it was easy to climb up again. and in winter when snow covered the ground we would carry boards to the top of the hill in the orchard, and then get on the slide and down the hill we would go, then roll off in the snow, and the boards would go through under the fence into the barnyard. Then back again we would go. The children in town miss all the fun we children in the country had.

I must not forget to tell of the Flax raising. When in bloom it waved like a blue sea and was very beautiful. When the bloom dropped it would soon begin to turn brown. And when the seed was ripe it was ready for the harvest. We would pull it up, tie it in bundles as large as your arm, and stick it with roots down and seeds up, in small stacks to dry. When dry it was hauled to the barn and the seed beat off and the stacks spread in smooth wind rows in the newly mown meadow where the grass was short, where the rain and the dew would fall on it until the stalks were rotted or brittle so they could be broken, then it was raked up and taken back to the barn, where Father would break it. I cannot describe a Flax break to you so you would understand it. Then we women folks would scrutch it, and mother would hackle it and it was ready for the spinning wheel. It looked like soft and beautiful gray hair as it was made into twists and hung up on the walls of the loom house. Then came the spinning of the Flax by mother and the older girls. We children that were younger had to spin tow. Tow is the tangled part that is hackled out of the Flax on sharp pointed steel pins. This is made into coarse cloath, the flax into figured table linen, or plain cloth for sheets, pillow cases, towels, etc.

I used to fill quills for the weaver, and got very tired sometimes, but everybody had to work. My older sisters had to spin the wool in summer on a big wheel and they would sing and spin. I seem to hear them yet, and see them draw out the long woolen thread from the woolroll. That was after the wool had been picked to remove all the trash out of it and it had been sent to the Carding machine to be made into rolls. Then after the spinning came the washing again, then the coloring of it into different colors, to be woven into woolen goods for our winter dresses, or plain blue brown or black for the men's wear, or left white for the blankets, or the colors were woven into beautiful designs for bed spreads. There were many uses for it. The older sisters used to weave beautiful white figured counterpanes for the beds, or carpets for the floors, some which were made from the coarse part of Tow, and colored different colors. Some were made from rags.

I tell you all of this that the grandchildren may know how easy they have it now!

All of our sewing was done by hand. We had no sewing machines then, nor cooking stoves. All the cooking was done over a fire place.

Our kitchen fire place was half as wide as the kitchen. But we had a big clay oven in the yard where we did most of the bread or pie baking. Occasionally Mother would bake biscuits or custard pies in a dutch oven on the hearth, if needed between baking days, and our corn pone (we never had any other sort in those days) was baked in

the same Dutch oven on the hearth, putting coals of fire under and on top of the oven. And how delicious it was—not hard crusted or dried out like a cook stove makes it.

I used to go to school at the old Green Ridge school house near a mile away and sit all day from sun up till sun down, on seats without any backs, but we never thought of getting tired. How we made the air ring with happy voices, and how we tried to get the last tag away as we ran to our homes in the evening. We never had kerosene lamps in those days, but had tallow candles, and we would burn pine knots in the fireplace to see to get our lessons with—it was much brighter. The girls used to spin too by the light of the pine knots, I mean on the little Flax wheels. They never spun wool at night. Sometimes they would want to go and spend the evening with a neighbor girl, or girls. Then they would gather up their wheels and go and laugh and talk and spin and visit till bed time, then pick up their wheels and go home again, to be ready for the business next morning. Those were happy days.

Virginia State Library photo

**1853 farm scene from the Southern Planter**

# A Misty Tour of Henry

By Clare White

On the morning of the historical tour of Henry County, May 16, the weather couldn't make up its mind whether to settle in for a steady rain or to mizzle along with fog. By afternoon, when 115 members of the Roanoke Historical Society got back to the starting place, the weather was still on the fence.

The misty day, however, held back only a few of the number who had signed up for the all-day excursion, the first joint tour with another historical group. The Henry County Historical Society joined forces with the Roanoke society to sponsor the spring tour of historic houses in Martinsville and Henry County.

The Henry County group furnished tour guides, both for their own school busloads of 80 weatherproof sightseers, and for the three

**Photos from the O. Winston Link and Roanoke History Museum Collection:**

From the O. Winston Link and Roanoke History Museum Collection, 1990.69.939 - Christian Gish barn, later Waldrond Farm

From the O. Winston Link and Roanoke History Museum Collection, 1990.69.907 - haymaking in Botetourt

More reference photos to access via URL:

1. Using a Flax Wheel - https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p267401coll36/id/13067

Lorain County Historical Society. (1889). Lorain County Historical Society at the Lorain County Fair Photographs [Photograph]. https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p267401coll36/id/13067. Accessed 26 October 2023.

2. Using a Spinning Wheel and Weasels - https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM110056

Krueger, Alexander. Two Women with a Spinning Wheel [Photograph]. Wisconsin Historical Society. https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM110056. Accessed 26 October 2023.

3. Using a Loom (spinning wheel also located in image) - https://www.ncpedia.org/media/weaving-old-wooden-loom

ANCHOR. Weaving on an old wooden loom [Photograph]. https://www.ncpedia.org/media/weaving-old-wooden-loom. Accessed 26 October 2023.

4. Harvesting Hay - http://www.virginiaroom.org/digital/document/BM356

Unknown. BM 356 Simpson Family [Photograph]. Virginia Room Digital Collection. http://www.virginiaroom.org/digital/document/BM356. Accessed 26 October 2023.

5. Making Apple Butter - http://www.virginiaroom.org/digital/document/BM129

Unknown. BM 129 Johnnie and Bertha Grubb [Photograph]. Virginia Room Digital Collection. http://www.virginiaroom.org/digital/document/BM129. Accessed 26 October 2023.

6. Plowing - http://www.virginiaroom.org/digital/document/BM135

Unknown. BM 135 Wheeler and Bessie Beckner [Photograph]. Virginia Room Digital Collection. http://www.virginiaroom.org/digital/document/BM135. Accessed 26 October 2023.

7. Cooking (really making apple butter, but done on a hearth inside) - http://www.virginiaroom.org/digital/document/BM175

Unknown. BM 175 Lucy, Molly and Jeff [Photograph]. Virginia Room Digital Collection. http://www.virginiaroom.org/digital/document/BM175. Accessed 26 October 2023.

8. Churning Butter - https://www.loc.gov/item/2017805088/

Wolcott, Marion Post, photographer. Mountain woman churning butter on the steps of front porch of her home [Photograph].

www.loc.gov/item/2017805088. Accessed 26 October 2023.

9. Shearing Sheep Stereoscopic Card - https://www.loc.gov/resource/stereo.1s47066/

Unknown. (1919). Shearing Sheep [Photograph]. https://www.loc.gov/item/2002705641/. Accessed 26 October 2023.

10. Milking a Cow - https://www.loc.gov/item/2017828990/

Rothstein, A., photographer. (1942) Zebulon, vicinity, North Carolina. Milking a cow on the Feggen Jones' farm [Photograph]. United States Zebulon Wake County North Carolina, 1942. Mar. https://www.loc.gov/item/2017828990/. Accessed 26 October 2023.