
Memories of Hoosier Homemakers: A Review Essay

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Indiana homemakers formed the first home economics clubs in 1913 to receive home economics lessons developed by the Cooperative Extension Service of Purdue University. In 1980 the Indiana Extension Homemakers Association (IEHA) launched a statewide oral history project to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the first clubs in 1988. IEHA originally intended to prepare an organizational history, but planners discovered a "lack of documentation" on the subject and thus extended their inquiry to include an exploration of homemaking itself. IEHA volunteers attended workshops on oral history methodology before conducting and transcribing interviews with almost three hundred Indiana homemakers from nearly every county in the state. Since most of the women interviewed were over seventy, fieldworkers sought in particular to recover experiences of homemakers between 1910 and the 1940s.¹

Success is evident in *Memories of Hoosier Homemakers*, a six-volume series containing a wealth of raw data on the social history of Indiana rural and small-town women.² Eleanor Arnold, who has directed the project since its inception and has edited each of the volumes, has been assisted with oral history by F. Gerald Hand-

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¹ Eleanor Arnold, ed., *Feeding our Families* (*Memories of Hoosier Homemakers* Series; [Indianapolis, 1983]), 1-4. The Indiana Extension Homemakers Association has approximately 45,000 members with local clubs in every county. Although names over the years have been Home Economics Clubs, Home Demonstration Clubs, and now Extension Homemaker Clubs, most of the interviewees refer to the organization simply as "club" or "home ec."

² The project has received support from the IEHA, the Indiana Historical Society, the Indiana Humanities Council, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. It has served as the pilot project for an oral history of the national organization and for other states conducting oral histories of homemakers.

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PREPARING THE THANKSGIVING MEAL, CLAY CITY, INDIANA, 1931

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field, Jr., and with photographic selection by Paul Wilson.³ Although some volumes add more to our historical understanding than others, each is replete with poignant, humorous, and matter-of-fact recollections of life in rural Indiana. The first volume, *Feeding our Families*, details homemakers' work in all stages of food preparation from gardening and butchering to baking and serving; *Party Lines, Pumps and Privies* examines the impact of the most significant technological changes on rural homes and homemakers; *Buggies and Bad Times* surveys transportation changes and the impact of wars and economic depression on rural Hoosiers; *Girlhood Days* offers accounts of growing up; and *Going to Club* focuses on IEHA club activities and leaders.⁴ A sixth and final volume, to be published in June, 1990, will explore the personal lives of homemakers and their relationships with husbands and families, including courtship, marriage, childbirth, child rearing, and widowhood. The volumes are arranged topically with relevant segments of interviews presented under each heading, and each segment in turn is identified by the interviewee's name, county of residence when interviewed, and age, making it possible to approximate the time period of each recollection. Arnold often places materials in chronological order, which proves effective in presenting technological changes. Splendid photographs, gathered from women around the state and from collections at Purdue University, accompany the text.

Memories of Hoosier Homemakers is an eloquent testimonial to the merits of oral history in that it provides details about the lives of ordinary rural women and their families rarely examined in written accounts. Since the volunteer interviewers selected friends and neighbors as subjects, there was "an easy assumption of basic shared knowledge between the two."⁵ Interviewers were furnished with a list of suggested questions that focused on homemaking practices, personal lives, home economics clubs, and the impact of external events. The effectiveness of questions, however, reveals

³ Arnold, who was IEHA state president in 1977, also served as editor of the newsletter, *Hoosier Homemaker*, for four years and was head of the Public Information Committee, which organized creative writing workshops. She describes the oral history project as the "direct descendant of the workshops, because it was there that I was reinforced in an idea I had always had—that Homemaker members had wonderful stories to tell." Eleanor Arnold, ed., *Going to Club* (*Memories of Hoosier Homemakers* Series; [Indianapolis, 1987]), 156.

⁴ Eleanor Arnold, ed., *Feeding our Families*; Arnold, ed., *Party Lines, Pumps and Privies* (*Memories of Hoosier Homemakers* Series; [Indianapolis, 1984]); Arnold, ed., *Buggies and Bad Times* (*Memories of Hoosier Homemakers* Series; [Indianapolis, 1985]); Arnold, ed., *Girlhood Days* (*Memories of Hoosier Homemakers* Series; [Indianapolis, 1987]); and *Going to Club*.

⁵ All interviews for *Feeding our Families* were conducted between September, 1980, and February, 1983.

some of oral history's limitations.⁶ For example, the topic of homemaking elicited detailed and illuminating responses, but comments concerning the impact of external events, such as wars, seemed much less informed and more general.⁷ It is unclear whether the occasional failures to probe revealing or insightful statements resulted from editorial decisions or the actual interviews. Readers will be frustrated at times with the short excerpts of interviews and will likely yearn for longer conversations with some of the women.

It is also regrettable that each section's introduction merely summarizes women's comments and makes few connections to broader historical themes. An appendix offering some indication of the socioeconomic status, religion, ethnic background, and farm or small-town location would have been helpful; as it stands, inferences on how economic, social, religious, or residential differences affected the choices the homemakers and their families made are left to the readers.⁸ Finally, the repetition of several recollections in different volumes detracts from the project's effectiveness. These flaws do not, however, minimize the overall achievement of Arnold and the many women working with her.

A number of themes—either explicit or implicit—appear throughout the five IEHA volumes: neighborhood interdependence, effects of technological change, gender roles on the farm, and the significance of home economics and associational activities for rural women. In an attempt to highlight these general facets of rural life, this essay will quote extensively from the homemakers' own words in order to convey the richness of their recollections. It will also attempt to place these topics in the larger contexts of twentieth-century life and women's history and to suggest the significance of this data in connection with some historiographical issues in these fields.

Neighborliness in rural Indiana communities in the first decades of the twentieth century meant involvement in a dense web

⁶ A valuable and concise statement on oral history is provided by Ronald J. Grele, "On Using Oral History Collections: An Introduction," *Journal of American History*, LXXIV (September, 1987), 570-78. Grele notes that interviewers have as much impact on the content of interviews as interviewees.

