Using Community Cookbooks as Primary Sources

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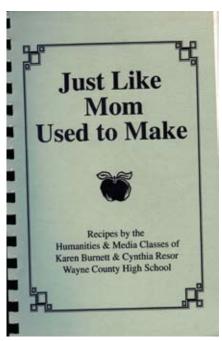
everal years ago, my high school students contributed a favorite family recipe and a story about that recipe to create a community cookbook (titled *Just Like Mom Used to Make*), which we sold in order to raise funds for the school. We achieved our fundraising goal, but the most important lesson the students learned was that cookbooks created by community or charitable organizations reveal much more than how to prepare particular dishes.

Community or charity cookbooks are primary sources that are widely available and that can be used to help students make connections between life's daily routines and wider economic, cultural, and technological trends. These local cookbooks grew out of an explosion of cookbook printing in the post-Civil War period fueled by the availability of new, cheaper printing technology. Students can examine community cookbooks to determine ways that national shifts in food production, preparation, and consumption were influenced by industrialization and changing technology, corporate marketing and media influence, and changing roles and perceptions of women. Students can also explore differences in cultural and regional traditions represented in recipes.

Community Cookbooks in the Classroom

Teachers can assemble a collection of community cookbooks for classroom use fairly easily. Charity or community cookbooks can be found at thrift stores, used book stores, flea markets, or in the cookbook collections of many homes. Local libraries may have copies on their shelves. Teachers may also ask students to bring community cookbooks used

by their own families (with the owner's permission, of course).



The most interesting community cookbooks are produced completely within the local community. These cookbooks may be typed, mimeographed, and assembled by the members of the sponsoring club or organization or typeset and printed by a local printer. Advertisements from local businesses are often included to help offset the printing costs. Artwork, stories of local

interest, quotations, prayers and household hints prepared by community or club members might also be included. This article focuses on locally-produced cookbooks, with most examples coming from central Kentucky cookbooks, produced between 1875 and 1978.

Some community cookbooks are not dated. This can create a primary source mystery for students to solve. For example, a friend gave me an undated, wellused copy of A Visit to the Paint Lick Kitchens, typed, illustrated and printed by the Paint Lick School Parent Teacher Association in Paint Lick, Kentucky. An examination of clippings tucked into the pages of the book helped me to get a general sense of the time period. In this case, the oldest clipping was a recipe for Pumpkin Chiffon Pie from the November 1948 Better Homes and Gardens, suggesting a publication date prior to 1948. If the cookbook was produced locally, students might use local archives to research the lives of the recipe contributors or cookbook committee members. Other clues are provided by recipe ingredients. The more pre-packaged ingredients called for, the newer the book.

Teachers can approach the examination of community cookbooks using the following three themes: changes in recipe ingredients and cooking technology and how these changes relate to national economic and technological changes; the changing role of women; and regional and cultural differences.

Economic and Technological Themes

Vast changes in the American diet are chronicled in 135 years of community cookbooks. In the years after the Civil War, most ingredients were produced and distributed locally and many cooks still produced and preserved many of their own foods. Advances in technology and the growth of corporations (factory processed, pre-packaged convenience foods; national food corporations and grocery stores; gas, electric and microwave cooking, refrigeration and freezing appliances; and standardized kitchen equipment) have revolutionized the American diet.

In the earliest published community cookbooks, lists of ingredients are fresh, unprocessed items often produced from an individual's own garden or farm. Recipes describe the preparation of foods that many of us wouldn't dream of actually making at home. For example, the *Columbia Cook Book* (1902) from Columbia, Tennessee, provides a recipe for making cottage cheese from the milk of a cow (i.e., not bought from a store).

Remove the cream from a goodsized pan of clabber; pour the clabber into a thin bag, and hang over night to drip. The cheese will be quite solid, but break it up well with a fork. Season with salt, a little black pepper, and about two tablespoons of sweet cream.

