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Community Cookbooks: Sponsors of Literacy and Community Identity

Lisa Mastrangelo

This article looks at the various ways that communities can be "read" through their cookbooks. Recipes and collections can reveal much about communities, including shared memories/traditions, geographical identifications, and representations of class.

"[Recipes] take the ingredients of history, class, region, theology, identity, and family and from them fashion new and continuing systems of community" (Ferguson 713).

Last summer, as part of a decision to organize my kitchen, I sorted my cookbooks. Much to my surprise, I realized that I was in possession of multiple community cookbooks from various communities that at some point had been a part of my life—cookbooks produced by certain groups of people who were understood to share common characteristics or interests. As Marion Nestle notes in her introduction to *Books that Cook*, cookbooks and recipes tell stories, both about food and about the locations where and conditions under which they were produced. "They convey myths. They are replete with drama, symbolic meaning, and psychological insight. Furthermore, they offer plenty to talk about: culture, religion, ethics, personal identity, and anything else it means to be human" (xvi). This is even truer of community cookbooks, which often reveal nuances about those communities and their self-representations.

What started as a general interest in reading my own past and experiences quickly led me to see the value of these cookbooks as rhetorical artifacts that reveal much about their communities. These cookbooks function as literate practices of a community, sponsored by the community members who were themselves cooks, contributors, readers, organizers and editors. As Deborah Brandt notes in "Sponsors of Literacy," such sponsors are "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way" (166). Those who produce these cookbooks, then, gain advantage by the sale of the cookbooks themselves, but also offer outside readers context clues for understanding their communities. As such, the cookbooks function as "alternative public spaces," where "ordinary people develop public voices, letting us characterize the distinctive features of these discursive spaces, [and] the discourses they circulate" (Higgins, Long, and Flower 10). Indeed, through their publication they create a snapshot of their communities, a picture and reflection of who they are and

who they want people to think that they might be. Through this lens, this article will explore key identities of the communities represented in the cookbooks, including shared memories and traditions, geographical identifications, and representations of class.

Background and Organization

Because of the diversity of their representations, I chose to explore two of the cookbooks in my collection: *Bouquet Garni*, a cookbook produced by the alumnae of Mount Holyoke College, of which I am one, and published in 1978 and 1986, and *76: The Bicentennial Cookbook of the Senior Citizens of Maine and Newark Valley*. *Bouquet Garni* was created by and sold by and to alumnae of Mount Holyoke College, a large group of culturally and geographically diverse women of a wide age-range, although fairly homogenously middle-to-upper class and mostly white at this time.¹ The *76* cookbook was produced by the residents of the towns of Newark Valley and Maine, New York, and was widely distributed in and around those towns—I received a copy as the grandniece of one of the residents of Newark Valley. These residents were local and not widespread, and were more restricted in age—all senior citizens as of 1976. In addition, the residents of Maine and Newark Valley at this time were largely working class and almost entirely white.²

Like most community cookbooks, neither *Bouquet Garni* nor *76* has a single author or a single voice, but rather a hidden, mostly anonymous group of sponsors. Alison Kelly notes that in this respect community cookbooks are different from other cookbooks—they are created by groups of nonprofessionals. As a result, the reader is not always sure who is talking throughout the books, or what the books assume about their listeners (43). Because the sponsorship of such work is sometimes hidden, readers come to the cookbooks with varying degrees of understanding of the representations presented by the texts, but an overall sense that these are communal “memory texts.” As Rosalyn Collings Eves notes in “A Recipe for Remembrance: Memory and Identity in African-American Women’s Cookbooks,” cookbooks work to “memorialize both individuals and community, to invoke ‘memory beyond mind,’ and to generate a sense of collective memory that in turn shapes communal identity” (281). They are literate practices steeped in the communal memories of the sponsors that produced them. These two particular cookbooks are particularly strong examples that show the ways that in-depth readings of the community cookbooks can make the situatedness of the cookbooks more visible.³

What does it mean to be a literate reader of these recipes, one who can decipher greater meanings about the community through an understanding of the work of the sponsors of the cookbooks? As Eves notes, it is to understand the “narrative framework around which memories, both individual and communal, are constructed and invested with meaning” (282). It means to read the recipes and the collections—their social, textual, geographical, and historical clues—in order to garner a greater understanding of the meaning of the texts. The greater the understanding on the part of the reader, the greater their participation in the community.