⁷ *Feeding our Families*, 4. The specific list of topics was as follows: "experience with IEHA; her chronological history, including life as a girl, courtship and marriage, childbearing and child rearing, and memories of the influence of outside events, such as wars, on her life. Further topics on her role as homemaker included questions on her typical daily housekeeping routines in various stages of her life; a comparison of her life with that of her mother and of her daughter; the effect of technology on homemaking chores, and others. A final section dealt with her judgments and values . . . and her opinions on aspects of husband-wife and parent-child relationships." *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸ The first five volumes contain almost no information on religion or ethnicity. Given the importance of religion and churches in the social and spiritual lives of rural Americans in the early twentieth century, it was disappointing that religion was covered in only ten pages in *Girlhood Days*, 172-83.

A TYPICAL CLUB OF
THE 1930s, WITH
WOMEN OF ALL
AGES PRESENT



Courtesy Indiana Extension Homemakers Association Collection.

of interdependent social and economic relationships. Neighboring families, secure in the knowledge that others would reciprocate, shared food and labor. The strong sense of community, based on friendship, trust, and cooperation, was evident in each volume of *Memories of Hoosier Homemakers*. Descriptions of hog butchering and wheat threshing days in particular, as well as the routine trading in daily life recorded in *Feeding our Families*, offer clear portraits of community interdependence.

Entire neighborhoods gathered for summer threshings and late autumn butcherings and combined socializing with hard physical labor. These days were especially happy for younger children who "loved to run around" while the adults worked. Nothing went to waste among their thrifty and practical elders who found ways to use all parts of the hogs; even the bladders on butchering days were blown up "as children play with balloons today."⁹ The work involved in threshing and butchering and preserving pork was strictly divided by gender.¹⁰ Men did the threshing in the fields, killed and scrubbed the hogs, hung the carcasses, and rendered the lard, while the women prepared the dinners for the large gatherings and cleaned the entrails for sausage casings:

They would start at the top or tail end and a man with a real sharp butchering knife would make a straight line clear down to the head. They'd lay that hog open. They would take the entrails out. . . .

As soon as the entrails were emptied and brought in, three or four women with their little scrub boards would clean and scrape the entrails until they were clean. To clean the casings [entrails] wasn't always the most pleasant odors, but you had to put up with it because it was necessary that they be clean. If the hogs didn't have worms, you had a good casing to stuff sausage.¹¹

During the harvest season there were constant dinners: "You didn't do all this [threshing] by yourself. You furnished all the food, but you went from house to house and helped each other." We "worked hard to get the meals ready," one woman from Decatur County remarked, but saw it as "a time for visiting and fellowship together with our neighbors."¹² Even though women were known for their different specialties at threshing dinners, meals on butchering days generally consisted of fresh livers and hearts with

⁹ *Feeding Our Families*, 42-43.

¹⁰ There are several studies of gender roles but most relevant to the homemaker interviews is John Mack Faragher's *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven, 1979). Despite the fact that Faragher's data are drawn from the mid-nineteenth century, there is a remarkable similarity between the gender role assignments he found and those described in *Memories of Hoosier Homemakers*. His working definition of gender is one that also serves well in understanding rural Indiana families: "gender roles are social regularities observed in what men and women do and the ways they think and feel about what they do, as well as how and why they do what they do." *Ibid.*, 48.

¹¹ *Feeding Our Families*, 43.

¹² *Ibid.*, 148.

gravy and biscuits. "We were awful glad if they could get one hog ready, so you could have some of the fresh meat to cook for dinner. . . . If you could get the liver out of one hog, you had it made."¹³ When threshing in the entire neighborhood was over, a threshing meeting was held to settle up:

Everybody had to pay the men that did the threshing, and if some of them had had more threshing tha[n] the others, they paid the others accordingly. Some of them wouldn't take anything, they just did it because of the friendship and fellowship with each other.

And then we had ice cream and cake. The women would bake cakes and we would make ice cream.¹⁴

At the end of each butchering day, meat would be distributed to neighbors. One woman remembered giving away meat but added, "We were always generous because they were generous to us." Neighbors, some of whom even specified the pieces they wanted, took home fresh meat, and "then when they butchered you got it back."¹⁵

After neighbors departed on butchering days, hard work remained for homemakers, who had primary responsibility for preserving the pork. Home freezers were not marketed until the early 1950s, and locker plants were not common before World War II, which made food storage a critical job: "The day of the butchering wasn't so hard on the women as the next day, when you had to get the meat all ready. Now that was the woman's big day."¹⁶ Details on diverse methods of making sausage and curing meat indicated family specialties, different ethnic influences, and variations within communities on how best to preserve the pork without waste.

Butcherings and threshings were special events necessitating neighborly reciprocity, but homemakers depended daily upon one another in more mundane ways. They traded fruits, cooked meals in times of sickness, offered to run errands, and, crucial for baking, shared their yeast starter when another's ran out or soured:

They all expected to share with one another. If you ran out of your yeast, why they just went to someone who had it. They'd start, have their starter and then, like if it was my mother, then she'd bake her bread the next day, and take it back to them, then they could bake the next day.¹⁷

Community bonds were further strengthened by the rural church, where worship was regularly combined with socializing. Church members, who were often both neighbors and relatives, frequently

¹³ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 41, 50.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 51. Locker plants in town enabled families to freeze meats before they had home freezers, but none of the oldest interviewees spoke of lockers.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

gathered for a Sunday meal after their worship services. Reciprocity governed these events as well: "The folks would decide at church and ask somebody home with them after church. And, of course, we were asked to their home for dinner in return sometimes."¹⁸

Cooperation between neighbors was even important in securing electricity, which transformed food preservation and preparation along with several other facets of homemaking. Recollections recorded in *Party Lines, Pumps and Privies* of initial reactions to electrical power and appliances offer valuable evidence of the cultural impact of technological change on ordinary people, especially on women who had been homemakers for years before the innovations were available to them.

