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## Book Reviews

*Living Rich Lives: Memories of Hoosier Homemakers.* Edited by Eleanor Arnold. ([Indianapolis]: Indiana Extension Homemakers Association, [1990]. Pp. 244. Illustrations, map. Paperbound, \$5.00, plus \$1.50 postage and handling.)

With the publication of *Living Rich Lives*, the Indiana Extension Homemakers Association's oral history project, *Memories of Hoosier Homemakers*, is now complete. Like the five preceding volumes in the series—*Feeding Our Families*; *Party Lines*, *Pumps and Privies*; *Buggies and Bad Times*; *Girlhood Days*; and *Going to Club*—*Living Rich Lives* offers abundant raw material on the lives of rural Indiana women primarily from the 1890s to the 1940s.<sup>1</sup> The final volume affirms the valuable historical contributions made by Editor and Project Director Eleanor Arnold and the countless Extension women, both interviewers and interviewees, who have recorded the revealing recollections of rural lifestyles, customs, and values. As with the earlier volumes, however, *Living Rich Lives* evades some crucial questions for understanding the history of women and families.

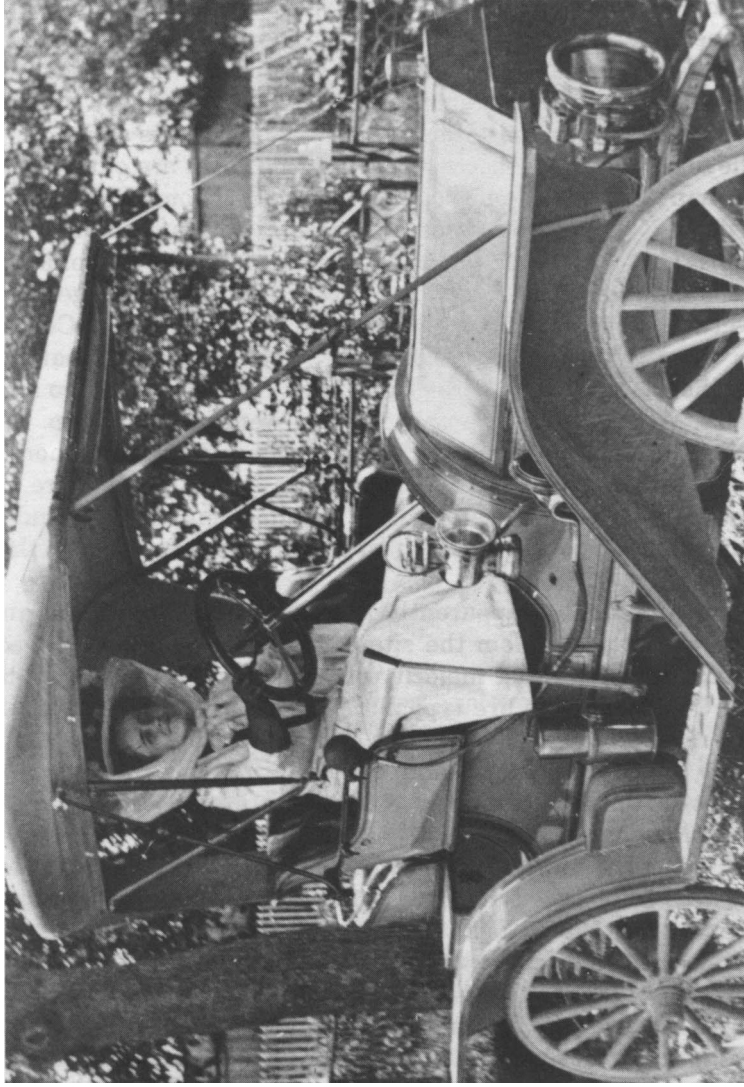
*Living Rich Lives* has three major sections, each with additional topical divisions. "Wooings and Weddings" recalls first meetings with husbands, honeymoons, and shivarees as well as courtships and weddings; "Women's Families" has a segment on "Starting Together" and information on childbearing, childrearing, church, retirement, and widowhood; "Women's Work" covers work at home, paid employment outside the home, women's roles in society, and women's values.

There is some repetition of material on childbearing, childrearing, and housework from earlier volumes, but the unasked or unanswered questions about women's private lives are more troubling. *Living Rich Lives*, like *Girlhood Days*, leaves the reader wondering what roles mothers, other relatives, or, as was often true for urban working-class youth, peers and popular culture played in the girls' sexual educations. A query about unmarried couples living together elicited the response that "we didn't even

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<sup>1</sup> For a review of these volumes, see Barbara J. Steinson, "Memories of Hoosier Homemakers: A Review Essay," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXXXVI (June, 1990), 197-222.

NEW EXPERIENCES



Courtesy Eleanor Arnold.

know what sex was in high school (p. 230)," but there is no other information on sexual attraction or activity during their youths and courtships. Although some interviewees had large families, many had only two children. How did they limit fertility, and where did they obtain knowledge of birth control and contraceptives? There are only glimpses of those who fell outside the norm of an enduring Christian marriage. "Nobody ever got a divorce," one woman asserted, but another recalled that her "biggest failure" was a divorce she "had to learn to live above . . ." (pp. 230, 129). Did she receive support or approbation from the good Christian homemakers in her community? Because oral history is so effective in ferreting out details of lives not found in written sources, gaps like these are regrettable, especially with the easy rapport between interviewers and interviewees evident in this series.

