

WRITING A MEASURE OF HER LIFE:  
THE RHETORIC OF  
WOMEN'S COOKBOOKS

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that women have employed cookbooks as rhetorical vehicles in order to establish individual and communal identities, claim authority of a written genre, and respond to dominant notions of womanhood. Three categories of cookbooks are explored within the project including: unpublished manuscripts, community cookbooks, and commercially published cookbooks. Drawing on the work of feminist scholars, Jaqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch, I argue that cookbooks from each of these categories function in different rhetorical ways for their authors. The cookbooks analyzed here evidence that women use “everyday” or “ordinary” writing to record history and memory, preserve relationships, pass on knowledge, and effect social change at many levels. Although focused on cookbooks written by Alabama women from 1850-1930, the archival study opens possibilities for acknowledging and valuing the important rhetorical work of everyday, ordinary forms of writing.

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my motherline, the women related to me by blood, marriage, and choice whose love and care has nurtured my body, mind, and spirit. I write back through you.

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I have always wanted to write an acknowledgments page. Now that the task is before me, I realize it is no easy feat. There are more people responsible for me being where I am today than I can possibly name or recognize, and yet I am grateful to each one.

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## INTRODUCTION

*“No one who cooks, cooks alone. Even at her most solitary, a cook in the kitchen is surrounded by generations of cooks past, the advice and menus of cooks present, the wisdom of cookbook writers.” – Laurie Colwin*

*“The universe is made of stories, not of atoms.” – Muriel Rukeyser*

My family has a treasured spaghetti sauce recipe. “Mary Ann’s spaghetti sauce” was the only spaghetti sauce recipe my mother used during my childhood and adolescence. We never had “store-bought” sauce from a can or jar. The yellowed, stain-spattered recipe card lives in a battered metal index card box. That recipe box travelled with us as we moved every two or three years first during my father’s military service and then later as he struggled to shake his wanderlust. Finally, we and the box settled in a rural log house my parents built. Twenty-five years later that house has become the quintessential Southern “family home” where my parents host their daughters, sons-in-law, a pile of grandchildren, and various friends and relatives for holidays, birthdays, and gatherings. No matter the occasion or meal, the green recipe box is there on the shelf in the kitchen standing ready to offer the recipes, written in (mostly) my mother’s hand, that have come to define our family: Chinese pork chops, Watergate salad, Boiled oatmeal cookies, and Mary Ann’s spaghetti sauce.

The sauce recipe came from my mother’s good friend, Mary Ann Adams. A few years ago, my mother compiled and transcribed all of her best recipes and created a family cookbook



for my sisters and me. When I saw Mary Ann, soon after, I joked with her that she was now famous as her recipe was “published” in my family cookbook. She was surprised that my mother had kept and used her recipe for over thirty years, but she was also pleased and happy. She told me about how she and my mother became friends, how they shared young motherhood together, and how they helped and influenced each other. Mary Ann and my mother had not seen each other in nearly ten years, and I had not seen Mary Ann since I was a young child, but I knew part of her through her recipe. “Mary Ann’s spaghetti sauce” was a fixture in my life.

Thoughts of Mary Ann’s recipe have been central in my mind as I ponder the practice of recipe naming and its power to record women’s relationships and identities. This idea has become especially poignant as cancer treatment complications resulted in Mary Ann’s sudden, unexpected death. I am not suggesting that death will result in erasing the effects of Mary Ann’s entire life, nor am I suggesting that she will only be remembered for one spaghetti sauce recipe. Her numerous friends, family, children, and grandchildren will remember her life for various reasons. What I am suggesting though, is that by claiming and naming the recipe “Mary Ann’s spaghetti sauce” *part* of Mary Ann Adams’ life and identity lives beyond her immediate family and friends. I have and use her recipe as do my four sisters and several of our friends (who may or may not have known Mary Ann) with whom we shared the recipe. Additionally, my mother shared the recipe with her friends (again who may or may not have known Mary Ann) over the past thirty years, as I am sure that Mary Ann did, too. It is difficult to know exactly how many people may have used or possess a copy of Mary Ann’s recipe, but the possibility is amazing. At least for my family, Mary Ann Adams continues to be a part of our lives and gatherings. Her life is on *our* record.

The story of Mary Ann's spaghetti sauce recipe is not unique. The simple act of naming and sharing a recipe creates a network of relationships that stretches beyond family lines, generations, and time. Like family Bibles, recipes collected in cookbooks serve as records of family life. However, recipes and cookbooks create a more intimate record than family Bibles. While Bibles are records of names, dates, and events; recipes record memories, senses, and emotions. Cookbooks record the embodied life of the family. They chart the meals at which bodies were nourished, milestones were celebrated, and loved ones were mourned. Women often give and receive recipes and cookbooks as gifts for weddings, the birth of a child, or the death of a loved one. Just as food is central to all of these occasions so are recipes and cookbooks.

As a genre, cookbooks appear to be nearly as old as cooking and writing. Ancient writings of Greek and Roman civilizations, including those by Cato and Apicius, discuss food preparations. Like most other press-printed books, the first printed cookbooks or "receipt books" were written by men, often famous chefs or cooks for noblemen. By the eighteenth century more and more European cookbooks were authored by women. The first printed cookbooks in the American colonies were imported from Europe, and the first printed cookbook by an American author, Eliza Smith's *The Compleat Housewife; or, Accomplish'd Gentlewoman's Companion*, was printed in Williamsburg in 1742 (Tartan 41). Cookbooks written by southern women soon followed and Mary Randolph's 1824 book titled, *The Virginia House-wife*, is regarded as "the most influential American cookbook of the nineteenth century" (41). Publishing cookbooks gained popularity in the United States during the nineteenth century. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the genre exploded within the commercial publishing market, and today cookbooks remain one of the most lucrative and prolific genres for publishers.

Yet cookbooks, like food, home, and family, represent the “private sphere;” a place separate from or other to the public. Traditionally, the work of those (mostly men) operating within the public sphere as “warrior citizens” or “worker citizens,” is valued (Beasley and Bacchi 350). By valuing the “public” life over the “private” life, these systems of law, politics, and tradition ignore the work of women which has historically occurred in the “private” sphere of the home. According to Royster and Kirsch, one approach for feminist scholarship is “rescue, recovery, and (re)inscription” work aimed at entering women’s lived experiences into the world’s canons of history, literature, the arts, etc (Royster and Kirsch 14).

In composition and rhetoric, specifically, scholars have responded to in force to Patricia Bizzell’s call for “canon busting” and expanding the scope of feminist rhetorical scholarship (50). Drawing attention to or re-valuing “women’s work” opens for exploration and analysis a vast array of previously ignored textual sources including: diaries, journals, commonplace books, letters, home-keeping manuals, quilts, needlework, and cookbooks (Gannett, Sinor, Gere, Chansky). Turning to the “ordinary” and “extracurricular” to examine the ways women have contributed to and practiced writing, reading, and speaking even when banned or discouraged from pursuing professional opportunities outside of the home, feminist scholars have sought to relocate women in the world’s written and spoken record (Gere, “Kitchen Tables” 278-279). Claiming these texts as appropriate and worthy of scholarly attention redefines the nature of citizenship and ameliorates the continuous historical erasure of women’s voices.

Moreover, to better understand the lived experiences of all women, these feminist scholars have moved beyond the white, middle class to uncover the written and rhetorical traditions of women of color (Enoch, Royster, Collings Eves) and various social and religious backgrounds (Bailey-Dick, Almagno et al, Gere, Sohn). This work has been an effort of both

recovery and discovery. Scholars have worked to recover women's writing and rhetorical practice from history, and that work has led to an interest in exploring women's relationships with writing and rhetoric in the present (Gannett, Sohn, Fleitz).

Like journals, diaries, letters, and other forms of "ordinary" writing examined by feminist and other scholars, cookbooks offer another option for revaluing women's rhetorical lives and disrupting traditional notions of what counts as rhetoric. In her study of the diary of one of her ancestors, Jennifer Sinor argues that, "We do not know how to read ... ordinary writing: writing ... that is not literary, writing that seems boring, barren, and plain" (123). She maintains ordinary writing should be read "through a lens that is shaped by the daily rather than the literary" which "honor[s] the rhetorical capacity of dailiness" (123-124). This same attention and honor is required for understanding the rhetorical work accomplished by the "ordinary" women who write cookbooks. That work is significant and has lasting impact on those who read and use the texts, even for generations after the author's death. It is this lasting impact, this echo of a life lived, that makes ordinary cookbooks valuable for scholarly study.