Both of the cookbooks have unique features in their organization and presentation. *Bouquet Garni* (see Figure 1), for example, is professionally printed and bound, with a white and green plastic cover designed by an alumna from the Class of 1975. Within the first few pages, the reader finds the subtitle “A liberal sample for the fine art of cooking from alumnae of Mount Holyoke College” in addition to a brief description of the college’s history and location.

Figure 1: *Bouquet Garni* cookbook



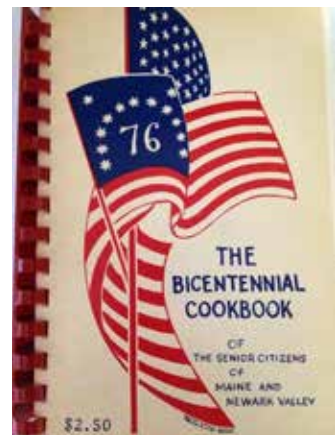
The collection begins with an introduction provided by an anonymous “Bouquet Garni Committee,” who thank the alumnae from around the world who shared their recipes. The Committee also provides an intriguing piece of information about the fact that they had tested each and every recipe themselves before including it. In general, the cookbooks that I looked at do not offer a sense for this type of involvement, but assume that the contributor is trustworthy and has tested the recipe themselves for accuracy and edibility. Thus, the *Bouquet Garni* committee had already created a relationship with the recipes before passing them to the reader, cooking and eating each recipe included and inviting the readers to join the community by doing the same.

76: *The Bicentennial Cookbook of the Senior Citizens of Maine and Newark Valley* contrasts greatly to *Bouquet Garni*. It is much less formal, and yet, seems more joyful. 76 is what Leonardi identifies as “a circle of enthusiastic and helpful friends reproduc[ing] the social context of recipe sharing” (342). The book itself is hand-typed and then reproduced (see Figure 2); there are no page numbers, nor is there an index. The book starts with a tribute page to the volunteers and lists both the committee and the staff of “solicitors and typists” by name.

Figure 2: 76 cookbook

Unlike *Bouquet Garni*, whose sponsors organized the recipes in order of a meal—appetizers, vegetables, meats, and then desserts—76 is organized by section, but the sections are organized alphabetically. Casseroles are listed just before Cookies, although the section on Desserts has headings to distinguish puddings, candy, and general desserts. Chicken recipes appear in the section on Fowl.

While the recipe organization may be different for most readers, so too may be the presence of advertising through the 76 cookbook. It is possible to gain a greater understanding about Maine and Newark Valley from the advertisements included in the book. While the beginning features only one



ad from The Newark Valley Bank, there are approximately 20 pages of ads at the end of the book, including everything from Town and Country Electric to Croft's Trailer Hitches—"Get Properly Hitched at Crofts!" One understands from the ads that these towns are both small and close-knit.⁴ The ads reflect a small-town sense of community with a focus on farming and agricultural industry. Ads are for excavators, industrial supply corporations, butchers, septic tanks, horse tractors, restaurants, and finally, the funeral home. Some ads include a small note; "Our Best Wishes to the Senior Citizens!" appears to be hand-drawn into the McKilligan Industrial Supply Corp. ad. Likewise, the editors of the cookbook speak back to their audience in thanks to their contributors: "Patronize our Advertisers" appears in more than one place in the ad section and likewise throughout the cookbook on nearly every other page. Readers here do not have to supply much context either for the recipes included or for the town; because of the extra materials included the reader is able to see more clearly the community's self-definition. The reader knows, upon entering the text, what kinds of places Maine and Newark Valley are, the ages of the contributors and organizers of the cookbook, and the types of eating they engaged in. While we may not know the individual stories of contributors, we can see their shared community and come to understand their cultural values and historical experiences through advertising as well as their food memories (Heck 205).