Mrs. Beecher²

The older the cookbook, the more recipes for canning and preserving are included. The *Lawrenceburg Baptist Cook Book* (1913), from Kentucky, features 18 recipes and items of advice for canning fruits and vegetables. This same book includes 22 different recipes for pickles, relishes, catsups, and other condiments that most contemporary Americans have never tasted in a homemade form.³

In some cases, the meanings of words that describe a particular food have changed. For modern Americans, pud-

ding generally means a creamy, dairybased, cold dessert, often made from a nationally-known brand mix such as Jell-O. The Lawrenceburg Baptist Cook Book features 16 recipes for puddings, a dessert made from various combinations of eggs, cream, sugar, fruits or other flavorings and baked or steamed in the oven. Several other dessert recipes called creams, custards, sponges, or jellies are closer to the modern conceptions of pudding. Not one of these recipes calls for a brand-name mix, but several do require a box of "gelatine." Originally, cooks obtained this thickening agent for cooked fruits, aspics, and jellies by boiling meat bones. In 1890, Charles Knox developed gelatin, a granulated, packaged product that began to be sold as "Knox Gelatine."4

Knox Gelatin, an early brand-name product available in the late 1800s, points to the wider trend of national food advertising in America. Food companies were one of the many industries that mechanized their production after the Civil War. As they grew and consolidated, they sought a method to make their particular product stand out from the competition. Until the late nineteenth century, most goods sold in stores were sold in bulk, with little or no brand-name packaging. Storekeepers and shoppers had little interest in the manufacturer of the food. In order to create a demand for a particular product, the food manufacturers had to foster brand loyalty among consumers. Food companies were the third largest advertisers in the late nineteenth century. (Patent medicine sellers and soap manufacturers were first and second.)5

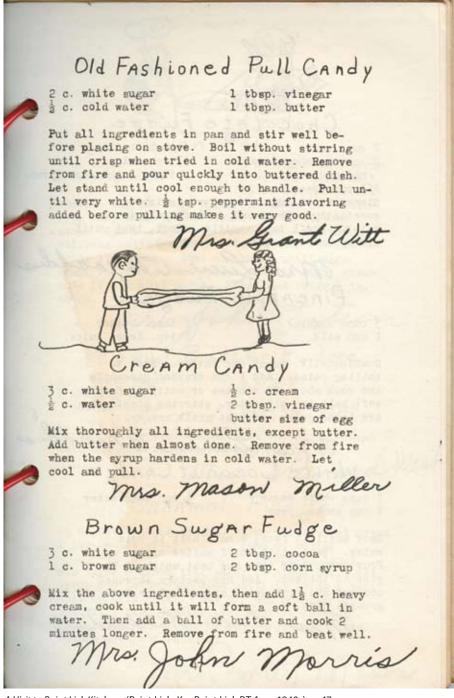
In community cookbooks of the late nineteenth century, brand-name products are featured in paid advertisements, but only occasionally listed as a recipe ingredient. As time passed, brand-name products were increasingly listed rather than the generic ingredient. For example, in a 1913 cookbook recipe for Orange Cake, Royal Baking Powder is listed as one of the requisite ingredients. ⁶ Royal

Baking Powder spent \$500,000 for advertising in 1893 alone, dominating the baking powder market. The appearance of this name-brand ingredient in community cookbooks is evidence of the success of nation-wide advertising.⁷

In twentieth century cookbooks, brand-name products become more commonplace: Crisco shortening; Velveeta cheese; Pepperidge Farm stuffing mix; Hellman's mayonnaise; Cool Whip topping; or Jell-O gelatin. Many recipes requiring a brand-name product may have been created and distributed by food companies to promote their own product. Sometimes, ingredients are listed that are no longer available at the supermarket, such as Dream Whip (a powdered mix for non-dairy whipped topping).