The disappointing aspects of *Living Rich Lives* are outweighed by the many illuminating sketches of rural customs and experiences, three of which are the social roles of churches, weddings and postnuptial celebrations, and multigenerational households. In small communities churches were social centers for all ages, but they were particularly important for young adults. A Scott County woman who married in 1914 explained, "You met your husband at church; there wasn't anywhere else to meet him; you didn't go anyplace else. When you went anywhere, you went to church" (p. 23). Following Sunday evening church youths often gathered in homes for small parties. "We had five churches in a five mile square," a Putnam County woman recalled. "They had church on Sunday night and rotated, so we would go wherever there was church that night" (p. 25).

Although churches apparently facilitated social mingling and romance, they were seldom the site of the small and simple weddings recalled by the vast majority of homemakers. Comments by a Grant County woman are typical: "Most of the weddings when I was married—you never heard of a church wedding. Most of them just went to the courthouse and got their marriage license and then went to the minister's home or to the justice of the peace" (p. 45). Following the ceremony the bride's mother served a dinner for the couple, the few guests, and the minister. Some of the older interviewees emphasized the importance of an infare dinner hosted by the groom's family the day after the wedding. The infare was a conscious merging of extended families, "the gathering of all the relations on both sides to wish the bride and groom a long, happy and useful life . . ." (p. 50). The shivaree, which occurred sometime during the first week after a marriage, was another rural custom with clear expectations:

Well, your friends and people surprise you one night. You are supposed to get a lot of candy and snacks and so forth as soon as you are married, because you never know when they are coming. They sneak up on you about midnight when you are



A WEDDING PORTRAIT

Courtesy Eleanor Arnold.

in bed sound asleep and then come and start hammering and banging pots and pans and all sorts of things and yell and sing. You have to go and invite them in. Treat them, and then they stay as long as they want (pp. 66-67).

Several couples were also “kidnapped” and taken for rides throughout the countryside, and it is not surprising that some women were “scared to death” at the prospect of their shivarees (pp. 70, 71).

Finally, multigenerational households were quite common in rural Indiana, particularly when a son went to work on the family farm. *Living Rich Lives* provides fascinating insights into the complex dynamics of these households. What some thought would be only a temporary expediency proved to be a lifelong arrangement. Although both generations of women had to make adjustments, there was little doubt about who was in charge. “So we just lived with his mother and helped take care of the farm,” one woman recalled. “Of course, she was the head of the house and I did as she wanted” (p. 79). Pearl McCall remembered her own mother’s

words: "My mother gave me the best advice that any mother could have given her daughter. She said, 'Pearl, you are going in that house up there, and just remember that it is her house' " (p. 126). Although it was sometimes hard, McCall followed this counsel and "didn't have the difficulties that a lot of girls had, because . . . she was never sharp and she was lenient about a lot of things" (p. 126). Family historians have examined landholding patterns within families, but the homemakers' remarks suggest that there is also much to be learned about the internal dynamics of rural families.

The entire *Memories of Hoosier Homemakers* series deserves a wide readership, for each volume contains fascinating material on Indiana's rural past. Individuals offering courses in Indiana, twentieth-century, family, or women's history should consider adding one of these volumes to their course reading lists. The recollections recorded by the Indiana Extension Homemakers Association are rich primary sources for undergraduates who too often feel no connection with the past.

BARBARA J. STEINSON is associate professor and chair of the history department, DePauw University, Greencastle, Indiana. She has published *American Women's Activism in World War I* (1982).

*DeKalb County, 1837–1987. Volumes One A and B, DeKalb County Topical History.* By John Martin Smith. Volume Two, *DeKalb County Families.* Edited by Troas May Wise. (Auburn, Ind.: DeKalb Sesquicentennial, Inc., 1990. Pp. xxxiv, 1512; 816. Illustrations, maps, tables, indexes. \$89.00, plus \$4.45 sales tax and \$6.00 shipping.)

The sheer bulk, and weight, of this work on DeKalb County attracts attention. Volume I is a topical history in two parts, A and B, which together total 1,392 pages plus an index of 118 pages. Volume II is devoted to the families of DeKalb County and boasts 679 pages in addition to an index of 134 pages.

John Martin Smith has produced for the DeKalb sesquicentennial celebration a valuable and enduring work that will help to preserve the rich heritage of this largely agricultural community. This is a good, old-fashioned county history with some new twists. The organization of Volume I is precise. Topically arranged, it encompasses the major facets of the county's experiences from its earliest years. Indeed, it takes the form of a published version of a local historical society's files. It is quick and easy to use in any search for pertinent information about a very wide variety of subjects. Smith has assembled some of his own writings, but the work of others, from miscellaneous publications and the area newspapers, compose most of the volume. The most enticing aspect of the book are the many vignettes that result from interviews with a