History and Traditions

The Mount Holyoke cookbook, *Bouquet Garni*, very clearly offers some context for the reader about the community it describes, but also assumes that the readers are familiar with the college's history and traditions (including their recipe and food traditions). A "community literacy" at work here is assumed; readers must provide their own knowledge of the college in order to fully understand the materials. The assumption exists that the readers are part of the same community as the sponsors and that they have in-depth knowledge regarding the world of Mount Holyoke.

There is an overall sense for the reader of *Bouquet Garni* that the Mount Holyoke community of women is defined by the recipes as a prominent one. The first recipe in the Desserts section, for example, is "Governor Ella Grasso's Seven-Layer Cake." There is no other mention about the fact that Ella Grasso was the first female governor of Connecticut, but there is a definite understanding that this is an important recipe. It takes the first spot in the Cakes section of the Desserts chapter, and is of course labeled with the fact that it was the Governor's contribution. Perhaps the most famous contributor in the cookbook, however, is poet Emily Dickinson, who surely did not know she was contributing. The introduction mentions her recipe as a traditional one—although the origin of the recipe is not given—and the recipe itself has more commentary than most, noting "This specialty of Emily Dickinson (who attended Mount Holyoke in 1848), was made famous by Julie Harris who portrayed the poet in [the play] 'The Belle of Amherst'" (200). As part of the culture and traditions of Mount Holyoke, it likely would be difficult to find an alumna who could not name

Dickinson as one of the more famous students of the institution. The inclusion of Grasso and Dickinson reminds readers that the community self-defines as prominent. But the inclusion of such figures also reinforces memories of the traditions that Mount Holyoke holds as important.

While famous people are represented in *Bouquet Garni*, the sponsors of 76 also participate in the inclusion of such “important” recipes. The very first two recipes in 76 stand alone and are for Baked Turkey Casserole and New York State Apple Pie. However, the reader immediately understands the implications of this since the first recipe is accompanied by a letter from Marba S. Perrott, Director of Correspondence for Mrs. Ford, wife of United States President Gerald Ford. The letter indicates that the Turkey Casserole Recipe is from the White House files of “First Family” recipes, and Perrott wishes the seniors the best of luck with their fundraising. The second recipe is submitted by Elizabeth Maher on behalf of Mrs. Rockefeller and the Office of the Vice President. Rockefeller was originally from New York State, and so the recipe for New York State Apple Pie is particularly fitting. The inclusion of both recipes shows the ways in which the citizens of Newark Valley and Maine define themselves as part of a larger, national community at the same time that they celebrate their own small towns.

Perhaps the recipe that most carefully represents a community and its traditions, however, is the recipe for Deacon Porter’s Hat in *Bouquet Garni*. Deacon Porter’s Hat is a dense brown bread-like steamed pudding, typically served with a hard sauce. It is a traditional dessert on the campus despite the fact that very few students actually like it—I speak from experience. Next to the recipe for Deacon Porter’s Hat in the cookbook is the vague “A traditional dessert at Mount Holyoke,” and most alumnae could tell you that it exists and know some variation of the story surrounding it, even if they have not been brave enough to try it. Its story appears in Frances Lester Warner’s 1937 *On a New England Campus*. Warner describes the history of Deacon Porter’s Hat’s name as existing “because its shape reminded the early students of the tall hat worn by our first Trustee in Charge of Building” (Warner)⁵. There is little context given for the recipe in *Bouquet Garni*, but the assumption of the sponsors of the cookbook is that the reader who might pick up *Bouquet Garni* (and a recipe like “Deacon Porter’s Hat”) will likely have some association with the college community and therefore be able to participate in the community created by the recipe, even if she could not remember the actual story behind it. According to Elizabeth Fleitz’s “Cooking Codes: Cookbook Discourse as Women’s Rhetorical Practices,” the combination of social, textual, and embodied practices that readers bring to a cookbook like *Bouquet Garni* provide “hints on how to interpret the discourse and ‘crack’ the code, thus leading to a fuller understanding of the cultural and rhetorical significance of the text” (6). Thus, women’s experiences of spending four years being served Deacon Porter’s Hat, in a particular place at a particular time, rhetorically codes the recipe for the participants of that experience and thus most readers of the cookbook. Alumnae readers, therefore, are able to engage dialectically with the recipe, identifying themselves clearly as literate members of the defined community.⁶