For this project I use the term *cookbook* broadly to encompass private, unpublished manuscripts; group-sponsored, community cookbooks; and commercially published cookbooks. Culturally, cookbooks have largely been viewed as women's books because they are used primarily for "women's work," the devalued work of the private sphere. Historically, the genre has been open to women as an acceptable form of authorship, both personal and public. Perhaps because of the utilitarian function of the texts and their status as women's writing, cookbooks were generally ignored as locations worthy of academic scholarship. Yet, for these same reasons, including cookbooks as a site for the study of women's writing allows scholars to develop a deeper understanding of the everyday lives of women from various classes, ethnic groups, races,

and periods of history. Additionally, (re)valuing artifacts associated with “women’s work” acknowledges the inherent value of the private sphere and disrupts the phallogocentric oppression associated with domestic work.

I argue that for many women throughout history; without profession, property, or possessions of their own; reading, writing, and sharing cookbooks offered a way to create identity, make meaning for themselves and others, and subvert dominant cultural discourse. Cookbooks and recipe collections were fixtures in women’s lives because, as historian John Edgerton notes, “until recently, the role of cook was one society expected women to play, whether they wanted to or not” (16). It is precisely this quotidian place of prominence within women’s lives that makes cookbooks essential artifacts in the study of women’s connections to history, society, culture, and rhetoric. Scholarship on cookbooks reveals a few important facts about the genre.

First, cookbooks are more than instruction manuals for cooking. As Rosalyn Collings Eves notes, “recipes convey information not only *for* women but *about* them” (282). We can read a portion of a woman’s lived experience in the pages of her cookbook. In her book, *Eat My Words: Reading Women’s Lives Through the Cookbooks They Wrote*, anthropologist Janet Theophano explains, “...authors used cookery books as a venue for the exploration of domestic life, women’s roles, education, and demeanor” (191). In their cookbooks, whether publicly published or privately held, women write about their lives, their beliefs, and their desires. As Elizabeth J. Fleitz argues in her recent dissertation, *The Multimodal Kitchen: Cookbooks as Women’s Rhetorical Practice*, cookbooks constitute a particular women’s rhetoric that allows participants to talk, write, and communicate in a common discourse that “establishes women as experts within their own (private) sphere” and creates both the space for performing rhetoric and

the ability “to value their own existence” (ii). This expertise is then passed woman to woman, often along traditional familial lines (mother to daughter) but also to wider, more distant, more public audiences.

Second, through their engagement in this common discourse both author and audience understand the dynamic nature of cookbooks. As Theophano notes, “cookbooks invite editorializing” (188). Women writing cookbooks often included several versions of the same dish titling each “another way” (186). This expression indicates to readers that they can freely alter, revise, or personalize recipes at will; thereby, rewriting the text as they choose. In my own family cookbook, my mother included a collection of seven recipes titled, “Granny’s Teacakes.” These recipes came from her mother, and although Granny did not specifically title these recipes as “another way,” each represents another way to make Granny’s favorite and most sought-after recipe. Marginal notes also demonstrate the freedom women feel to editorialize or talk back to cookbook writers. Notes like, “‘want to try,’ ‘good,’ and ‘terrible’” fill the margins of many well-used cooking texts (Theophano 186). Marginalia indicates that the women using cookbooks do not consider the author the sole authority of her text. Theophano highlights examples of marginal notes in cookbooks that show scorn, sarcasm, and critique of the books and their authors. Clearly, women feel free to take the position of co-author alongside the authors of the cookbooks they use.

Third, this freedom to edit and expand cookbooks allows women to use their cookbooks as record books. As (sometimes the only) texts that a woman could call her own, cookbooks were truly valuable, multipurpose spaces in the lives of the women who owned them. Andrea K. Newlyn points to cooking texts she studied as locations for women to record social history. The books from her study held newspaper clippings of major events, obituaries, and even drawings of

rail and road ways. Theophano gives examples of women writing poetry, journaling, recording events, and even practicing their handwriting within the volumes she studied. She documents scrawls in cookbooks from children who practiced their letters as their mothers cooked (Theophano 157). These extra-textual elements indicate that the personal, utilitarian nature of cookbooks allowed women the freedom to communicate openly within the pages.

Finally, expanding on the value, importance, and freedom of expression historically offered to women by cookbooks, feminist scholars have examined cooking texts to understand the ways women from various segments of society use them to create individual and communal identities. Marta Hess examines the ways Junior League women have used their cookbooks to create community and identity in her recent essay, “Establishing Community and Identity in Junior League Cookbooks.” Hess focuses on three specific cookbooks produced in the mid-1970s by Junior League organizations in Stamford, Connecticut; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She argues that the format, images, and recipe selections within these group-sponsored cookbooks work together to create projections of both the communities and women they represent.

Other scholars explore how women from different religious communities use cookbooks to craft and support their own community’s identity (Bailey-Dick, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Romines). More interesting is the notion that women use cookbooks to simultaneously establish both community and personal identities. In her essay “Speaking Sisters: Relief Society Cookbooks and Mormon Culture,” Marion Bishop explores how the cookbooks created by Mormon women communicate “two decidedly different messages” as the authors sustain their faith’s traditional values of family and gender roles within the church and community “while at the same time articulating and validating more individualized ideas” (90). Bishop highlights

textual elements and recipes that reiterate Mormon cultural values (food storage, large families, and mothers as homemakers) while also serving to substantiate the lives of the individual women who contributed to the book.

Bishop's positioning of the cookbook as location for expression of both communal and personal identification is mirrored in the works of Anne E. Goldman and Rafia Zafar who both argue for cookbooks as forms of women's autobiography. Goldman maintains that women's cookbooks can be read as the women authors' attempts to write simultaneously for the collective and self (xv-xvii). Goldman makes the case for self-identity *evidenced through or linked to* communal identity. This linking of identities, the personal and the communal, can serve to shield a woman's personal beliefs within a community. It is often safer for a woman to talk about a community rather than to talk about herself. Also, situating personal beliefs as community beliefs lends authority or credence. Zafar extends the link between community and autobiography arguing, "[C]ookbooks...help us understand how a recipe collection functions as an articulation of a personal and/or communal identity. Each text works as autobiography *and* history in addition to engaging, obliquely or not, the linked issues of black stereotyping and class" (450). As texts with everyday influence and use in women's lives, cookbooks evidence a duality of identity. A woman is at once herself and a member of a larger sisterhood, whether that sisterhood is one of religion, class, race, ethnicity, or some combination of all.

Bishop points to recipe naming as a way of validating individual women. With recipes like "Karen's Salad Dressing" and "Mikki's Pecan Pie," Bishop argues, women use cookbooks to literally write themselves and their accomplishment(s) into being (97). This argument on naming and validation echoes Judith Butler's assertion that a subject often employs naming as it "seeks the sign of its own existence outside itself" (20). Naming allows a subject that is mostly



called into existence by “categories, terms, and names that are not of its own making” the ability to exercise some control, leave some mark of her own on the world (20). Recipe naming then is the cookbook author’s way of marking her existence (or a loved one’s existence) and leaving a part of herself for the future. Through naming her recipes she creates a portion of her own identity.

In thinking about recipes and cookbooks as constructions of identity, it is first important to understand the connection between writing and identity, especially for women. Feminist theory is centered on the notion that women are not men, and therefore, do not experience life in the same ways as men. Judith Kegan Gardiner seeks to define the “female identity” and locate it in women’s writing (348-349). She maintains that unlike men who are aided by society in creating their identities, women create their own identities, writing themselves as they write their texts. She explains, “...the woman writer uses her text...as part of a continuing process involving her own self-definition” (357). Likewise, the process of creating a female identity occurs when women read, too. Gardiner contends that “the woman reader goes through a somewhat analogous process [to the woman author’s] in her empathic identifications, identifying particularly with female characters closely bonded to their authors” (357). Although mainly focused on women literary authors and readers, there is room to extend Gardiner’s argument of how women write (and read) a female identity to other forms of writing. I propose that women write themselves as they write cookbooks, and because of the instructive nature of cookbooks, women read themselves in cooking texts, too.

Another view of the connections between women’s literate practices and identity comes from Sarah Robbins. In *Managing Literacy, Mothering America* Robbins concentrates her exploration of identity on the genre of the domestic literacy narrative. Drawing from literacy

scholar Charles Schuster, Robbins writes, “being literate is having the ‘ability to make oneself heard and felt, to signify,’ so that literacy can be ‘the way in which we make ourselves meaningful not only to others but through others to ourselves’” (Robbins 16). To be heard, to claim one’s voice, to make oneself meaningful is to create identity. As marginalized people, women were often barred from producing significant, public texts. Furthermore, the texts common to or acceptable for production by women were often deemed insignificant. Robbins’ applies the tenets of social literacy theory to a distinct genre of writing written and consumed by women. The women authors of domestic literacy narratives created an identity for themselves and their readers – mother as teacher of literacy. Likewise, cookbooks offer a glimpse at another unique women’s genre and offer a space to examine women creating identity.

