

Book Reviews

Feeding Our Families: Memories of Hoosier Homemakers. Edited by Eleanor Arnold. (Indianapolis: Indiana Extension Homemakers Association, 1983. Pp. 153. Illustrations. Paperbound, \$6.00.)

I love to keep house, bake pies. Nothing makes me happier than for the family to come in and I can cook a big meal for them.

Clara Ashcroft, 70, Ohio County

We baked bread every other day. Each pan held six loaves, so that would be 12 loaves every other day.

You were feeding ten children, Pappa and Mamma, and Grandpa always stayed with us. That was 13 people in our family—that took a lot of bread.

Agnes Bell, 85, Hamilton County

In the words of women ranging in age from one hundred down to twenty-five, this delightful paperback details the hard work, the unending tasks, and the gaiety and joy of keeping a home in rural Indiana in the years from 1890 to 1930. The volume stands as a shining example of the possibilities for effective public use of an oral history project and as a caution against overly logical compartmentalization and too human nostalgia.

Eleanor Arnold has lovingly brought together excerpts from the oral histories of 243 homemakers from seventy-two counties. The excerpts are short, from a sentence to, very occasionally, three paragraphs, followed by the name, age, and county of the speaker. The excerpts are organized by task into chapters from "Raising and Preserving Fruits and Vegetables," "Butchering and Curing Meat," to "Eating with Others" (Sunday dinners, family get-togethers), and "Feeding the Workers" (it was nothing to feed sixteen to twenty men from the threshing team).

The whole is bound together by an insightful introduction that summarizes the average rural home.

Each extended household was almost self-sufficient. . . . The household itself was generally large, consisting of mother, father, many children, perhaps grandparents, unmarried uncles or aunts, or orphaned cousins. . . . two or more hired men, an occasional hired girl, and numerous guests, invited or drop-in. . . . the young homemaker of the day was much of the time either pregnant or a nursing mother (pp. 9-11).

The front and back pages of the volume provide the information that archivists call "provenance," how the collection came to be. The preface explains the initiation of the oral history project

in preparation for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Indiana Extension Homemakers Association in 1988, the process of selecting and interviewing the homemakers, and the collection of photographs, newspaper clippings, and other memorabilia to be preserved for public use in the Indiana Historical Society. All the interviewees and interviewers are listed in the back of the book. Already a tape/slide show consisting of a sound track of the women's voices and slides from the visuals has been prepared from the collection.

We read—with pleasure at the good humor expressed, with astonishment at the multitude and heaviness of the household tasks, with recognition for we have heard similar accounts from our own elders. The tight organization on specific areas of food preparation—cooking and baking, milking and churning—



HOMEMAKER WITH A DAY'S WORK, WHITE COUNTY—1923

Courtesy Indiana State Library, Indianapolis.

provides a composite view of each task over forty years. This method has its drawbacks, however. Lacking is a sense of the changes that took place over the years, of the full daily routines of these women, and, most especially, of the social relationships between members of these large, hardworking families. The tasks are isolated in time and context, and the material becomes more a springboard for our own memories, personal or as told to us, than a well-rounded picture of the lives of our not-so-distant foremothers. Be that as it may, reading the book aloud will surely stimulate animated conversation between older and younger generations.

Feeding Our Families is the first of a planned series entitled *Memories of Hoosier Homemakers* to be drawn from the collection. Others will deal with social and family traditions, courtship and marriage, childbearing and child rearing, and the effects of technology on the homemaker's chores. One suggestion for future volumes in the series is that they include longer excerpts, better pinpointed as to what decade they are describing and revealing more of the speakers' feelings about the significance of their tasks. From this first book it is evident that the whole collection is a gold mine from which new nuggets of insight into our past can be extracted again and again.

The Indiana project serves as a pilot for the National Endowment for the Humanities, which plans to document the National Extension Homemakers Council, with Indiana project director Eleanor Arnold serving as chairman for the national project.

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Historic American Buildings Survey in Indiana. Edited by Thomas M. Slade. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, for the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, 1983. Pp. xviii, 156. Maps, notes, illustrations, figures, appendixes, index. Clothbound, \$12.95; paperbound, \$7.95.)

Indiana's contributions to the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) have been few but solid. Only 161 (or about 1 percent) of the more than 16,000 buildings recorded in the Library of Congress archive by 1979 came from Indiana. A handful of shrewd and pragmatic persons with limited time and resources selected the Hoosier sites most likely to be recorded with federal assistance or by volunteers. This volume catalogs the accomplishments of the vanguard that preceded the agencies now charged with historic preservation in the state.