The recipe for Deacon Porter’s Hat also rhetorically functions to encourage both

participation and remembrance in the community. If alums cannot be a part of the Mount Holyoke Community physically, they can still participate in the traditions of the institution from their own homes, and contribute to their literate involvement in this way. As Eves note, “because cookbooks encourage interaction, consumption, and embodiment, they may also encourage active remembrance” (287). Participating in the recipes of the community, then, becomes a way to remain connected to the dialogue and continue to participate in the community.⁷

Geographic Representations

In addition to locating the communities historically/traditionally, many of the recipes in both collections also reflect their sense of geography. In *Bouquet Garni*, for example, the contribution of international recipes reminds readers that they are also participating in a community that is both socially diverse and literate in the cuisine of other cultures and regions. In the Introduction, the editors make it clear that they sought a “rich mix of cuisines” for the cookbook, including those from a wide range of geographical areas in the United States as well as those from around the world. “She Crab Soup from Alabama, and Baked Whole Salmon from the northwest mingle appetizingly with Iranian Lamb, Tandoori Chicken, and Carbonada Criolla, a Farmer’s Stew from Argentina.” Some context is provided within the cookbook for such recipes as well. The recipe for Nigerian Meatballs, for example, has the comment “peanuts are a major source of protein in Africa,” and the recipe for Pescado En Escabeche is labeled “A pickled fish dish from Puerto Rico” (10-11). While there is not necessarily a sense for where the recipes came from—that part of the self-identification is missing from the Nigerian Meatballs recipe, and the contributor is listed as being from Boston, Massachusetts—sometimes the context is more obvious. The contributor of the recipe for the traditional Puerto Rican fish dish, for example, lists herself as a resident of Puerto Rico. These outward and visible inclusions help readers understand the ways in which the contributors are situated.

76, in contrast, shows the regional locality of Western New York State in 1976. The names in the collection are typical western New York senior citizen names from 1976—Agnes, Elsie, Trudy, Eunice, Harold, and Milton are all thanked in the list of solicitors. Last names such as Hutchings, Stimming, Eastman, Murch, and Hart all indicate a Western European origin for the families contributing to the cookbook—primarily English, with some French and German origins. Kelly makes an interesting note about the names of cookbook contributors, commenting that they are “a path to discovering more about the cultural context of any given community cookbook,” and this is certainly visible in the 76(41).

Geographical self-definitions are further expressed in 76 with the inclusion of recipes for local dishes that western New Yorkers would find familiar but others might find a-contextual. A recipe for *spiedies*, a marinated, grilled type of meat still commonly eaten in the area, is included. According to local lore, the spiedie was brought to the area by Italian immigrants and the recipe is supposed to be a closely guarded secret

(“Eating History”). Traditionally, spiedies were made from lamb, although now they are more commonly made from pork or chicken. Locals looking in the cookbook, however, would have been well acquainted with them as a local food, as, indeed, they still are today. Recognition of the importance of such local and regional recipes creates what Ferguson calls “autochthony,” a sense of something originating from or being formed in a particular place (712). Much like the recipe for Deacon Porter’s Hat, while a person who was not literate to this community might not recognize the importance of the inclusion of the spiedies recipe, informed readers of the cookbook most certainly would.