One of the most notable shifts in cookbooks over time is the growing reliance on pre-packed and processed food ingredients available for purchase at national grocery store chains. (The Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company, an advertiser in Housekeeping in the Blue Grass [1875], and later known as A&P, became one of the first national grocery store chains).8 Some increasingly popular ingredients included sticks of margarine (rather than butter); cake, cookie and other prepared mixes; brand-name breakfast cereals like Corn Flakes or Rice Krispies; cans of prepared soup; boxes of pudding or gelatin mix; bags of marshmallows; stuffing mixes; and condiments.

By 1978, a Monticello, Kentucky, community cookbook no longer included chapters of canning and preserving recipes, but did include two very different chapters. A chapter entitled "Make Your Own," featured recipes for how to create mixes similar to commercially-produced mixes for biscuits and pudding, as well as for "processed" items such as chocolate syrup and seasoned crumb coatings. The recipes in a chapter called "Mixes" explain how to make new creations starting with a pre-packaged mix for cake, pudding, cookies and the like.⁹



A Visit to Paint Lick Kitchens (Paint Lick, Ky.: Paint Lick P.T.A.: c. 1940s), p. 47.

The influence of changing technology is evident in the steps or techniques listed in recipes. Cookbooks published before the 1920s and 1930s (the time when gas and electric ovens became widely used) are often vague about baking temperature. Thermometers to measure the temperature of a wood burning cook-stove were virtually non-existent in the home kitchen of the late

1800s and early 1900s. Phrases such as "a hot oven" or "a moderate oven" are common. The cook was instructed by Mrs. Grant Witt in A *Visit to Paint Lick Kitchens* to "remove from the fire" the pan of sugar, water, butter and vinegar that would became "Old Fashioned Pull Candy." This phrase, indicating that the cook should remove the pan from the stove, continued to be used in reci-

pes as gas and electric stoves became more common.

In the oldest cookbooks, measurements are not provided using the standardized system that we take for granted in the United States today. References to teacups, teaspoons, and tablespoons signify the actual cups and spoons used at the table, not special measuring cups and spoons. Standardized measurements were introduced in 1896 in a popular cookbook by Fannie Farmer.¹¹

Women's Lives in Community Cookbooks

Throughout history, women have been expected to cook or oversee the cooking in the household. Even though the massive cultural and economic shifts of the last 50 years have changed perceptions of women's roles, women are still often perceived as the ones responsible for preparing meals for the family. Modern food advertising continues to target a female audience. 12 Yet greater numbers of women working outside the home has meant less time to spend on gardening and the preparation and preservation of food for the family. Community and charity cookbooks can provide insight into historical perceptions of women's roles and how these perceptions have shifted over time.13

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when charitable cookbooks first began to be published, women were denied suffrage in many states. Furthermore, the publishing world undervalued women's capacities as authors. Women turned to a range of voluntary groups, including charitable, educational, civic, political, and religious organizations, for socially-acceptable ways to participate in the public life of the nation, and the community cookbook was one such venue.¹⁴

Shifting perceptions of a woman's place in the public realm are evident in community cookbooks; women's names appear in different forms over time. The majority of the contributors to the cookbook created by the Ladies Aid Society of

Suggested Classroom Activities

A. Using an inquiry approach to primary sources, ask students to examine various elements of cookbooks representing several different decades. Allow students to discover prominent themes before introducing the categories (rows 1-5) in Table 1, below.

Spark a classroom discussion with some related questions. Students can record their answers on Table 1.