Perhaps it would now be appropriate to point out that examining the relationship between real-life and its textual representation within any form of self-writing is complex. Felicity Nussbaum notes, “the real is never completely accessible,” thus the identity that an author writes or that a reader reads is created as the “cultural constructions of self and gender intermingle with the individual subject’s interest and engagement in taking up the particular discourses available at given historical moments” (149). So, identity is a complicated construction. It may be an attempt to reflect the self an author sees within, or it may be an effort to project the self an author wishes she could be. Regardless, the value lies in the woman author’s work to establish her own identity at all.

As writing that is labeled “nonliterary” or “ordinary” because it differs from the dominant (i.e. men’s) written form, cookbooks offer a place to look for the ways women subvert or resist the discourse of dominant culture. Newlyn makes the case for studying unpublished cookbook manuscripts for evidence of women’s narrative construction. Like other feminist scholars, she

contends that women's writings have largely been excluded from scholarly inquiry because they do not fit male-constructed definitions for literature or narrative. She argues that nineteenth-century cooking texts demonstrate the ways women create narratives of response and resistance to dominant social ideology. Aside from recipes, Newlyn identifies specific textual features of cookbooks like ornamentation (including title pages, drawings, and graphical elements); magazine clippings; and interleaves (notes, marginalia, and other ephemera). She argues that these textual features along with recipe naming, attributing, and sharing are indicative of a narrative system at work within cooking texts, a system created by women's ways of writing ("Challenging" 39). Newlyn explains the power of the cookbook to subvert dominant social ideology saying:

Despite its originary site of production (the home), and its symbolization of women's apparent geographic and psychological separation from the commercial marketplace, the cookbook nevertheless functions as a catalyst for social reform through its positing of a domestic hero: the housekeeper who can, in a narrative of domestic felicity, restore balance and order to an imperfect domestic scene, and, in the process, reform her family and community, and perhaps even the nation as well. ("Challenging" 43)

Even as it seems ordinary or nonliterary, writing cookbooks has allowed women to challenge the bounds of the "woman's sphere" through leveraging the power of women's work. Of course, such leveraging is not always a positive endeavor. Images of women working in "their place" are often co-opted by commercial interests and used to create negative poster-women like Betty Crocker or Aunt Jemima. While the companies employing these characters use them to promote products women cooking for their families may find useful, the first image represents an unachievable ideal domestic goddess-figure while the second is a racialized parody of women.

Both leverage women's work for commercial gain but neither challenges the bounds of the "woman's sphere."

### **Project Scope**

Historically, scores of women's lives are missing from the traditional record. Unless she was famous (or infamous) a woman's life may very well be undocumented, even (especially?) in the public record. Personal possessions and writings are often the only physical evidence of a woman's existence. This project is a feminist historiography which examines cooking texts written by Alabama women from the 1850s to the 1930s. There are several reasons for this specificity of focus. First and foremost, as my home state, I feel a connection and special interest in the texts written by other Alabama women. Second, the abundance of primary source material from Alabama women writers allows for examination of how cultural values and societal conventions changed (or not) over time in one southern state rather than an entire and very diverse region. Third, the time period is not arbitrary, either. As we will see later in this chapter, though women's lives changed dramatically in the South between 1850 and 1930, many of southern society's expectations of womanhood remained locked in place. Women living through these times all grappled with the disconnect between social expectation and lived reality.

The scope of this project is mostly, though not entirely, limited to white, upper and middle-class Southern women. Such women were the heads of the domestic household in prominent Southern culture and as such are the most likely segment of Southern women to have their papers preserved in institutional archives. Even so, as members of the dominant class these women were the standard-setters of their times. Their writings give insight into their personal lives and the social and cultural mores of their times. Finally, I acknowledge that my research, like all archival work, is most limited by the texts available for study. To that end, rather than

making broad generalizations about a population of women, this project provides a look at how some women used cookbooks to accomplish rhetorical work.

This project takes up the challenge of feminist scholarship and works to expand the scope of women's rhetorical studies. In her foreword to Royster and Kirsch's text *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*, Patricia Bizzell notes, "To discover that a woman somewhere used language somehow is not to do feminist research on rhetoric" (xi). In truth, feminist research is more than noting that women exist, however; for the past three decades feminist research has largely focused on what Royster and Kirsch call "the 3Rs: rescue, recovery, and (re)inscription" of women's lives and embodied experiences (14). Born from the women's movement and Second Wave feminism, feminist research seeks to combat the assumptions of a universal human experience by employing an epistemological framework that is necessarily inclusive of, and pays close attention to, elements such as personal experience, subjectivity, positionality, worldview, and emotion (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 5). These elements are often absent from more traditional research paradigms. Additionally, feminist research seeks to avoid the claims of neutrality and objectivity so highly valued in traditional research by acknowledging the inability of any researcher to fully tell a subject's story. Feminist research places higher value on letting subjects speak for themselves by encouraging collaboration, mutual benefit, and more balanced power relationships between researcher and subject. As Royster and Kirsch note, "feminist scholars have made the case for designing research that can enrich the lives of those whom they study, whether the rhetorical agents are women, students, historical figures, Internet users, or other groups" (34). Often this enrichment comes from feminist scholars challenging traditional notions of what counts as materials and who counts as subjects worthy of academic study.

Drawing on Beasley and Bacchi's argument that the public/private split is an artificial construct, I contend that cooking texts; like other forms of "private sphere" writing – journals, commonplaces, and correspondence; hold valuable insights into the rhetorical lives of the women who wrote and used them. These texts demonstrate how their authors grappled with authority, identity, and gender conventions. Additionally, I employ scholarship by Andrea K. Newlyn, in which she maintains that unpublished cooking texts demonstrate women's use of alternative narrative strategies that simultaneously reproduce, respond to, and resist dominant cultural ideals of womanhood. As I discuss the ways women use writing to (sometimes simultaneously) uphold and subvert socially dominant ideals of womanhood, I argue that Newlyn's (re)conception of narrative theory can also be applied to cooking texts other than unpublished 19<sup>th</sup>-century manuscripts. Finally, to examine the ways that women's cooking texts address issues of gender and authority I draw on Judith Butler's concepts of gender as performance and naming as an act of creation. I argue that within the pages of their cookbooks women claimed authority, performed and subverted dominant notions of gender, and marked their existence in a valuable historical record.

As previously mentioned, in this project I treat cookbooks as a genre and sort the primary materials collected into three sub-genres or categories: unpublished, personal manuscripts; jointly-compiled, community cookbooks; and commercially published cookbooks. Authorial purpose and intent drives my use of these categories. Each category/sub-genre seems to have a different intended audience and authorial purpose. In chapter 2, I look at two unpublished, personal manuscripts. These are hand-written books, similar to journals or commonplaces, in which the author records recipes, poetry, newspaper clippings, and other personal or home keeping related writings. These manuscripts show no indication that the author intended an

audience other than herself and possibly her family. While the women who wrote these books may have hoped to pass them to their daughters or granddaughters, there is no overt indication of such intention, and the books appear to be written for no audience other than the author herself. These texts each offer a look at their author's personal lives and demonstrate how societal standards and expectations effected one woman's life.

Community cookbooks comprise the next sub-genre. These books may be written by one or more authors and are usually published as a fundraising project. Chapter 3 features an analysis of three such texts. These books are obviously intended for a wider, public audience. And while they may not give insight directly into the personal lives of the authors, these texts serve as social documents outlining the dominant values of the author(s) and time period and as locations for the work of forming communal identity.

Chapter 4 addresses some examples of the final sub-genre – commercially published cookbooks. These texts represent a woman author's concerted efforts as earning money through publishing her knowledge and expertise as a cook. These are professional endeavors and the two texts analyzed in the chapter demonstrate the ways in which the author positions herself as an expert and a working woman. Through commercially published cookbooks we can read the professional identity the author constructs for herself and see the ways she, as a professional woman, responds to the notions of womanhood dominant in her time.

## **Methodology**

This project centers entirely on historical or archival texts, and I use rhetorical analysis as the primary method for examining the collected source material. Since my primary goal is to conduct *feminist* historiographic work, I rely on the methodological framework outlined by Royster and Kirsch in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*. This framework consists of four

components: critical imagination, strategic contemplation, social circulation, and globalizing the point of view. For my research I employ the first three of these.