Power lines penetrated rural Indiana gradually. The Rural Electric Membership Corporation in Indiana extended electrical power to many farm families in the 1930s, but a sizable number remained without electricity until after World War II. Although most were aware of electricity's potential benefits for their own lives—some families generated their own electricity with a Delco battery system¹⁹—neighborly persuasion was often needed to obtain enough new customers to support and justify an electrical line:

Several evenings we had the neighbors in to talk about it.

There had to be quite a few patrons on the line within a mile for them to be willing to do it. We also had to agree to each of us buy an appliance so that they would be sure that we would use enough electricity to pay them to put the lines out.

Finally, I think there were eleven of us signed up, and they were willing to do it. That's the way we got our line—by pushing that project.²⁰

Homemaker clubs and extension agents, in educating people about electricity, also indirectly promoted rural consumerism; demonstrations were given on "how much light you'd get from a candle, and then how much you'd get from an electric bulb." In addition, homemaker clubs addressed the issue of cost, a major concern of many rural families during the Depression era. "So many people thought we couldn't afford it, and the lesson was 'We Can't Afford Not To Use Electricity,'" one narrator recalled. Despite these efforts there were "a lot of people that didn't do it"; some not only resisted electricity for themselves but "wouldn't let them set poles on their place, so electricity could go past them on that road."²¹

Examination of oral testimony demonstrates that family conflicts over the desirability of electricity reflected generational

¹⁸ *Girlhood Days*, 181.

¹⁹ A Delco battery plant "had large batteries and it had an engine that was run with gasoline and the motor charged those batteries." *Party Lines, Pumps and Privies*, 125.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 127.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 127, 128.

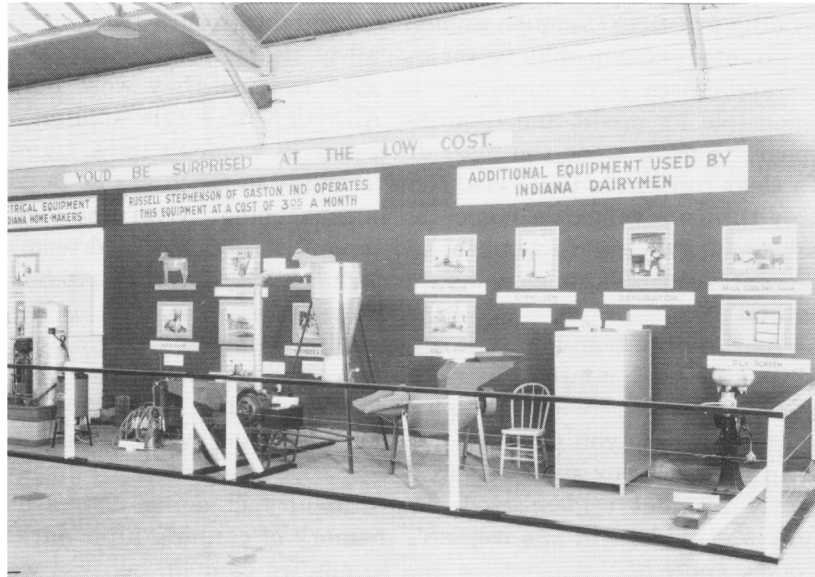


EXHIBIT TO ENCOURAGE USE OF ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT AT 1934
INDIANA STATE FAIR

Courtesy J. C. Allen Photo File, Purdue University
Agricultural Communication Service, West Lafayette.

rather than gender differences. “Well, mother said, ‘We’ll still keep the [kerosene] lamp, because you don’t know what the things will do. . . . People making things and plugging them in, it just won’t work.’” Another remembered “when my folks first got electricity after World War II out in the country. It was quite exciting for them. My grandmother, who lived with them, was quite elderly, and she didn’t think they needed it.”²² Husbands, in contrast, were often eager to provide their wives with appliances that promised to lighten the housework load. One homemaker’s threat to go on strike for a washing machine induced her husband’s purchase, but in many other cases, men actually surprised their families with the appliances.

Our neighbors, they got a washing machine first. Lester saw it . . . [a]nd so that put the idea in his head and he went down, and it happened that they had another one there, so he bought it.

And, land, I never even thought about such a thing, but I was really happy.²³

²² *Ibid.*, 139, 140.

²³ *Ibid.*, 67.

Another husband "couldn't wait. He had me an iron bought."²⁴ These purchases also illustrate society's gender divisions in family spending practices: because women shopped for groceries, advertisers targeted women, but in almost all of these recollections, the first appliances were purchased by men because they were held responsible for credit and finances. Although no single appliance appears to have made the most difference in women's lives, there is a clear consensus that "electricity made it so much easier to do many things involved in home and housekeeping." Over and over the women expressed in unpretentious and straightforward terms this sentiment: "Electricity, it's wonderful. I wish I could have had it all my life."²⁵

As the shift from kerosene and gasoline lamps to electric light bulbs progressed, family lifestyles began to be transformed as well. Before electricity, "We went to bed early. And then it was 7:00 or 7:30 by the time you got your milking done, and by the time you got in and got your supper over, it was about bedtime," a Pulsaki County resident remembered. The difficulty of doing chores at night was evident in one woman's memory of canning after dark: "I don't know how many flies and things we canned, because we couldn't see. But we did it, and it didn't kill us."²⁶ Women also recalled the dirt, smells, and dangers of kerosene and gasoline lamps. "Every once in a while Mom would say, 'Well, we've got to have fresh air in here,' and she'd open up the door or the windows. She was always afraid the fumes from the lamps would suffocate us."²⁷ In addition, the oral histories evoke the sense of awe and wonder associated with first seeing one's home electrified: "I remember the first night we had it [electricity]. Daddy had been out and didn't know they had come and turned it on. So we let him start to the barn with the lanterns and then we turned it on. The expression he had on his face—there was no way you could describe it."²⁸ Finally, pitfalls of inexperience with electricity were also recorded. Apparently, home extension lessons on its use had not reached everyone because more than one woman spoke of her own "lesson" with electricity: "One night I decided that I would fix my light plug and—without turning off the current—I attempted to cut off the plug. Needless to say, I had a nice indentation in my knife. The electricity just melted the knife where I tried to cut it."²⁹