Likewise, readers might actually gain some knowledge about the local area through certain recipes included by the sponsors. For example, there is a lengthy section in 76 on making preserves from produce that would have been abundantly and locally available (zucchini marmalade and crab apple, strawberry, and rhubarb jellies all appear alongside multiple recipes for pickles). The context here is one for locals—much as locals would know about spiedies, they would also know which ingredients (fruits and vegetables in particular) were available seasonally to complete the recipes. Such inclusions are typical of community cookbooks, which Ferguson notes often define their regionality through such recipes as “sauces, vinegars, or jams” (711), at a point in time when canning and food preservation were important tools for survival.

The 76 cookbook sponsors also reflect small town USA when they intersperse the recipes with songs, prayers, aphorisms and poems throughout the book. In the Meat section, for example, the recipe for “Happy Day” appears, contributed by Agnes Perry of Maine: “Take a pinch of patience, ‘folks,’ mix with work and fun. Stir awhile and add a smile for that’s the way it’s done. Pepper up the lot with pluck, serve the best you may. There’s no foolproof recipe for a happy day.” The sponsors’ inclusion of “extra” materials signifies a community that wants to reflect itself as value driven and close-knit (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Recipe for Ham and Noodle Casserole with an aphorism underneath it. Also note the “Patronize our Advertisers.”



Much the way that Deacon Porter’s Hat does this in *Bouquet Garni*, the “extras” create a sense of togetherness and belonging throughout the cookbook. As Eves says, “they generate a sense of *collective memory*,” creating an extended dinner table that includes the entire community, even if members are not physically present at that given moment (293).

Rhetorically, the geographical and local elements in both cookbooks create what Eves defines as a “memorial text.” As she notes, “as memorial texts, the stories inscribed in these cookbooks are both static and dynamic—static in their moment of inscription, but dynamic in the way they add to and help shape broader communal narratives and memories” (287).

There is a clear sense of the community that is signified within the recipes and this creates a stronger sense for who and what that community is. Using Eves' definition, the collections of recipes contain embedded discourse, that which creates "an exchange between a giver and a receiver, as well as exigence and context" (282), creating stronger community self-definitions.

Recipes as Indicators of Class Status

Perhaps one of the most interesting features of these two community cookbooks was the way in which they reflect class issues. Understanding the ways that class is represented in the recipes, closely examined, can help readers become more knowledgeable readers and interpreters of the community. As Eves notes, "we signal our group affiliation through food choices," creating "a powerful form of community identification" (288). Ferguson echoes this when he identifies community cookbooks as a location and space that "create and reinforce various class boundaries, both in their purpose and in their instruction" (706). Recipe choices made by the sponsors, then, can mark both group identity and cultural participation.

Even the titles of each volume can signify the community and the class expectations of the discourse inside. *Bouquet Garni*, which literally translates to "the garnished bouquet," is also the bundle of herbs, tied together, that is typically used to prepare soups, stocks, or the "base" elements of other dishes. With the 1961 (Volume 1) and 1970 (Volume 2) publications of Julia Child, Simone Beck, and Louisette Bertholle's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, the sponsors of *Bouquet Garni* would have understood the reference to French cooking—the bouquet garni is featured in many of the Child, Beck, and Bertholle recipes. The *Bouquet Garni* title signifies cosmopolitanism and upper class aspirations.

Conversely, the cover of *76: The Bicentennial Cookbook* reflects the patriotism of small-town America but does not overtly reflect class. The cover itself is red, white, and blue, and the flag on the cover with the "76" embedded in the original 13 star flag, with a fuller star flag in the background, reflects the community's sense of history and their participation in the larger national celebrations of that year. In this way, *76* broadcasts its participation in a larger national conversation.