Royster sees *critical imagination* "as an inquiry tool, a mechanism for seeing the noticed and the unnoticed, rethinking what is there and not there, and speculating about what could be there instead" (20). Employing critical imagination then, means coupling imaginative habits with traditional habits of critique to "listen deeply, reflexively, and multisensibly; grounding inquiries in historical evidence with regard to both texts and contexts; creating schemata for engaging critical attention; and disrupting our assumptions regularly through reflective and reflexive questions" (21). Such practices are especially important in archival/historiographic work when materials are limited and the subjects of study are no longer living. Additionally, critical imagination can help researchers avoid relying on our own assumptions and expectations of the women we study and instead continually return to "the women -- to their writing, their work, and their worlds, seeking to ground our inquires in the evidence of the women's lives, taking as a given that the women have much to teach us if we develop the patience to pay attention in a more paradigmatic way" (20).

Connected to Stuart Hall's theories of social culture, *social circulation* refers to the ways in which the past, present, and future are connected by "overlapping social circles in which women travel, live, and work," and includes taking into consideration how those circles are continued or changed by time and generations, and how all this can lead to changes in rhetorical practices (23). Awareness of social circulation is also a deliberate move to "disrupt the public-private divide by suggesting a more fully textured sense of what it means to place these women in social space, rather than private or public space" (24). Examining a woman's social spaces



(professional, activist, scholarly, etc) works to uncover and make visible both her "public life and [her] private challenges" (24).

As a reclamation of the early scholarly practice of meditations, *strategic contemplation* involves "taking the time, space, and resources to think about, through, and around our work" (21). Additionally, strategic contemplation means taking the time to meditatively engage with the women we study, "even if only imaginatively," in order to understand their lives, ideas, and priorities and how/why they differ from ours (21). Strategic contemplation means paying attention to the lives and lived experiences of our subjects and ourselves and considering how each affects our research. This includes critical attention to the locations we visit, the artifacts we handle, our own embodied experiences, the responses invoked in us by visiting these sites and handling these artifacts (22). Royster maintains, "By claiming a space for contemplation, reflection, and meditation, by observing without rushing to judgment, by noticing without immediate need to analyze, classify, and establish hierarchies, we allow new vistas to come into view, unexpected leads to shape scholarly work, and new research questions to emerge" (22). Finally, strategic contemplation means recognizing the work of others and acknowledging our debt to those who have come before us, both scholars and not. Royster cautions us to reflect "deliberately and consciously on how we ourselves are shaped by our projects, how our understanding and knowledge evolve, and how work can help us envision the future" (22).

Tied to the use of this methodological frame, I want to make mention of my attention to ethical research practices. Such concern may seem unwarranted for a project centered on research subjects long-since deceased, but it is still important that I conduct ethical and responsible research. In a recent talk at the University of Alabama, Dr. Jacqueline Jones Royster cautioned feminist historiographers to be cognizant of the potentially damaging effects of

research, even for deceased subjects (Royster “Narrating Women’s Lives”). Her comment is particularly important to remember as I make claims about authors writing to form identity, perform womanhood, and resist or subvert cultural norms. To ensure ethical research practices Royster, quoting Jamaican sociologist Erna Brodber, urged historiographers to acknowledge that we “tell one truth until another truth becomes evident” (Royster “Narrating Women’s Lives”). In this project’s discussion of cookbooks I acknowledge that I am telling only one truth and others may yet become evident.

### **The South and the Southern Lady**

Since this project focuses specifically on cookbooks written by Alabama women, it is important that we understand southern history and the unique societal expectations of southern womanhood—what it means to be a woman in the South. This context is essential for reading the cookbooks of southern women in order to understand the ways women both uphold and subvert these expectations through their cookbook writing. Understanding the historical and social underpinnings of southern culture will also help to extrapolate critically imagined pictures of the women who wrote the cookbooks analyzed for this project. Finally, this contextual information will eventually allow me to think and write reflexively about the ways in which my experiences as a southern woman affect my writing and thinking about the women whose writing I explore throughout this project.

Until the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution in December 1865, southern culture and society was defined by the region’s “peculiar institution” of slavery. Every aspect of life in the South was in some way influenced by an economic system of production and reproduction dependent on some men owning others. This was true despite the fact that only about one-fourth of white southerners owned enslaved humans. This hierarchy of

*noblesse oblige* established strict boundaries of acceptability based on race, gender, and class. The wealthy, white man (the planter) was at the hierarchy's pinnacle.

In the antebellum South the planter ruled both at home and in public. He was truly elite. Only about forty-six thousand Southern men belonged to this category created by the federal census bureau to designate men who owned at least twenty slaves, and together these men controlled over half of all the region's slaves and much of its economic wealth (Levine 4). Additionally, these men governed both the region and the nation. From the Revolutionary War to the Civil War twelve of the fourteen US Presidents were either slaveholders or advocates of enslavement. The courts and legislature reflected the same pro-slavery dominance. Such economic and political dominance meant translated into social dominance, as well.

Southern slaveholders considered the family, or more correctly, the household, to be the foundational unit of their society. Historian Eugene Genovese notes, men, specifically fathers/husbands, presided at the top of this order with other "family members" -- women, children, and enslaved persons subject to him (70). Slaveholding operations, large and small, shared a dependence on production and reproduction (Genovese 71). Each member of the household (men, women, children—both free and enslaved) held responsibilities related to these two facets. "Prevailing southern ideology," Elizabeth Fox-Genovese notes, "emphasized the ideal of the southern lady as gracious, fragile, and deferential to the men upon whose protection she depended" (109). Linking this social and economic organization to divinity or God's will, as many proslavery advocates did, worked to ensure participation by those with a modicum of choice (ie women and children) and supported the forced participation of those without choice (ie enslaved persons). Interestingly, the person with the most power in this structure (the master/husband/father) was also the person whose comfort was most dependent on the

participation of those at all other levels of the hierarchy, yet he considered all to be dependent on him.

In fact, the crux of the argument of separate spheres in the South was divine nature; God created men and women differently and for different purposes. As such, those divinely appointed, natural roles should not be altered. Never mind that the real and ideal were disparate and irreconcilable. Women were somehow simultaneously paragons of strength and virtue, “queens of the home,” but also the weaker sex (physically and mentally), in constant need of direction and protection by men (Scott 167). Even as the “private” sphere widened during and after the Civil War to include employment (for unmarried women) and social justice work, the biological/natural argument for gendered division held strong. Of course, this argument applied more to women of “the right class” (ie wealthy and white). Black women and poor white women were not necessarily included. Their flawed racial and class status meant they did not count. Although unjust, that omission released these women from some of the gendered expectations and restrictions that applied to white women of higher social status. As historian Anne Firor Scott notes, no one worried that the black woman or poor white farm wife got her hands and clothes dirty as she worked (xi).

Elite white women were the Mistresses of the House. Unlike her northern sisters who strove toward the ideals of “true womanhood” like Christian piety and self-sacrifice, the upper-class nineteenth-century southern woman’s role model was the plantation mistress. Just as the economic organization of slaveholding society depended on production and reproduction, the social organization did also. In southern society, identity, especially for women, was tied to familial relationships. As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese notes her essay on family and female identity in the antebellum South, “Women, especially, relied upon family membership to define their

identities, for they normally did not have access to other, more abstract roles (citizenship, employment) that would offer competing sources of identity” (19) (parenthetical added). Girls were first daughters and sisters then as women they (hopefully) became wives and mothers. The mistress was measured by her husband’s social success and how well she managed the household. More than her northern sisters, the southern woman, often isolated by rurality, based her identity and standards of appropriate behavior on the examples of women in her family and community. Familial relationships served a reproductive role in southern culture and identity formation as women often rooted their sense of self in “continuity across generations and beyond the grave” (21). This need to memorialize relationships and link generations together evidences itself in southern social practices such as naming children after beloved or deceased relatives. Fox-Genovese notes, “Names, especially, signify continuities” (21). I argue that southern women extended this practice of naming (as a means of memorializing relationships) to their recipes, as well. I will discuss this more later.

Placed on a pedestal by southern men, the southern lady was taught from girlhood to be submissive, dependent, virtuous, and obedient. In his iconic book, *The Mind of the South*, WJ Cash called this cult of ideal southern womanhood “gyneolatry” (86). He maintained that believers held the Southern Lady as the paragon of “Southern Virtue” which surpassed the virtue of not only the North but any other place on Earth (86). Cash says, the Southern Lady was the South itself, “... The center and circumference, diameter and periphery, sine, tangent and secant of all [men’s] affections” (86). After examining women's diaries, correspondence, and other writings, Scott concludes that for upper class women in the antebellum South, “an unattainable perfection was the only standard” (13). Reconciling the perfect ideal with an imperfect reality is a recurring theme in nineteenth and early twentieth-century southern women’s writing.