Ruth Schwartz Cowan in *More Work for Mother* emphasizes that class and residence were crucial determinants of when fami-

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 131.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 134.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 136, 137.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 137.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 140.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 132.

lies acquired not only electricity but also indoor plumbing and central heating. She cites a 1934 United States Department of Agriculture *Farm Housing Survey* to show how limited the dispersion of these household technologies was in rural areas:

only 20 percent of the farmhouses in Missouri had a kitchen sink with a drain, . . . only 7 percent of those in Kentucky had a bathroom, . . . only 25 percent of those in the state of Washington . . . had flush toilets, and . . . only 17 percent of those in Ohio . . . had electricity.³⁰

The *Memories of Hoosier Homemakers* oral histories confirm the scarcity of these conveniences in rural Indiana before World War II as well.³¹ Cowan concludes that “in the forty years since the end of the Second World War, the amenities that were once reserved for just part of the population have become the basic standard for the lives of almost everyone.”³² *Party Lines, Pumps and Privies* gives individual context to Cowan’s statistics through detailed accounts of transformations in rural lives brought by electricity, indoor plumbing, and central heating.

Cowan’s central thesis, however, that the “diffusion of amenities was accompanied . . . by increases in the amount of work that some housewives had to do, and in the level of productivity that others were able to achieve,” does not accurately reflect the experiences of rural Indiana homemakers.³³ While her argument may be convincing for middle-class urban women and while her comments about increased productivity and greater results are certainly applicable to the Hoosier homemakers, the evidence in these interviews makes it impossible to believe that the amount of housework was greater for postwar rural women than for their mothers. “The work processes of housework may have changed substantially since 1940,” Cowan notes, “but the work itself has not gone away.”³⁴ Overall, Cowan gives too little weight to the changes in the process and the amount of physical labor involved. After reading the words of Hoosier women who went from scrub boards to automatic washers within their lifetimes, one can only

³⁰ Cited in Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York, 1983), 185-86.

³¹ Since *Party Lines, Pumps and Privies* does not include data on social class or residence, one can only speculate that the first to obtain electricity were those most able to afford it or those closest to town.

³² Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 196.

³³ *Ibid.*, 192. Such a thesis would, in fact, have produced considerable amusement among these Hoosier homemakers.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 193. Cowan correctly notes, however, that in the second postwar generation far more women worked outside the home and that when employment plus housework are added, women after World War II had more work than their mothers.

conclude that changes in "process" were more important to the women who experienced them than to later historians.³⁵

The first section of *Buggies and Bad Times* also addresses technological change through a coherent chronological overview of shifts in transportation.³⁶ "Bombs and Bad Times: Homemakers Look at History," the second half of this volume, is, however, somewhat uneven because critical topics such as women's suffrage and Prohibition, for whatever reasons, are neglected. Several of the interviewees, for example, are old enough to have been among the first generation of women voters and to have lived through World War I and Prohibition, and while younger women were able to recall in detail their mothers' attitudes and activities in other areas, they, too, might have had some interesting observations on these topics. Since several women had recollections of the war, one wishes that more specific questions had been asked. "What do you remember about World War I?" elicited little information either on the homefront or about women's attitudes toward war.³⁷

Observations on the Ku Klux Klan, however, provide insights on the organization's impact on rural Indiana. These Klan stories compensate for the disappointments of this volume. The revived Ku Klux Klan had more members in Indiana in the early 1920s than in perhaps any other state; estimates range from a quarter to a half million members.³⁸ The commonplace nature of the Klan in rural Indiana is evident in the matter-of-fact tone found in many recollections; interviewees remember that the KKK was present, that some neighbors and relatives were members, and that it was secretive and mysterious, especially to children. "I had an uncle that had quite a limp," one woman recalled, "and we had a lot of

³⁵ One author argues that "the automatic washer probably restructured rather than reduced laundry time" because it "changed the laundry pile from a weekly nightmare to an unending task, increasing the size of the pile . . . and possibly even the housewife's working time, which was now spread out over the week." See Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York, 1982), 268. Strasser and Cowan may be correct about the time involved, but the physical labor involved is very different.

³⁶ Testimony about horses and buggies, roads, and early automobiles are the most interesting segments. Although some women remembered automobiles as early as 1905 and while others did not have access to cars until the 1930s, for most rural residents the 1920s saw the increase of good roads and efficient cars, both of which reduced travel times and diminished distances.

³⁷ It is likely that the interviewers were more familiar with the areas of food preparation and technological changes within the home than with specific aspects of World War I, although the section on the war does include interesting information on special recipes for dealing with food shortages and the influenza epidemic of 1918-1919: "The flu was so bad that people couldn't get help. I thought I'd go to a neighbor and try to help them. I went and was there one day, and I took the flu and had to go home." *Buggies and Bad Times*, 75.

³⁸ Emma Lou Thornbrough, "Segregation in Indiana during the Klan Era of the 1920's," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLVII (March, 1961), 609. See also James H. Madison, *Indiana through Tradition and Change: A History of the Hoosier State and Its People, 1920-1945* (Indianapolis, 1982), 44-55.



**A TEACHER, ALMOST INDISTINGUISHABLE BY SIZE OR AGE, POSES
TO THE RIGHT OF HER STUDENTS**

Courtesy Indiana Extension Homemakers Association Collection.