The contents of each cookbook also send readers strong messages about class and class participation. The *Bouquet Garni* committee as sponsor, for example, includes a brief introduction to each section, and the reader immediately has the sense that food, in this context, has a purpose and a status. These are not common recipes meant simply for consumption of food or random recipes thrown together with minimal organization, as sometimes seems the case with *76*. Rather, these are instructions for cultured meals to be presented to and shared with others. The "Desserts" section, for example, starts with "Desserts are the final compliment to a well planned menu. If you have included a pastry such as a quiche or a phyllo dough recipe as part of your main course, offer a soft pudding; or Bavarian type dessert; if your meal has been rich or spicy, end it with a refreshing sherbet; a mousse or soufflé entrée or accompaniment can

be balanced with a cake or fruit pie” (192). Such an introduction allows the reader to understand the context and purpose of the recipes. Food is defined here as a reflection of culture, and not merely an object for consumption.

The recipes in *Bouquet Garni* also imply that readers do not want or need budget-friendly recipes. *Bouquet Garni* contains no recipes that include industrially produced or heavily processed items, such as canned soups or meats/fish, Spam, or Jello-O, although gelatin is used for molded salad recipes. There are, however, recipes that reflect a predilection for “show” and entertainment such as the Ham Mousse Madeira—“Pink and pretty for a buffet”(93)—and the Chicken Soufflé Sandwich—“A sandwich baked in eggs and milk is so easy to do ahead for guests” (112). Both the soufflés and the molded salads were meant for appearance, and were popular “dainty’ creations” (Kelly 47).

Many of the recipes also reflect particular tastes during particular times, especially in meat. By the early 1900s, regular consumption of meat was considered a sign of wealth and prosperity, particularly for immigrants (Ziegelman 177). This is clearly reflected in *Bouquet Garni*. Most recipes call for fresh meats and fish and reflect a variety of types. For example, recipes for sweetbreads, venison, tongue, and roast pheasant point towards a time period when people regularly ate a greater variety of meats than currently are typically consumed.

Unlike *Bouquet Garni*, the recipes in 76 are not recipes for people who want to entertain and impress others. These are recipes for people who want to *eat* and want and need to be both thrifty and efficient while going about the process. Levi-Strauss calls this the difference between “‘endo-cuisine,’ prepared for domestic use, destined to a small closed group,” vs. “‘exo-cuisine,’ that which one offers to guests” (30). The recipes in *Bouquet Garni*, for example, are clearly meant for entertaining guests in the home. Conversely, the recipes in 76 are meant for consumption—to feed hungry family members nourishing food. This interior vs. exterior depiction of food also reinforces a class divide between the two cookbooks. In 76, frugality and class issues are wholly visible in the recipes, and offer a glimpse into 1976 small-town Western New York. Multiple recipes, for example, call for processed and industrialized foods such as canned vegetables, cream of “x” soups (lots of cheddar cheese and mushroom, crushed corn flakes, margarine, Jell-O, cake mixes, hot dogs, Tang, and even Spam) my favorite is the recipe for Spam Casserole, which not only includes Spam but cream of cheddar soup. As Jennifer Wallach points out in *How America Eats*, such recipes reflect the introduction of industrialized food production around World War II and recipes that were created to serve cooks who lived through that time period. Women could be seen as “cooking” even as they were using industrially produced food products to save themselves time and money in the kitchen (139).⁸ The recipes in 76 reflect the increased access to cheaper processed food that allowed cooks to both “stretch” recipes and cook food in less time.