- 1. What ingredients are unfamiliar in the older books? What is the modern equivalent of an ingredient (such as lard)? Why are brand-name ingredients more prominent in 20th-century cookbooks than in 19th-century cookbooks? How do changes in ingredients represent changes in technology and society?
- 2. What **cooking processes** are unfamiliar? What is a modern equivalent for a process (such as pressure cooking?) How do changes in measurements and cooking equipment represent changes in technology and society?
- 3. How much **time** is required to prepare various dishes? Are the recipes in the older community cookbooks easier or more difficult to prepare than modern recipes? Why? Some argue that there is less time to cook in modern America than in past decades. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?
- 4. How is the book illustrated? Why do some books feature etchings, others color photographs, and others have no illustration at all (or only on the cover)? How do changes in printed artwork represent changes in technology and society?
- 5. **Who contributes** to community cookbooks? Why? Who is missing from the contributors of a particular community cookbook? Why? Why do women use their husbands' names in older cookbooks (ex., Mrs. Thomas Johnson) and their own names in more modern cookbooks?
- 6. In sum, do you think that Americans cook in the home more or less in 2011 than they did in 1890? Why or why not? How could we find out? How can changes in attitudes toward cooking be explained?
- B. Ask students to bring community cookbooks used by their family (with the permission of the owners) or favorite family

- recipes. Ask students to identify different cultural traditions based on the recipes.
- C. Assemble a class book of student contributions—a favorite recipe or a description of a favorite food and a short essay about the meaning or traditions associated with that recipe. Be sensitive to the range in student backgrounds; the families of some students may not cook or use written recipes.
- D. Choose recipes from older community cookbooks or from cookbooks from different regions to prepare (by teacher or volunteer students) for the class to sample. Ask students to compare and contrast "historical" or "regional" foods to modern or local counterparts. For example, a baked "pudding" from the *Lawrenceburg Baptist Cook Book* (1913) to modern instant pudding dessert mixes.¹⁵

Internet Resources

The Library of Congress's American Church, Club and Community Cookbooks website has over 100 full-text late nineteenth and early twentieth century community cookbooks from across the nation. www.loc.gov/rr/scitech/SciRefGuides/americancookbooks.html

The Feeding America: The Historic American Cookbook Project is a digital archive of 76 influential American cookbooks from the late eighteenth century through the early twentieth century. Five full-text community cookbooks are included. This site also features a glossary of cookery terms and images of antique cooking implements from the collections of the Michigan State University Museum.

 $\label{lib.msu.edu/projects/cookbooks/html/browse_int/browse_interest_charity.html} \\$

The David Walker Lupton African American Cookbook Collection, University of Alabama. This website lists African American cookbooks in the collection, and may also serve as a guide in locating African American cookbooks.

www.lib.ua.edu/lupton/luptonlist.htm

TABLE 1: How Cookbooks Can Reflect Changes in Technology and Society

	1870s-1900	1900-1920s	1930s-1940s	1950s-1960s
Ingredients: Generic v. Brand-name, raw v. pre-packaged, processed, or frozen, etc.				
2. Cooking Technologies: Types of utensils, wood or coal stoves, electricity, etc.				
3. Time and Effort: Changes in cooking methods, work that's required to prepare a dish, etc.				
4. Illustrations: Drawings v. photographs, black-and-white v. color, clothing, etc.				
5. Names of Authors: Changes in use of "Mrs." or "Ms.," use of husband's name, etc.				

COOKIES

COCOANUT CONDENSED MILK COOKIES

Mix 34 pound shredded cocoanut with 1 large can sweetened condensed milk. Drop the mixture from a spoon onto buttered pan. Bake a delicate brown in moderate oven. A square of bitter chocolate may be added to this recipe if chocolate cookies are preferred.

Mrs. Hendren.

GINGER CAKES

1 cup of sorghum; 1 cup of sugar; 2 eggs; 2 teaspoons of soda; 1 teaspoon of salt; 1 cup of lard; 2 cups of boiling water; 1 tablespoon ginger.

Mrs. Robert Hagan.

DATE BARS

1 cup of sugar; 3 eggs beaten together; 1 cup of flour; 1 cup chopped dates; 1 cup of nuts. Mix flour, dates and nuts together, then put in eggs and sugar. Add 1 teaspoon of baking powder; 1 teaspoon vanilla. Bake in large pan; cut in strips and roll in powdered sugar. Moderate oven for baking.

Mrs. J. Smith Hays.