It must have been difficult for the Southern Belle to become the Mistress of the House. Although becoming a wife, mother, and plantation mistress was her planned future it was certainly not a future the belle was trained for. The belle's life was centered on becoming a marriageable woman. Daughters of elite planter men often received formal educations through tutors or at female seminaries and colleges. These young women learned languages including: French, Latin, and Greek. Additionally, they studied music, dance, needlework, handwriting, art, math, and science. Belles were expected to be young women of beauty and refinement who could entertain suitors and gentlemen with music and conversation. Success in these areas secured a belle's social status and ensured her prospects for a comfortable future by making her eligible for marriage to a man of property and wealth.

Once married, the former belle found she must somehow meet exacting standards of perfection that often directly contradicted her daily reality. Life for most nineteenth-century southern women of all classes was full, busy, and not easy. Scott writes:

No matter how large or wealthy the establishment, the mistress was expected to understand not only the skills of spinning, weaving, and sewing but also gardening, care of poultry, care of the sick, and all aspects of food preparation from the sowing of seed to the appearance of the final product on the table. (31)

Wealthy plantation mistresses oversaw everything from hog butchering to food preserving. Scott says, "They made their own yeast, lard, and soap, set their own hens, and were expected to be able to make with equal skill a rough dress for a slave or a ball gown for themselves. It was customary for the mistress to rise at five or six, and to be in the kitchen when the cook arrived, to 'overlook' all the arrangements for the day" (31). Additionally, most southern women in the nineteenth-century averaged one pregnancy per year during their childbearing years. In truth, the

southern belle-turned-mistress found herself in a balancing act between ideal and reality as she sought to run her household while precariously perched upon her pedestal. As chapter 2 will demonstrate some of these women used their cookbooks to keep records and manage their household responsibilities.

Unlike many of their northern counterparts, southern women lived the Civil War and its aftermath. The majority of the war was fought in southern states, and the war required a mobilization of an unprecedented number of men. Additionally, southern women suffered material deprivation because of the war and the weak Confederate economy. Survival during the war required southern women to move beyond the traditional notions of womanhood. Women's lives changed immediately and often drastically at the start of the war. In addition to their work in the “private” sphere, women assumed responsibilities for farming, selling, milling, and manufacturing that had previously been carried out by men. As southern men left home to fight, southern women ventured into the “public” sphere to keep the South running.

As historian Drew Gilpin Faust notes, prior to the Civil War, “slaveholding women thought of themselves primarily as part of a hierarchical family or household, with their most significant connections tying them in relationships of dominance and dependence to their husbands, children, and slaves rather than other white women” (23). As a result, women’s organizations were not very popular in the South. Once the war began women set to work creating a variety of groups aimed at assisting in the war efforts. Some of these groups focused on women working in more traditional tasks like sewing, knitting, and collecting supplies. Other groups were more progressive. Their members participated in activities that blurred the traditional lines between public and private including public performances (music, speech, and drama) and letter writing campaigns to raise funds. Additionally, once funds were raised, many

women's groups sent specific instructions for use to the Confederate government along with their donations. Faust contends that for the first time in the South "women's benevolence became public policy" (28). Chapter 3 examines community cookbooks which, though published in the early twentieth century, are rooted in women creating groups to shape public policy and social change through benevolence.

Things changed for southern women while their men were away at war, but it took a while for the men who returned to notice. Immediately following the war most political and social attention was focused on race and Reconstruction. Another change in the southern labor and social landscape came in the 1870s as thousands of black southerners fled for better opportunities in the North and West. This migration changed life for many upper- and middle-class southern white women who were used to overseeing or working with servants (usually enslaved persons). Now, these women would have to cook all their family's meals and clean their own homes. Scott says, "...significant cultural patterns were changing. The knowledge, attitudes, and values shared by southerners, and the ideal patterns -- the generally accepted view of how people *should* behave in certain situations were, bit by bit, being altered" (100). Southern women, left alone during (and often after war) were challenging the idealized notions of southern womanhood, but, although challenged, that idealized image of womanhood held tight through the late 1800s and well into the twentieth century.

Part of the challenge to the southern social pattern came from affluent southern women born just prior to or during the Civil War. These young women had seen (and helped) their mothers work out of necessity during the war and Reconstruction. In her book, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895*, Jane Turner Censer points out that by the turn of the century, elite southern women had become far more domesticated than their



antebellum grandmothers had ever been (89). These women lived in a time when “good servants” were hard to find. During this time, as Censer notes, African American men were rejecting domestic work outright and African American women were increasingly rejecting the notion of living with the family they served (89). As a result, elite southern women were faced with the challenge of completing their own domestic work. Additionally, these women had employment opportunities in fields previously denied to women such as teaching, nursing, clerking in stores, and working in factories. Some young women chose not to marry and work instead. Others had no other option. Young men who did not die in the war often chose to leave the poverty-stricken South and go west. Figures from the 1870 census show the South was a land without men. Women outnumbered men in staggering numbers. In North Carolina there were 25,000 more women than men. Georgia had 36,000 more women, and there were 15,000 and 8,000 more women than men in Virginia and South Carolina, respectively (Scott 106). Even in this land without men, marriage, family, and home were still the ideal. Factory and mill work was acceptable for unmarried women, but not for upper and middle class married white women.

Young southern women were increasingly faced with the choice to stay single and work for money or to marry a man and work for free. Scott contends:

[T]he nature and meaning of women's work had changed radically in one generation. Not only had the number of respectable occupations multiplied, but the idea that any woman who could find a male relative to support her should do so was losing its force, as was the notion that for a woman independence was only acceptable when it was a grim necessity. (133)

Changes in southern social expectations were not immediate, nor were they very welcomed. In fact, though the Civil War eradicated the formal institution of slavery and its economy, it did

little to dislodge the desire for a social hierarchy dominated by affluent, white men. For many decades after the war, affluent, white southern leaders sought to build a New South that was a political and cultural resurrection of the Old South. This resurrection is apparent in popular culture from the early twentieth century including cookbooks. In chapter 4, I examine cookbooks by two women, from two different eras, who parlayed their period's national fascination with southern-ness into lucrative professional endeavors. Though both of these women claim the moniker "southern," neither closely fits the long-held racial and class restrictions placed upon the title of "southern lady." Instead, these women work to define southern womanhood on their own terms and to successfully promote their own careers.

Many women of the New South found that the region's industrialization changed their daily lives and reduced the amount of toil associated with keeping house. Historian Mary Martha Thomas argues that by the early twentieth century, "The [southern] family was completing a long-term shift from a unit of production to one of consumption" (3). Technological advancements brought indoor plumbing, electricity, appliances, and central heating which lightened women's domestic work. A wider array of store-bought goods including canned foods, commercially produced bread, and ready-to-wear clothing also brought a decrease in workload and an increase in free time (Thomas 3). This increase in free time corresponded to the Progressive era efforts at social reform. Problems such as poverty, child labor, workers' rights, and local health conditions became areas of public and political policy. As Thomas notes, these same areas "had long been women's province through voluntary associations and charitable benevolence," and were now "increasingly defined as proper scope for public policy" (2). Now the "private" was spilling into the "public" and women took notice. Many of them joined reform efforts, pioneered these "new public spaces" and "made possible a new vision of active

citizenship” (Thomas 3). Again, cookbooks reflect both women’s social reform work and their desires for modernization. As previously noted, chapter 3 explores the ways community cookbooks allowed women in the early twentieth century to engage in charitable service, effect social change, and shape public policy.

While the ideal notion of the southern lady seems to have bound nineteenth and early twentieth-century upper-class, white women to a pedestalized existence within the private sphere, a closer examination reveals tension between the ideal and the real. The Civil War brought with it, not only an end to slavery, but massive economic and social changes that allowed women to explore those tensions, blur some of the boundaries between private and public, and challenge the parameters of race and class that once seemed to strictly define southern womanhood. Along with establishing identity and claiming authority, all of the cookbooks analyzed in the next three chapters work in some way to grapple with the definition(s) of southern womanhood. The sample size is not exhaustive, but it demonstrates that southern women have used cookbooks to engage rhetorically with issues that are important to their own lived experiences. Truly, through their own cookbooks we can read a measure of southern women’s lives.

## CHAPTER 1

### WRITING HER LIFE: THE MANUSCRIPT COOKBOOKS OF MARTHA BANKS AND ANNIE PERKINS

As the popular saying goes, “well behaved women seldom make history” (Ulrich xiii). And while it may be true that women who “behaved themselves” are often lost to the dominant historical record, feminist historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich contends that history is made when people “create and preserve records, and when later generations care” (229). The manuscript cookbooks I uncovered in the University of Alabama archives are just this sort of record. The women who composed these books appear to have given little thought to the legacy their books would create. They may have hoped to pass their books, or at least their recipes, on to their own daughters and granddaughters, but these books seem to have been created out of necessity and used regularly. Filled with recipes, notes, and other writings, these cooking manuscripts are records of history and culture. They are artifacts born out of everyday life and work. Today, these texts illustrate at least a portion of their writers’ literate and rhetorical lives and serve as artifacts of the culture in which those women lived. These manuscripts reveal what life was like and what womanhood meant for the women who wrote them.