The recipes that include such ingredients as Spam and Jell-O also reflect the conflicted class assumptions of the time period and location. As George H. Lewis notes in “From Minnesota Fat to Seoul Food: Spam in America and the Pacific Rim,”

the introduction of Spam, originally “invented” and produced in New York State, into American culture in 1937 afforded those who were not able to purchase fresh meats the ability to still consume meat. During World War II, citizens were encouraged to consume canned meats in order to assist the war effort and display patriotism (Lewis). Local communities such as Newark Valley took pride in their ability to contribute to the war effort and continued to use products such as Spam long after the war. At the same time that the 1976 publication of *76* was meant to celebrate the nation’s bicentennial, Spam had also become both a symbol of pride and embarrassment for the nation. According to Lewis, by the 1980s (and certainly even by 1976) “most Americans had come to connect Spam symbolically to an earlier time of innocent-but-hokey pride and patriotism—something to be collectively embarrassed about but, at the same time, secretly prideful” (Lewis). Spam was celebrated in this sense by small-town Americans at the same time that a good deal of the rest of the world generally saw it as low-class. The senior residents of Newark Valley, who would have lived through the Depression and World War II, though, would have viewed Spam as both frugal and patriotic, and its inclusion in the cookbook is therefore not a surprise.

Much like the story of Spam, residents of Newark Valley and Maine may have been familiar with the LeRoy, New York roots of Jell-O, which is also a defining ingredient in the cookbook. Their inclusion of recipes with Jell-O would, much like their inclusion of Spam recipes, harkened back to World War II, when citizens were encouraged to use Jell-O as part of a meatless, wheat-free diet. As Katherine LeBesco notes in “There’s Always Room for Resistance: Jell-O, Gender, and Social Class,” Jell-O has long been used to extend meals and to produce dessert on a budget. However, it has also come to be associated with lower social class (141). *Bouquet Garni*, in contrast to *76*, only includes one recipe that contains gelatin (not Jell-O per se), which is the molded Ham Mousse Madeira. Conversely, the *76* includes six recipes for Jell-O salads, including two basic Jell-O salads, two simply marked “Salad”—an Apple Cheese Salad and a Red Apple Cinnamon Salad. Desserts such as the Jell-O poke cake—just called Jell-O Cake—and Glass Pie also appear.⁹

Throughout, the *76* exudes a sense for frugality and advice on how to stretch a meal. The meat-based recipes are the clearest on this point. The recipe for Spanish Rice, for example, calls for any variety of chopped meat, mixed with rice, tomato, and onion. The contributor herself is aware of the recipe’s reputation for stretching the budget, noting: “Make Spanish Rice for these affairs when appetites are keen and a little money must feed a lot of hungry folk.” Most of the casseroles as well as the recipes in the Meat chapter, indeed, call for ingredients such as chopped meat and stale bread. In the absence of meat (and the second World War’s call for meatless meals) many of the casseroles either use canned or processed meat or are vegetarian. In Jessamyn Neuhaus’ “Is Meatloaf for Men?” she comments on the image of such recipes, noting that “meatloaf’s reputation for thriftiness grew from its ability to incorporate a variety of leftover ground or chopped meat, as well as nonmeat ‘stretchers” (91). This thrift is evident in the sponsors’ inclusion of such recipes and accompanying commentary.

Such frugality is also reflected in recipes that do not contain processed ingredients.

There are, for example, several pie recipes, including one called “Vinegar Pie,” that seem to consist of little other than brown sugar, butter, and perhaps milk. Such recipes reflect cooks who lived through time periods when few items would have been available to even fill a pie. Ferguson labels these “mock foods,” and while 76 does not go to the extreme that he suggests existed—crackers instead of apples, for example, there is a Mock Cherry Pie—made from cranberries—and a Poor Man’s Lobster—made from haddock. Most fish in the 76 is also canned or frozen—compared to *Bouquet Garni* where most is fresh.

Class is an important marker in helping readers become closer readers of texts such as cookbooks. Insight into class can help us to more clearly define the texts that we are reading as well as their sponsoring communities. Overall, the class differences in these two cookbooks are very clear, and understanding them contributes to our overall understanding of the self-definitions of the communities.