AFTERNOON TEA DOUGHNUTS

2 eggs; 6 tablespoons sugar; 34 teaspoon salt; ½ teaspoon grated nutmeg; 2 tablespoons melted shortening; 6 tablespoons milk; 2 cups flour; 3 teaspoons baking powder. Method—Beat eggs until very light, add sugar, salt, nutmeg and milk, add flour and baking powder. Drop by teaspoonfuls into deep hot fat and fry until brown.

Mrs. M. A. Collins.

COOKIES

1 pint surghum or syrup; 1 cup cugar; 1 cup shortening; 3 eggs; 1 cup sour milk or buttermilk; 1 tablespoon soda; 3 cup flour. Mix and let stand over night. Next morning add flour and roll out.

Icing—2 cups powdered sugar; 3 tablespoons melted butter; 4 tablespoons boiling hot coffee.

Florence Bishop.

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Ladies Aid Society of the Kirksville Christian Church, Cook Book (Publisher unknown, 1929).

the Kirksville Christian Church (1929) identify themselves by their married state and their husbands' names—e.g., Mrs. Robert Hagan. A few women use their own names—Florence Bishop or Lissa Tinder—probably indicating that they were not married. ¹⁶ The more recent the cookbook, the less often contributors use

their husbands' names to identify their contributions.

In the cookbooks of the last half of the twentieth century, the recipes are often easy to prepare, a reflection of the limited time of the working woman. Karen Burnett's "Tuna Noodle Casserole" recipe requires "1 pkg. noodles," "1 can tuna,

drained," and "1 cup grated cheese." 17 She didn't note package or can sizes, or type of cheese, implying that a working women or a thrifty cook makes do with what is on-hand.

The voice of average African American women is even harder to hear from the past than that of white women, especially in the 100 years after the Civil War. But community cookbooks created by African American women can be found. One of the oldest examples is Federation Cookbook: A Collection of Tested Recipes, Contributed by Colored Women of the State of California (1910).¹⁸

Two cookbooks from Garrard County, Kentucky, relate the lives and recipes of two African American women who grew up in the days before the civil rights movement and who became renowned for their cooking. Special Recipes of Hugh Emma Eird (1998) and Garrard County Adult Day Care Cookbook Honoring Grace Kennedy (1993)¹⁹ begin with the life stories of these two women. Both women went to work in the homes of white families at an early age. Hugh Emma Eird (born in 1922) started her first job at age 12, after her father, who was hit by a car walking home from his job, became disabled. Eird cooked for two different families until she married in 1944. She developed a widespread reputation for her skills, cooking for many different employers and preparing dozens of country hams in her home every holiday season for regular customers.

Grace Kennedy (born in 1907) went to live with a white family around the age of five after the death of her mother. Kennedy doesn't describe her life with the white family as a job, but she noted that "Miss Mary said she would teach me (to read) and would send me to school, but she had children of her own and I just never went." Kennedy lived with Miss Mary's family until she was 13 or 14 and could find work caring for children. She later went on to work as a housekeeper and cook. "I've done a lot of cooking, and I've cooked a lot of hams in my life.

Sometimes I'd have 25 to 30 hams in here (her kitchen) at a one time," Kennedy states in her cookbook.²⁰

The recipes and stories of these two Kentucky women reveal, on the one hand, their pride and skill in cooking. On the other hand, cooking and domestic service was also one of the few areas in which a black woman received recognition by the white community—though a fine line existed between that recognition and the stereotype of a black woman's single-dimension role as a cook (stereotypes reinforced by the myth of Aunt Jemima promoted by the R.T. Davis Milling Company and Quaker Oats in the late 1800 and early 1900s to sell pancake mix).²¹

Regional and Cultural Differences

Community cookbooks can also be used to illustrate differences in regional culture. For example, students might compare recipes and ingredients in cookbooks from two or more regions of the country. Recipes for bread and meat dishes often show the most regional differences. Many recipes for biscuits and corn bread feature prominently in Rootin' Tootin' Vol. II(1978), a cookbook created by teachers in the Wayne County School District in southern Kentucky. On the other hand, Three Rivers Cookbook: The Good Taste of Pittsburgh (1973) doesn't include a single biscuit or cornbread recipe, but does contain several recipes for pancakes, pretzels, fritters, strudels, representing a German and eastern European heritage.²² In coastal communities, fresh seafood recipes feature prominently, while seafood recipes originating from inland communities tend to feature canned tuna, canned salmon, and frozen fish.