THE WOMEN'S KU KLUX KLAN, HARTFORD CITY, INDIANA

Courtesy Indiana Historical Society. Neg. No. C4238.

fun, because we knew he was walking past us [in a KKK march], hopping along." Another interviewee remembered that "it was quite a mystery. I was never quite sure, but I thought I had two uncles in it—one from my mother's family and one from my father's."³⁹ The Klan's secrecy and beliefs created some tension and uneasiness in tightly knit rural communities. Some women noted their own parents' disapproval of the KKK and the clear sense that they did not associate with KKK members; "the ones that we did know that were in [the Klan], we weren't around much." Knowing that relatives and neighbors might be involved was "kind of eerie," for "you never knew exactly who it was, because they were always disguised with their costuming."⁴⁰ Some went to watch the marches, but not with approbation: "We were parked along the side of the street, and we saw them march down the street. My mother and father thought that was just awful . . ." After a cross burning one woman's parents expressed sorrow, and many recalled their fears as children when they saw a burning cross.⁴¹ The dominance and hypocrisy of the Klan were poignantly recalled by a Parke County resident:

Just about half or more of the people in Parke County belonged to it. I didn't, nor Joe didn't and Joe's mother didn't.

I couldn't see where they could be Christians if they hated certain people. But they pretended to be Christians and held [some] of their meetings in churches. Preachers preached that, you know, that you should join the Ku Klux Klan. They had church meetings and filled the churches, and took up money. They passed the plate around and took in a lot of money, which probably went to the head, to the upper officers.

I thought they did a lot of damage. They burned a cross in the courthouse yard for a certain woman who lived right there, a Catholic woman. I like that woman, and I thought they weren't much of a Christian if they could do that.⁴²

The KKK, with its secrecy and cross burnings, may have intimidated large numbers of people who felt powerless to oppose it, but occasionally individuals found ways of demonstrating their disgust with the organization, as a Shelby County woman recalls:

There was a group of Ku Klux Klan meeting at a little country church near Needham. It was quitting time, so my husband unhitched his horses and was going to drive them home. He was going to have to drive them through this group of Ku Klux Klan all dressed up in their whites.

There was devilment in him, so he wound the lines around the collars of the horses and smacked the horses on the rear, and turned them loose. Of course, they were anxious to get home, and they run right through the Ku Klux Klan. Those Klanners all run and tried to climb fences and everything else.

He loves to tell that story. He was Catholic, and the church was within a half mile of their house. It was sort of a get-even deal, I think.⁴³

³⁹ *Buggies and Bad Times*, 88, 84.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 85, 87.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

Anti-Catholicism was the major source of KKK antagonism in rural Indiana, although blacks and errant whites were also targets. "I think it was to scare people," one woman explained, "colored and white people, too."⁴⁴ In Perry County the White Caps, which operated like the Klan, "tried to scare people, and if they had a grudge against someone, or thought he was lazy and not providing for his family, they'd take him out and flog him. [They'd] leave a bunch of switches at people's door as a warning."⁴⁵

This very provocative section of *Memories of Hoosier Homemakers* suggests several questions for additional oral histories on the Indiana Ku Klux Klan. Was there a lingering mistrust within communities after the membership declined later in the decade? Were KKK activities later perceived as aberrations from community values, or were they reflections of values that were usually expressed in less visible ways? It would be interesting to explore the longer term impact of the Klan on rural Indiana.

Unlike the testimony about the Klan, as a whole *Buggies and Bad Times* offers little new material that is not available in other oral history and documentary collections on the Depression and World War II.⁴⁶ Although some recalled the Depression as an especially difficult time, others felt only slightly affected because they had never had much cash, had always been frugal, and had food from their gardens. From these accounts it appears that during the the Depression families continued old patterns of neighborhood interdependence, exemplified in trading, sharing, and working together. Although rural Hoosiers expressed concern for neighbors who were experiencing severe economic problems, this compassion had definite limits, as evident in the hostile comments by a Huntington County woman toward townspeople, believed to be stealing from rural folk: "And the country folks had worked like

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 86. Thornbrough found that statewide, "Appeal to race prejudice, in comparison to the appeal to anti-Catholicism, was relatively slight despite Indiana's long history of racial bigotry." Thornbrough, "Segregation in Indiana," 610.

⁴⁵ *Buggies and Bad Times*, 89.

⁴⁶ Sources for the Depression and World War II include Studs Terkel, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (New York, 1970); U.S., Works Progress Administration, Federal Writers' Project, *These are our Lives . . .* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1939); Tom E. Terrill and Jerrold Hirsch, eds., *Such as Us: Southern Voices of the Thirties* (Chapel Hill, 1978); Ann Banks, ed., *First Person America* (New York, 1980); Jeane Westin, *Making Do: How Women Survived the '30s* (Chicago, 1976); Richard Lowitt and Maurine Beasley, eds., *One Third of a Nation: Lorena Hickok Reports on the Great Depression* (Urbana, Ill., 1981); D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984); John Morton Blum, *V was for Victory: Politics and American Culture during World War II* (New York, 1976); Richard R. Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On? The American Home Front, 1941-1945* (New York, 1970); Studs Terkel, *"The Good War": An Oral History of World War Two* (New York, 1984); and Sherna Berger Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War and Social Change* (Boston, 1987).

the dickens to get these things [garden produce and farm animals], and that's the way they'd do [steal]. And they'd even come and steal hogs. You just about had to lock your fences, and then they would saw the locks off, so they could get your things."⁴⁷ Except for a short section entitled "Government Jobs," which includes a few comments on Works Progress Administration jobs and the Civilian Conservation Corps, there is nothing on the impact of the New Deal on rural Indiana. Surely the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and possibly the Farm Security Administration must have touched the lives of many of these women.

Accounts of World War II centered on relatives in the service and the consequences of gas, tire, sugar, and shoe rationing. Depending on their own needs, neighbors often traded ration stamps with one another. In spite of shortages, the war, some recalled, did bring economic recovery through expanded farm production and availability of new jobs. These jobs often drew women from rural communities, and several interviewees echoed William Chafe's thesis that World War II was a major turning point for American women: "many of them didn't go back to being just homemakers after the war. They just kept on with their jobs. They had learned that they could do both jobs."⁴⁸

Girlhood Days differs from the other volumes in the series because it focuses synchronically on the first twenty-five years of this century and thus provides richly detailed but rather static portraits of rural childhoods.⁴⁹ Fortunately, most of the women did not romanticize their youths. Given the pitfalls of reconstructing childhoods from the perspective of elderly adults, this volume seems remarkably free of nostalgia.⁵⁰ It is to be hoped that some crucial aspects of growing up female not covered in this volume will be addressed in the final volume. For example, what were their girl-

⁴⁷ *Buggies and Bad Times*, 93.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 146. William Chafe's *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York, 1972) has been challenged by studies that stress continuity with employment patterns in the 1930s. See Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women during World War II* (Westport, Conn., 1981); and Campbell, *Women at War with America*.