Conclusion

In her introduction to *Books that Cook*, Marion Nestle notes the many levels on which cookbooks and recipes may be interpreted: “as English tests ripe for close textual analysis, as deeply moving fiction or memoir, as a way to learn about life, as suggestions for what to cook for dinner, or just as a pleasant way to pass time” (xvii). And yet, cookbooks can help us to rhetorically read and participate in community, or as Anne Bower suggests, to create communal identity and to “beautifully [relate] and [shape] a community’s time and place and needs and longings and difficulties and delights” (8). This is certainly true with the books that I looked at. In addition to sharing their community history through their recipes, they also reflect material conditions and geographical and traditional identities, filtered and organized by their sponsors. In reading these cookbooks in this way, I am able to create my own definition of what it means to be a literate reader and interpret more about that community from the cookbook itself, to invest it with meaning and create my own narrative. Without a careful reading and literate knowledge of the contents of the cookbooks, I can merely cook and eat.

Endnotes

1. According to Alumnae Association records, there were approximately 20,300 living alumnae in 1978; approximately 500 (2.5%) identified as non-white. Graduation years listed indicate contributions from classes ranging from 1913 to 1980, meaning that contributors ranged in age from 26 to 93 at the time of the 1986 printing.

2. While I was unable to locate census information for Maine, the 1970 census for Newark Valley lists 1,288 residents. While racial information was not broken down by town, in the 1970 census only .9% of the entire county was listed as non-white.

3. This is not always true; as Anne Bower observes in her work on community cookbooks, a tremendous variation in the producers and products is not uncommon. In terms

of the cookbooks, “there are so many of them; most of them aren’t accessibly cataloged; and in truth, not all of them are fascinating” (8).

4. They remain so—according to the 2010 Census, Maine’s population was 5,377 and Newark Valley’s was 3,946—although this makes it nearly a third larger than it was in 1970.

5. The story that I (and a few of my fellow alums) remembered was far more lurid (although likely far less accurate). The rumor was that Deacon Porter’s wife had accused him of having an affair with Mary Lyon, the college’s founder. Porter had responded with indignation, telling his wife that if this was true, he would eat his hat. Legend had it that she had then steamed it into a pudding and served it to him. I asked approximately 20 alums from a 50 year time span, and most remembered little about the story at all, although all recalled that Deacon Porter’s Hat was both served regularly and was not a favorite for eating.

6. Perhaps because of the recipe’s existence for at least 150 years, it has leaked beyond the campus walls (it is certainly not because of its appeal as food). A quick Google search reveals an appearance of the recipe in the 1987 *L. L. Bean Book of New New England Cookery*. It is also included in the 1999 *The New England Cookbook: 350 Recipes from Town and Country, Land and Sea*, with the descriptor: “A spiced suet pudding steamed in a tall cylindrical mold. In 1837, at Mount Holyoke College the pudding was named to honor a favorite deacon, and the shape of his stovepipe hat. The dessert is still served at the College on Founder’s Day” (521). It seems appropriate that a cookbook meant for women of the college community would have less context surrounding the recipe, and that outside publications would contain more, and yet it seems that the Mount Holyoke women would have perhaps benefitted from the extra information.

7. Of the alums that I surveyed about Deacon Porter’s Hat, several told me that they had tried to make the recipe themselves in the intervening years since graduation. One admitted that it was better when she had made it herself, while another confessed that she had found it wholly inedible and had to throw it out. Several made it during weekends where fellow alums were coming to visit.

8. Consumers spent an astonishing 150 million dollars on frozen foods in 1940, for example, but with an increase in the numbers of refrigerators, the products that were being produced, and the number of women in the work force, by 1970 that number had jumped to seven billion dollars (Wallach 139).

9. Jell-O cake generally is comprised of a box mix white cake. Once the cake is cooked, the Jell-O is made and poured over it. Glass Pie is different colors of Jell-O, cut into cubes and combined with whipped cream and served in a pie crust.

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