In her study of the narrative structure of women’s nineteenth-century manuscript cookbooks, Andrea K. Newlyn calls manuscript cookbooks “*the* literary text of the nineteenth-century housekeeper, playing a crucial role in maintaining communal structure, social ties, and cultural tradition” (“Redefining” 32) (emphasis added). Through their manuscript cookbooks, women appropriated the style and conventions of an existing

genre—domestic literature—which sought to bring them into conformity with social expectations. With this appropriation though, women took the cookbook and, as Newlyn argues, “transformed it into a locus of female artistry, empowerment, and social reform” (“Redefining” 32). In writing her own cookbook, a woman empowered herself by establishing her own expertise as a housekeeper, claiming her own voice as author, and writing a record of her own history. Newlyn says, “Cookbooks not only reflect the women writing and compiling such texts and the nature of the communities in which these texts circulated, but they also record women’s efforts toward legitimating themselves and authenticating the spaces they inhabit, demonstrating both the diverse mediums in which female artists worked and their attempts to control their own stories, histories and traditions” (“Redefining” 35). Moreover, through the act of writing about domestic work, a woman pulled back the curtain, so to speak, on her everyday life, revealing a large portion of her lived reality. Anthropologist Janet Theophano writes, “In the act of inscribing their knowledge, women exalt the ordinary work that they do in the routines of everyday life. The text renders the invisible and transient – often thankless and taken-for-granted – work indelible, noticed, and worthy” (146). So cookbooks can be read as both records of domestic work and as histories of the lives and times of the women who wrote them.

Often the sole existing record of a woman’s life and work, Theophano explains that manuscript cookbooks can be read as memoirs of the women who owned them,

Cookbooks tell personal stories. While many women left precious little behind ... often their cookbooks provide enough to catch a glimpse of the person. In evocative culinary memoirs composed of directions for cooking, accounts, textual fragments, marginalia, and paper ephemera stored between

the pages of a book, women inscribe themselves in their recipe texts as testimonies to their existence. After years of daily use, the cookbook becomes a memoir, a diary – a record of a life. (121)

These books are valuable because although they do not reveal the entirety of a woman's life, they reveal much about the work she did and what she felt was important enough to preserve through writing and text. The manuscript books I examine in this chapter reveal interesting information about the women who wrote them, information that is not available in any other historical record. Most significantly, this information comes directly from the women themselves. These books were written with their own hands and are filled with knowledge collected over time. Through these books we can see how life changed and remained the same for these women. We can see what kind of work they did, who was part of their lives, and what was important to them. As Theophano claims, "Keeping a recipe book, ostensibly a record of mundane tasks and accomplishments, was simultaneously a way of inscribing one's life, writing oneself into being" (154). Through their books these women wrote a story of their lives and wrote themselves into recorded existence.

As artifacts, manuscript cookbooks reveal much about their authors' daily lives and relationships. Newlyn claims close analysis of manuscript cooking texts reveals "the myriad and complex ways that women expressed themselves, [and] created an institutionalized network of conventions, rituals and customs based in same-sex relations..." ("Redefining" 32). Through her manuscript cookbook, we can see how a woman worked, what she thought about, and what events filled her everyday life. In reading a woman's recipes we can trace the social circulation of a network of relationships and shared knowledge. A biscuit recipe from her mother, a cake recipe from a friend, and a newspaper clipping with a recipe for

treating a sick farm animal, all tell us about the life of the woman who collected them and the relationships she had with other women. Yet, as Theophano notes, manuscript cookbooks can reveal more than just the everyday of their authors' lives, "Although cookbooks note much that is everyday, at the same time some recipes encode the highlights of a life. Women recorded favorite and successful recipes, those for which they were recognized or in which they took pride..." (123). Cookbooks are both repositories of everyday domestic knowledge and records of a woman's unique, individual domestic achievement.

Recipes, arguably the cookbook's most primary component, tell us many things about the lives of the women who wrote them. Newlyn says, "Recipes reflect not only what the family ate and drank, but also attest to economic concerns ('Cheap Lemon Pie') and salubrity (cures for cough, colds, and dropsy)" ("Redefining" 43). Obviously, recipes are a vital part of any cookbook; however, other elements found in manuscript cookbooks are just as important, especially when working to read a woman's life, history, and culture.

Theophano notes, "The cookbook is itself a hybrid that encompasses various kinds of women's writings: letters, memoirs, diaries, and scrapbooks blending raw ingredients into a new configuration, a form of daily writing centered on women's work" (122). Because it was a book meant for personal use, like a diary or journal, women often wrote and compiled more than recipes in their cookbooks. Newlyn contends that the personal nature of manuscript cookbooks "provided women with a textual apparatus which enabled artistic and creative experimentation, and beyond that some claim to legitimation and public spaces" ("Redefining" 35). As such, cookbooks often include snippets of poetry and other non-domestic writings either written or collected by the women who created the books.

Familiar with the genre and conventions of cookbooks and aware of the social acceptability of cookbooks as feminine books, women were able to utilize the cookbook form for writing about both the domestic and the artistic. Newlyn notes:

recipes remain only one element in a larger structural system. The other constituent pieces of private domestic cookbooks include ornamentation (including mock-title pages, graphics, drawings, dried flowers), magazine clippings (typically articles and poetry on an array of subjects), and interleaves (notes, poems, articles, recipes, accounts and other ephemera, handwritten or printed) (“Redefining” 38).

Each of these components worked to both increase the cookbook owner’s prowess as a housekeeper and support the narrative she created of herself.

Manuscript cookbooks are often a woman’s sole surviving personal possession, something of her own, belonging just to her. These books were used regularly in the completion of women’s everyday work as wives, mothers, and home managers. They are a history of the women how created them and the work those women did. While the current reclamation of feminine work for recreational and activist purposes revolves on choice, feminine work was often not a matter of choice for women in the past. Women often did domestic work out of necessity alone. Regardless of choice, throughout time women have worked daily at domestic tasks and that work has supported many cultures, societies, and nations. That work is vital and important. It has value. As a record of a woman’s life of domestic work, a cooking manuscript is a valuable source for reading a woman’s life and learning something of her response to the society in which she lived, Newlyn notes,



Written under the aegis of patriarchal ideology, the cookbook narrative is a privileged site for examining the contradictions, tensions and conflicts surrounding not only the shifting concept of the gendered (that is male) individual in the nineteenth-century, but other dominant cultural ideologies such as separately gendered spheres and idealized feminine virtues. But while manuscript cookbooks reproduce these ideologies, they also enact responses to, and resistances toward, such cultural dicta. (“Redefining” 35)

Manuscript cookbooks are valuable locations for feminist study because from them we can learn the ways in which women used an available medium to create/craft identity, establish/perpetuate intergenerational relationships, and grapple with the standards of womanhood promoted by society at a given time, especially the notion of southern lady. In the rest of this chapter I examine the manuscript cookbooks of two nineteenth-century Alabama women.

Historical evidence indicates that Martha Banks and Annie Perkins were contemporaries. Both women wrote and compiled their texts during the second half of the nineteenth-century and both had some ties to Greene County, Alabama. Martha was born there in 1833, lived in Eutaw, Alabama, until her marriage in 1852, and was buried in her family cemetery in 1868. Records indicate that Martha lived the majority of her adult life in Lowndes County, Mississippi, where she and her husband owned land and presumably had a plantation or farm of some kind. Annie lived in Eutaw, Alabama, during at least part of the time while she was compiling her book. The historical record for her is less clear, but she signed her maiden and married names to her book followed by “Eutaw, Alabama.” She was buried in Eutaw’s Mesopotamia Cemetery in 1873. I do not know for certain how old Annie was when she died. Her birth date is not recorded on her

gravestone. Although I was able to find more of Martha in the historical record, both of these women share a connection through place, time, and work.

### **Martha Jane Coleman Banks**

Martha, born Martha Jane Coleman in 1833, was the daughter of John Coleman, a wealthy planter in Greene County, Alabama. According to local historians, John Coleman was one of the earliest settlers of Greene County. He and his enslaved man, Trim, came to Greene County from South Carolina in 1819. Coleman and Trim cleared land and began establishing Coleman's plantation, Grassdale, near present-day Eutaw. Soon after, John Coleman returned to South Carolina to fetch his wife, Rhoda, and their five children. Once settled at Grassdale the Colemans had five more children. Martha was either ninth of tenth; records are unclear. All evidence indicates that Martha spent most of her life on a plantation. First she lived at Grassdale, with her parents and siblings. Later, as a married woman, she lived on the plantation she owned with her husband, James O. Banks, in Lowdnes County, Mississippi.