⁴⁹ A survey of quotations in two sections supports these generalizations. In the "Chores" portion of chapter 1, "Growing up in my Home," all but 20 of the quotations were from interviews with women age sixty-eight or above, and in the entire "Growing up at my School" chapter, all but 33 of the 174 quotations were by women over sixty-eight. Since the interviews were conducted between 1980 and 1983, the youngest of these women would have been born in 1915.

⁵⁰ Jay Mechling argues that a much greater effort must be made to reconstruct childhood from the perspective of children themselves. He cautions that "the adult recollecting in 1987 her 1920 childhood will be perceiving and interpreting that childhood through her adult, learned categories—from adult notions of propriety to the special vocabularies of popularized psychology." Jay Mechling, "Oral Evidence and the History of American Children's Lives," *Journal of American History*, LXXIV (September, 1987), 581.

hood rites of passage; how and when did they learn about menstruation; how did they learn about human sexuality; what kind of relationships did they have with mothers and sisters; what were their courting rituals?

Among the many glimpses of life that are documented in *Girlhood Days*, some of the most illuminating are those which examine gender roles on the farm, attitudes toward school, and health conditions. Families described were large, and the children, like their colonial and nineteenth-century rural predecessors, still labored on the family farm. Many spoke of performing farm and house chores by the time they were seven. Such tasks included collecting eggs, feeding chickens, filling and hauling water buckets, carrying wood, gardening, and assisting with baking and washing.⁵¹ Whether or not girls undertook other farm tasks depended largely on the sexual composition of the family and the attitudes of the father. Assignments based on gender may have irritated some girls, who as elderly women still recalled their exclusion from certain jobs. Although some girls milked cows and helped in the fields (especially when there were not “near as many boys as there was girls” in the family), other fathers refused to let their daughters perform what they considered “male only” tasks. “My father was one of those,” a Lagrange County woman explained, “he didn’t want the women working out in the fields. He was very strict about that. We would beg to work.” Another father constantly reminded his daughters, “‘Your place is to help your mother, and I don’t want you out around here, with the stock.’” One farmer, willing to let his daughter work as a field hand, felt more comfortable giving her a male nickname: “My dad had no boys and he always called me Tommy. The other three girls worked in the kitchen and around there, but I always helped feed the horses and hogs and do things like that. . . . And he called me Tommy.”⁵² Fulfilling male work roles, however, did not reduce traditional female responsibilities:

It wasn’t hardly fair—the men would come to the house at noon; they would feed the stock and then they would sit down while Mother and us girls had to get the lunch ready. The men could eat, sit down, and rest again while we cleared up. There wasn’t any rest for us—we just had to go back to the field. Same way in the evening. When we would get through in the evening, Dad and the boys got their chores done and they could quit. But our work went on and on, because we had to get ready for the next day.⁵³

For many families farm work often took precedence over school attendance; consequently, it was not unusual for parents to

⁵¹ These chores are remarkably close to those assigned to girls on the midwestern family farms in the 1850s studied by Faragher in *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*.

⁵² *Girlhood Days*, 21, 22.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 23.



SOME GIRLS ENJOYED HELPING THEIR FATHERS



CLUBS FOSTERED SISTERHOOD AMONG HOOSIER WOMEN

Courtesy Indiana Extension Homemakers Association Collection.

keep their children out of school to help with harvests in the fall or with heavy chores within the home. School was out early in the spring, "because kids had to work on the farm." As "soon as they could plow," remembered a Johnson County homemaker, "they had to be at home." "After I got big enough to use the washboard," another recalled, "I lots of time stayed home on wash day, because with that big a family, there was lots of washing." During the months of December, January, and February, boys came back to school from the farm, "So during those months we'd have quite a little rowdiness in school much of the time." One woman whose parents hired people rather than keeping their children out of school recalled that her family was the exception: "We didn't hardly ever have to stay home to work. A lot of children did have to, but Dad and Mom never were like that."⁵⁴ Although most school memories focused on one-room schoolhouses, many women explained how few children attended school beyond their graduation from eighth grade: "A lot of students didn't go to high school in those days. Not because they couldn't pass the test, but because there were no school buses and if they lived in the country they had no access to high school facilities." Transportation difficulties alone did not account for the termination of schooling: "What was the use of going to school?" a Pulaski County woman asked, "They were just going to get married anyway."⁵⁵

"Growing up Healthy" is an ironic title for a chapter that offers a litany of the diseases contracted by interviewees or by family members. Typhoid, diphtheria, smallpox, tuberculosis, rheumatic fever, diarrhea, whooping cough, influenza, and pneumonia, as well as serious farm accidents, punctuate homemakers' accounts. Rural Indiana was not exceptional in this regard, however; for despite considerable progress made in the treatment of several diseases between 1890 and 1920, by the 1930s, "On farms across the land, the birthrate was still high, the average length of life still low, [and] the 'old-fashioned' diseases still appallingly prevalent."⁵⁶ Hoosier women recalled a variety of home remedies, and from the comments about some of the doctors, patients probably had as much chance of recovery with a home remedy as with a doctor. One Lawrence County mother correctly diagnosed her daughter as a victim of "infantile paralysis, because there had been some cases

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 73-74. The first Indiana "compulsory education" law was passed in 1897, but according to the Lynds, the law only required twelve weeks of consecutive attendance per year from ages eight to fourteen. "Until 1924 the upper age limit for required school attendance was fourteen." They also noted that high school attendance in the state increased dramatically from 1920 to 1924. Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture* (New York, 1929), 183-84.