While studying immigration and acculturation, students might examine the national origin of recipes in selected cookbooks and how international influences change over time. The recipes from cities and towns with diverse populations often reflect a wide range of cultural origins. While many recent immigrants lacked the English skills to use or create

American cookbooks, their descendents often sought to preserve family traditions by contributing to or publishing community cookbooks. These recipes merge old country traditions with American ingredients and the availability of mass-marketed and processed foods. Foods once considered "foreign" to those of English or West European descent such as pizza, lasagna, tacos, or burritos make regular appearances in community cookbooks of the 1970s, 80s and beyond. Often, recipes are adapted and signs of the original cuisine become hard to detect. For example, a recipe for meatloaf, which originated in Europe, is transformed into "Mexican Meat Loaf" in a recipe listing canned tomatoes and green chilies among its ingredients.²³

Community cookbooks are an often overlooked primary source that can be used in the classroom in multiple contexts. Not only do they speak of the lives of average women and changes in material culture over the last 150 years, these collections of recipes can also make wider economic, technological and cultural trends come alive through the very everyday reality of food.

Notes

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- Ladies' Aid Society of the First Baptist Church of Columbia, Tennessee, Columbia Cook Book. 2d ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Press of the Bradley & Gilbert Company, c1902), 41. Accessible at Library of Congress, "American Church, Club and Community Cookbooks: Selected Titles from the General Collections," www.loc.gov/rr/scitech/SciRefGuides/ americancookbooks.html.
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- 8. Southern Presbyterian Church Missionary Society, Housekeeping in the Blue Grass (Cincinnati, Ohio: G. E. Stevens & Co, 1875), 67. Accessible at Library of Congress, "American Church, Club and Community Cookbooks: Selected Titles from the General Collections," www.loc.gov/rr/scitech/SciRefGuides/americancookbooks.html
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- 10. A Visit to Paint Lick Kitchens (Paint Lick, Ky.: Paint Lick P.T.A.: c. 1940s), 47.
- Fannie Merritt Farmer, The Boston Cooking-School Cook Book, 1896.
- Katherine J. Parking, Food is Love, Food Advertising and Gender Roles in Modern America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 1-2.
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- 14. Longone, 20; Bower, 47.
- 15. Lawrenceburg, KY. Baptist Church. Ladies' Aid Society.
- 16. Ladies Aid Society of the Kirksville Christian Church, *Cook Book* (Publisher unknown, 1929).
- 17. Rootin' Tootin' Vol. II, 98, 82.
- Doris Witt, Black Hunger, Food and the Politics of U.S. Identity (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 221.
- Hugh Emma Eird, Special Recipes of Hugh Emma Eird (Hartwell, Ga.: Calico Kitchen Press, 1998); Garrard County Adult Day Care Cookbook Honoring Grace Kennedy (Orange City, Iowa; The Cookbook Company, 1993)
- 20. Garrard County Adult Day Care Cookbook Honoring Grace Kennedy, 2.
- 21. Witt, 21-39.
- Rootin' Tootin' Vol. II; Child Health Association of Sewickley, Inc., Three Rivers Cookbook: The Good Taste of Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh, Penn.: William G. Johnston Co., 1973)
- Wayne County Extension Homemakers Association, Recipe Memories from the 'Little Mountains' Monticello, Kentucky (Collierville, Tenn.: Fundcraft, 1995), 61.

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