Grassdale must have been an impressive sight. John Coleman's plantation spanned over thirteen hundred acres, and the main house is noted as the first two-story frame home built in Greene County (Heritage 9). According to census records, Coleman owned seventy-five enslaved men, women, and children in 1840 and thirty-seven in 1850. Additionally, in 1850, the 1,312 acre plantation was valued at \$11,050.00; produced cotton, wheat, rye, corn, oats, vegetables; and housed a variety of livestock including horses, mules, cows, oxen, sheep, and pigs (Heritage 9). By all accounts, Martha grew up in a household accustomed to wealth and plenty.

As one of the first settlers of Greene County, Martha's father John held a prominent place in local society. Kimberly R. Jacobson's history of Eutaw and Greene County indicates that John

and several other planter fathers created a school for their daughters in 1845. Called the Mesopotamia Female Seminary, “the school offered basic subjects but also astronomy, Swift’s philosophy, music (harp, piano, and guitar), orthography, French and Latin” (Jacobson 67). Records indicate that Martha was an excellent student at Mesopotamia Female Seminary and graduated in 1848 with “proficiency in the several branches of Science and Literature” taught at the school (Jacobson 87). It is during this time at school that I believe Martha began writing in her book. Much of the book is comprised of essays that appear to be school assignments written by Martha and other young women. Though only first names are given, the names attached to some of the essays in Martha’s book appear to be those of her sisters and other young women from local families who were most likely students with her.

In January 1852, Martha married James O. Banks of Tuscaloosa, Alabama. That same year her father, John, died. The newlywed couple settled Lowndes County, Mississippi, just across the Alabama-Mississippi border, to begin their life. In Mississippi, Martha and John owned land and enslaved persons. Records indicate that James O. Banks received an advance on his father Willis Banks’ will sometime before October of 1852. That advance included \$11,600, 1760 acres of land, and various enslaved persons. Other records show that James and Martha, together, purchased more land and enslaved men, women, and children in Mississippi at various times from 1853-1865. In addition to becoming a wife, plantation mistress, and slave owner, Martha became a mother. She gave birth to five children in twelve years, from 1853-1865, yet only three of those children survived to adulthood – Mary Gray Banks, born July 1853; Willis Alston Banks, born May 1857; and James Oliver Banks, born December 1865. John Coleman Banks (1855-56) and Coleman Banks (1859-60) both lived less than a year. While this pattern of births and deaths is somewhat typical of antebellum life it is no less heartbreaking to think of

Martha as a young mother burying her infants and caring for those who survived. During these years Martha began using her book to help her run her household.

Martha's household was apparently just as large and busy as her father's plantation Grassdale had been. The 1860 census lists James O. Banks as a planter living with his wife and two children and owning real estate property valued at \$135,000 and personal property valued at \$125,000. Notes in Martha's book from around this time list the names and clothing sizes of seventy-eight enslaved persons; forty-eight males and thirty females. In fact, James O. Banks may have owned more than 100 enslaved persons in 1860. A list of the largest slaveholders from the 1860 Lowndes County, Mississippi Census records a "James D. Banks" as owning 128 enslaved men, women, and children. Since this is the only James Banks on the list and there is no James D. Banks listed on the actual 1860 census, I believe this is a transcription error and should actually read James O. Banks. Clearly, James and Martha were very wealthy, and Martha was the mistress of a very large household. Presumably her life became even busier in the fall of 1861 as James enrolled as a captain in the Mississippi Confederate Infantry and left home to fight in the Civil War. During the majority of the war years (1861-65) it appears that James was gone from his home and stationed at various locations across the South. Seemingly, Martha remained at their home in Mississippi as property records indicate at least one real estate transaction the couple made during the war, and notations in Martha's book record goods received and the amounts of meat in her smoke house during some of those years. From what I can determine, Martha managed the entire Banks plantation while her husband was away at war.<sup>1</sup>

It seems that Martha relied heavily on her book during the war years. Dated writings throughout the book record the best planting times for various fruits, vegetables, and flowers; food goods received and given; and clothes and bedding needed for various seasons. Martha did

not necessarily write in her book chronologically, lists are scattered throughout, but her last dated entry details an extensive list of bedding and linens taken out for the winter. Dated December 11, 1865, this list was written just days before Martha's last child, James Oliver, was born. Although it is unclear exactly why she stopped writing in her book, perhaps the birth of her child coupled with James' return from the war meant that Martha was able to relinquish responsibility for running the entire plantation and return to her role as mistress of the house.

Sadly, Martha died at age thirty-five on February 29, 1868, less than three years after that last dated entry in her book and the birth of little James Oliver. Official historical records do not indicate the cause of her death, but family member, Charles Humphries, has written an unpublished history of the Banks family. In that account he claims that Martha died after aiding the sick during a yellow fever outbreak in Gainesville, Alabama, just across the Tombigbee River from her home in Mississippi (Humphries). Martha's body was sent back to Eutaw for burial at the family cemetery at Grassdale. Sadder still is what happened to Martha's family after her death. Martha's three living children were ages 15, 11, and 3 at her death. According to Humphries, at their mother's death, the older children, Mary Gray and Willis Alston, were "sent off to school in the East," (1). The youngest child, James Oliver, was sent to Greene County to live with his mother's family.

Because of her family's social prominence, Martha's life is better-documented than some of the other women whose books I found. Her portrait hangs in the headquarters of the Greene County Historical Society and is featured in a published history of the county (Jacobson). Genealogical records detail portions of her life and the life of at least one of her five children, James O. Banks. Additionally, much is known of her father's family because of their prominent position in the antebellum society of Greene County, and her husband's participation in the Civil

War is well-recorded. Yet, much of this record is focused on the men in Martha's life. Without her book little would be known of her own, personal life.

### **“Recipes for Housewives” the cookbook of Martha Jane Coleman Banks**

Martha's book is probably the oldest book I have ever touched. Its brittle cover belies the sturdy, stiff-papered pages within. Though yellowed, water-stained, and musty the book is well-preserved for being almost one hundred and seventy years old. Someone even took the time to create a typewritten transcript of Martha's cookbook. Clearly, Martha Jane Coleman Banks' life mattered enough to be at least partially recorded by someone other than herself.

Yet, Martha did record some of her own life in the pages of her cookbook. She begins the book with copies of essays, some she authored and others written by her sisters and friends. With titles like, “Alabama -- Here we rest,” “It is darkest before dawn,” and “Friendship is the odor which flowers yield when trampled upon,” these essays appear to be school assignments. Following these essays, Martha's book has page upon page of poetry and verse. She titled this section, “‘Fragments of flowers and weeds, gems and commonplace thoughts’ by Ida.”<sup>2</sup> In this section Martha lists the authors of most entries and mixes work from well-known poets and writers with work from her family and friends. All of these items are hand-written in Martha's book. Obviously, these words were important to Martha and she wanted to keep them.

In all, these writings comprise about half of Martha's book. Like a flip-book, the other half of the book titled, “Recipes for Housewives,” begins at the opposite cover. The pages that follow are filled with one hundred recipes and several pages of pasted-in news clippings with home keeping and cooking advice. Additionally, Martha covered the interior covers and interleaves of her book with lists, figures, and notes. What began as a school girl's collection of treasured writings evolved into a plantation mistress' much-used compendium. Pages in

Martha's book note the sizes of clothing worn by her enslaved workers, the appropriate months for planting vegetables and flowers, and recipes for food and medicines. She even recorded a list of gifts she gave or planned to give to her enslaved workers for Christmas 1859. Clearly, Martha's book played an important role in her life.

### **Annie Robinson Perkins**

Unlike my research on Martha Banks, I have uncovered very little about the life of Annie Robinson Perkins. She is buried in Eutaw's historic Mesopotamia Cemetery. Her tombstone, near others with the last name Robinson, lists no birth date and lists her death as November 19, 1873. Census and marriage record searches reveal a likely match for Annie. An Annie Robinson married William Perkins on October 28, 1869, in Hale County, Alabama. Hale County sits adjacent to the western side of Greene County and was established in 1867 when Greene County was split. Additionally, the 1870 Greene County census lists William Perkins<sup>3</sup> as a merchant, about 23 years old living with his wife, "Annis," also about age twenty-three. I think the name Annis is a typographical error, and Annis is actually Annie. I have not found an earlier record for Annie Robinson Perkins, and if this Annie is the same woman whose cookbook I have and who is buried in Mesopotamia Cemetery, then she died very young at only about twenty-six years old. For Annie, her book is one of very few records of her life.