⁵⁵ *Girlhoods Days*, 107, 108.

⁵⁶ Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 183-84, quotation p. 186.

around," but the doctor "said he knew it was just worms, and he doctored her for worms." Questions of competence aside, without antibiotics and with inoculations for only a few diseases, country doctors in many cases could do little for their patients. Moreover, while many rural families delayed contacting doctors, some explained that they were "often scarce and you just couldn't get one."⁵⁷ Travel for rural families remained extremely difficult, and many perceived hospitals as distant places where one went to die. It is not surprising that home remedies, relatives, and neighbors were anchors in times of sickness. "Whenever any of the neighbor men would get sick, the neighbors would all pitch in," one woman said. "They'd go and help put out the crops, or help to gather them in, or whatever needed doing. If the women would get down sick, we'd go in and take them things and help out every which way we could."⁵⁸ Serious illness drew the neighbors together; "When somebody was sick, we had no hospital here . . . the men always came and sat up at night."⁵⁹

Going to Club will probably appeal to fewer general readers than the other volumes, but those interested in twentieth-century and women's history will find the data on homemaker clubs enlightening in connection with the impact of the culture of professionalism; the influence of Progressive faith in science, efficiency, and expertise; and the significance of women's associational activities. Glenna Matthews maintains in her insightful new study *"Just a Housewife"* that by 1900 the first professional home economists sought "to distance themselves from that lowly amateur, the housewife," and to set standards by which "actual practice would be measured." She concludes that the promotion of standards meant that women had to be taught "not to trust their own tastes" but instead to rely on experts and to "despise tradition and . . . advice of older women." The only way to escape tradition and effect change was "through the instrumentality of the outside expert."⁶⁰ Home economics, which by 1915 was thriving, was also imbued with such Progressive concerns as raising living standards, improving sanitary conditions, disseminating information on nutri-

⁵⁷ *Girlhood Days*, 117, 128.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Glenna Matthews, *"Just a Housewife": The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America* (New York, 1987), 150-51. Matthews distinguishes between Catharine Beecher, author of *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841, New York, 1970), and professionals at the end of century. Excluded from careers in science, these women copied male professions and, unlike Beecher, who extolled the virtues of homemakers, denigrated the competence of women as homemakers. "Themselves women who were having to contend with invidious stereotypes of female nature and female abilities in the academy and workplace, many of the pioneer home economists internalized the stereotypes and judged housewives accordingly." Matthews, *"Just a Housewife,"* 171.

tion, and increasing labor efficiency. Under provisions of the 1914 Lever Act, land grant colleges established networks of cooperative extension courses for women, and in 1923 the Bureau of Home Economics was created in the Department of Agriculture.⁶¹

The underlying assumptions of home economics as a discipline are apparent in the formation of the Indiana home economics clubs. These clubs were organized for the purpose of enlightening rural homemakers through lessons and demonstrations. Purdue University home economists, revered by the homemakers, traveled around the state giving presentations in schools or courthouses to groups composed of representatives from the local "home ec" clubs. The local women would then take the practical advice back to women in their own communities. As club membership grew, women lobbied their county officials to contribute funds for a full-time home economics agent in each county.⁶²

There is no doubt that lessons "to improve, enlarge and endear the greatest institution in the world—THE HOME" helped alter rural homemaking methods in early twentieth-century Indiana.⁶³ Hoosier women were encouraged to rely on the experts and to give up their old ways in order to become better homemakers. In the beginning, a homemaker recalled, most club members were "farm women and they had no education in developing their sewing and cooking, and I think it was the most wonderful thing that ever happened."⁶⁴ Since mothers of these farm women had presumably run homes without "education" in homemaking, comments like this indicate that many accepted the assumption that they needed special training.

Judging from the number of references, some of the most valued lessons were those on cold packing and canning food, but these lessons reveal another dimension of home economics: if the homemaker herself were to use the new methods, she would need a cold packer and a pressure cooker of her own. As previously noted, clubs offered lessons promoting electricity and the benefits of particular electrical products. There were also lessons on the benefits of packaged foods and mixes. Although the published testimony indicates that women were generally receptive to new methods and products, there were probably some who were not convinced.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 153-62.

⁶² One former agent recalled that visiting every club four or five times a year mushroomed into an impossible task when the number of clubs increased from five to twenty-eight. Ironically, extension agents were forced to remain unmarried. Since homemaking was presented as a full-time profession, "when you got married, you quit work. You weren't expected to work in Extension after you were married." This policy changed only after World War II when single women were difficult to recruit and when more married women were working. *Going to Club*, 61.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.



HOME ECONOMICS CANNING WORKSHOP, FRANKFORT, INDIANA

A DEMONSTRATION OF THE LATEST CANNING TECHNIQUES FOR VARIOUS FOODS, INCLUDING PINEAPPLE

Courtesy J. C. Allen Photo File, Purdue University Agricultural Communication Service, West Lafayette.

"When packaged mixes were just coming out, we were afraid of them. I remember we had a member who took that lesson. She was not very happy with the mixes, and she said, 'Well, this is what they're showing, and I'm supposed to show it to you, but I don't really think it's a good way to do. I think you should make them from scratch.'"⁶⁵ The pattern of teaching women the advantages of new technologies for simplifying homemaking tasks and thus both implicitly and explicitly promoting consumerism has continued for over seven decades. Rather than the advantages of pressure cookers and electric irons, for example, contemporary lessons have praised the benefits of microwaves and home computers.

A review of the lessons over this period offers social historians abundant evidence of the impact of change on rural and small-town women in Indiana. Initially concentrated primarily on food or clothing demonstrations and geared to women who did not work outside the home, lessons in more recent years have focused on a wider range of topics, "We have human development . . . and we have lessons on aging and wills, banking, women living alone, insurance, social security—all things we never used to get into in Extension Lessons." Because planning was originally premised on the assumption that homemakers had only one job, "more lessons for career women that go hand in hand with homemaking" have been offered since World War II. "Lots of us are working outside the home," a woman in her thirties explained, "and budgeting our time has been of prime importance in our lesson discussions."⁶⁶ The changing nature of the lessons indicates the pragmatic orientation of extension and its willingness over the decades to deal with contemporary concerns of rural women.

Quite apart from whatever practical benefits women derived from the lessons, the clubs were enormously important in strengthening neighborliness. Historians have examined nineteenth- and early twentieth-century associational activities for urban women and have written extensively about sisterhood, bonds between women, and women's networks in urban areas,⁶⁷ but historical ne-

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 115, 116, 118.

⁶⁷ Among the many studies that discuss women's associational activities and networks, some of the most important are Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven, 1977); Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1984); Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York, 1981); Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, Conn., 1981); Estelle Freedman, "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930," *Feminist Studies*, V (Fall, 1979), 512-29; Sharon Hartman Strom, "Leadership and Tactics in the American Woman Suffrage Movement: A New Perspective from Massachusetts," *Journal of American History*, LXII (September, 1975), 296-315; Kathryn Kish Sklar, "Hull House in the 1890s: A Community of Women Reformers," *Signs*, X (Summer, 1985), 658-77; and Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, 1987).

glect of rural women's associations partially reflects the few organizations other than churches for rural women to join. The oral testimony in *Going to Club* provides historically revealing and poignant insights into the personal meaning of this associational activity. In the simple words of one elderly homemaker from Montgomery County,

Farm women had never had an opportunity to join clubs. And, for many of the women, the social part of it was worth more to them than anything else. It was worthwhile for that, just to get women out and let them know that there was somebody else that had the same problems they did.⁶⁸

Many women undoubtedly went to club just because they "wanted someplace to go"; others joined because "everybody else in the community belonged and it was the best of women . . ." With the dearth of other activities, "our club meetings and our church were the highlights of our lives, and everybody went." For new residents joining a club was "a good way to get to know people around the neighborhood." Without it, one woman "wouldn't have known anybody." The women were "so friendly. You just felt that you was in a jolly bunch. . . . I felt right at home with all of them."⁶⁹

For the first decades, clubs met during the day, often with children in attendance, but after World War II some clubs began meeting at night, reflecting employed women's new jobs. Not only were more women working outside the home, but there was also "electricity in more than just a few houses"; and with improved transportation, "we were becoming more mobile. Women weren't afraid to go out at night alone."⁷⁰

Whether attending day or evening meetings, members emphasized to families their determination not to miss these occasions. Club night became known in many families as "*Mom's night out!!*" And you didn't do something that interfered with it. They took care of themselves at home. That was always my time and my family respected it. That was the *one* thing that Mom did." Family members did not object when women went out because, "To tell the truth, it wouldn't of done them much good." In order to take time out for the day meetings, women often worked harder in the evening to make up for the lost time. Since many children attended the day meetings, they grew up together and also formed special friendships through the clubs: "There was about as many children as there were women and that was a big deal to get to go play with all the children on club day," a woman recalled. With or without children present, women were faithful members because the "fel-

⁶⁸ *Going to Club*, 18.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 18, 21, 25, 19.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

lowship meant so much" and they "were very special to each other."⁷¹

In addition to sisterhood, club activities offered women an opportunity to develop leadership skills and increase self-confidence. The responsibility of bringing a lesson back to the club forced some women to speak in front of others for the first time. "I remember the first lesson I took," a Whitley County woman stated. "I came home with a headache and worried about how I was going to give that lesson." Overcoming her "shaking and quivering" when she made a speech, one member was never again "bothered in front of people." "By receiving lessons from Purdue specialists," a former state president explained, "it helped me to have confidence in myself and to branch out into other community organizations."⁷²

Special club activities provided some women with extraordinary experiences; for example, several clubs and state groups took field trips to Indianapolis, Chicago, and other cities to tour museums or attend artistic performances. But travels by the Indiana Homemakers Chorus in the 1930s were most notable. Club choruses throughout the state joined to form the Indiana Homemakers Chorus, or "Singing Hoosiers," with approximately two thousand voices and performed at the Hollywood Bowl, the International Exposition in Toronto, Canada, and Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C. The latter performance led to an invitation by Eleanor Roosevelt to sing for Franklin D. Roosevelt at a White House lawn party. After entertaining him with "'Home on the Range,' because it was such a favorite of his," the women were greeted by the first lady.

Mrs. Roosevelt was such a gracious lady. She went all over that big lawn and she shook hands for a long, long time with anybody that wanted to shake hands with her. That was such a gracious thing for her to do, because I know that hand must have been awfully tired. But the women were so thrilled.⁷³

Most members of the homemaker clubs, of course, never performed for a president or met a first lady, but they all learned new homemaking techniques and traveled the distance from the certain isolation within the home to the possibility of sisterhood within the club. Perhaps some lessons that criticized traditional methods of homemaking may have made some women doubt themselves, but *Memories of Hoosier Homemakers* offers abundant evidence that the overall impact of the "home ec" clubs for rural women in Indi-

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 50, 49, 45, 29.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 80, 64.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 35-36. Given the Roosevelts' concern with Indiana in the 1936 election, the invitation to the "Singing Hoosiers" was probably a clever political move. The 1936 campaign is discussed in James Philip Fadely, "Editors, Whistle Stops, and Elephants: The Presidential Campaign of 1936 in Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXXXV (June, 1989), 101-37.

ana has been overwhelmingly positive: "After all these years, the girls are almost like sisters. We've grown up together and there is always a helping hand if you need it."⁷⁴

If the published volumes provide a fair sample of the riches contained within the hundreds of interviews, researchers in several historical specialties—women's history, Indiana history, rural history, twentieth-century social history—are certain to benefit when the transcripts are deposited in the Indiana Historical Society at the end of the project. Reading the first five published volumes also increases anticipation for what Arnold has termed the "culminating volume on the women themselves."⁷⁵

⁷⁴ *Going to Club*, 166.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.