### **Food, Home, and Health the Recipes of "Mrs. Annie Perkins, Eutaw Alabama"**

Annie's book appears to be nearly as old as Martha's. The finding aid lists it as "Annie Perkins Cookbook" and dates it as "approximately 1867" from Eutaw, Alabama. Assuming this is the Annie Robinson who married William Perkins in 1869, Annie most likely started her book (like Martha) prior to her marriage. The book measures about 12 inches by 6 inches and appears to be a repurposed ledger or address book as some of the pages are tabbed with letters. Annie's

book is worn, water-stained, and broken. The pages, probably once a light cream color, have aged to a mellow caramel color.

The inside of the front cover holds sets of math figures while the first page features “Miss Annie Robinson” written neatly in both print and script near the top of the page. Further down at the bottom right of the same page “Mrs. Annie Perkins Eutaw Alabama” is written in the same neat script. The first eight pages of Annie's book are filled with pasted in news clippings featuring poems and lines of verse. The rest of the book features recipes handwritten in pencil and interspersed with more clippings of poetry and domestic advice. In total, Annie's book has 52 handwritten recipes for foods, medicines (for people and animals), and household items. She includes in her collection recipes for things like “grafting wax”, “Ribbon Cake”, and “Cure for Sore Eyes”. In addition to recipes, the back inside cover of Annie's book holds the written notations about her daily activities including one which reads, “Let the black hen on duck (?) eggs -- 30 April -- White on turkey eggs -- 25 April.” Clearly, Annie used her book to collect a myriad of information important to her life and household.

Both Martha and Annie used their books to collect recipes and information important to their roles as housekeepers and home managers. A careful examination of each manuscript also reveals these women accomplished much more in creating their texts. In the following sections I analyze both Martha and Annie's texts as rhetorical artifacts. This analysis reveals that the manuscript cookbook can be a valuable location for exploring how women preserved and created intergenerational relations, claimed authority and composed the self, and grappled to reconcile lived experience with the notions of womanhood dominant in their own times.



## Preserving Relationships and Talking through Time

As previously mentioned, nineteenth-century women appropriated and transformed the familiar genre of domestic literature to suit their needs and desires. When writing their own manuscripts, these women adhered to a set of discourse conventions particular to cooking texts. One such convention is the reproducibility of recipes. In her article, “Recipes for Reading,” Susan J. Leonardi notes, “...a recipe is reproducible, and, further, its hearers-readers-receivers are *encouraged* to reproduce it and, in reproducing it, to revise it and make it their own” (344). But, just as recipes invite reproduction and revision, cookbook discourse conventions also invite attribution. Naming recipes after the woman who shared them is a common practice. Newlyn says, “In an effort to overcome the compartmentalization women often experienced living in the private sphere, housekeepers shared recipes, passed them on to neighbors, handed them on to friends” (“Redefining” 43). Attributing a recipe to the woman who shared it by including her name after the recipe or in its title demonstrates social circulation and the efforts women made to create connections and foster relationships outside of their immediate households. Newlyn contends, “This kind of attribution is not only an articulation and reflection of community, but, more importantly, a designation that establishes a heritage of tradition and ritual in the form of recipes passed on from mother to daughter or from friend to neighbor” (“Redefining” 43-44). Through this tradition of sharing and attributing recipes women passed knowledge, created relationships, and built communities that exist outside the bounds of time and consanguinity.

Naming and attribution appear to be important for some of Martha's recipes. Of the one hundred recipes written in her book, twenty-five are given some form of attribution.<sup>4</sup> Either, they are named for a person like, “Mrs. Travis’ Riciet (sic) for Biscuit” and “Ma’s Cream Cake,” or a

name follows the recipe entry like Martha's recipe for "Gumbo Soup" which is followed with the notation "(Aunt Suentia)" or a recipe for "Muffin Bread" she attributes to "Jessie Webb." It is unclear whether Martha received these recipes named in this way or whether she decided to name and attribute them herself. Either way, Martha included the names of the women from whom the recipes came. She preserves their names and relationships within her text.

Interestingly, naming does not appear to be as important in Annie's book as it was in Martha's. While Annie makes sure to put her own name clearly in the front of her book (three times, in fact), she does not attribute the recipes in her book to anyone else. The sole exception to that is a recipe for Sally Lunn cake which Annie names, "Mrs. (indecipherable) 'Sally Lunn.'" Of course there could be many reasons for the recipes in Annie's book to be unnamed and unattributed. It could be a matter of personal preference. Maybe as a young wife, Annie wanted to create the impression that her domestic knowledge was her own. Or, it could be a matter of source. Perhaps rather than being given recipes, Annie collected them from other published materials, like cookbooks or periodicals, which did not include women's names in the recipe titles. It could also be a matter of time and age. I do not know exactly when Annie started her book, but some clippings date as early as 1861. Annie married William Perkins in 1869 when she was approximately twenty-two years old. She died just four years later. If Annie started her book in 1861, as suspected, she would have been about fourteen years old. That means that by the time she died in 1873, at age twenty-six, she would have only had about twelve years with her book. In all, Annie used her book for a relatively short time, even in comparison to Martha who kept her book for about twenty years or so. Regardless of the reason, Annie's recipes do not follow the popular convention of naming and attribution.

As Leonardi argues, recipe sharing operates within a “the social context” which creates “a loose community of women that crosses the social barriers of class, race, and generation. Many women can attest to the usefulness and importance of this discourse: mothers and daughters—even those who don’t get along well otherwise—old friends who now have little in common, mistresses and their ‘help,’ lawyers and their secretaries—all can participate in this almost prototypical feminine activity” (342-43) (emphasis added). While recipe sharing can be read as a community-building or relationship-affirming activity it is important to remember that a shared relationship or connection evidenced through shared recipes does not indicate equality or symmetry within those relationships or the prevailing social order. Theophano notes, “Cookery manuscripts, intimate documents of daily life, might lure us into believing that all the women who wrote or contributed to one another’s books were social equals. We could believe that women’s domestic spheres did not have hierarchies. Indeed, these personal recipe collections rarely reveal an explicit pecking order” (35). Yet, as in most social circles, a pecking order exists. In exploring the possible relationships between recipe givers and receivers, Anne Goldman encourages cookbook readers to ask, “When does recipe sharing...become recipe borrowing, with only a coerced ‘consent’ from the domestic ‘help’?” (172). All of this means that it is vital for researchers to remember Royster and Kirsch’s definition for critical imagination as an inquiry tool, “a mechanism for seeing the noticed and the unnoticed, rethinking what is there and not there, and speculating about what could be there instead” (20). As we read and think about the possible connections between women and the recipes recorded in their cookbooks, we must acknowledge that recipe contributors can come from any aspect of a woman’s social interactions from family and friends to servants/enslaved persons and even

servants of family and friends, and as such, while we can state there is some relationship documented through recipe sharing, that relationship is not always clear, two-sided, or reciprocal.

It is difficult to know from reading recipes exactly what the relationships were between the manuscript author and her recipe contributors. Many of Martha's named recipes are attributed to women with familial ties, either consanguineous or otherwise. Martha attributes ten of her recipes to "Ma" or "Mama" or women whose names are preceded with "Aunt." Whether these women were related to Martha by blood, marriage, or some other line of kinship is unknown. Some relationships may seem obvious, especially when recipes are attributed to "Ma" or "Mother" or "Cousin," but even these connections may not be as clear cut as they seem.

In the South it was the custom, during slavery and for many years afterward, for white people to address older black men and women as "Uncle" and "Aunt," respectively. In fact, in her memoir Martha's great-niece, Mary Coleman Chandler, writes that her family called several black servants "Aunt" or "Uncle" including: Uncle Hard, Aunt Emily, Aunt Julann (whose name, Chandler notes was actually Julia Ann), and Aunt Betsy (Coleman 4.1-4.42). Since Mary Coleman Chandler was born in 1867, many of these older black servants were probably formerly enslaved men and women who continued to work for the Coleman family after their emancipation.

Likewise, monikers like "Aunt," "Uncle," and "Cousin" may indicate relation through blood, marriage, or choice. Those same titles, included in recipe names, might even indicate relationships existing in families other than author's own. A recipe from "Aunt Sally" could have come from the manuscript author's servant, her family friend, a friend's

aunt or extended relation, her mother's or father's sister, or even her grandmother's or grandfather's sister. Without other documentation it may be impossible to trace the actual relationship between the manuscript author and her recipe contributor. Regardless of the biology, Martha valued the recipes from these women enough to write them in her book and attribute them. This indicates Martha's intent to preserve both the recipes and her ties to the women who shared those recipes.

While we should work to avoid assumptions of direct familial relation when reading recipes as evidence of relationship and connection, we should also consider the role appropriation plays in recipe ownership, especially between a mistress and her enslaved worker or servant. Theophano says, "Written contributions from servants, although they suggest collaboration and community, do not erase political, economic, and social inequalities" (40). We most likely do not know the circumstances through which a recipe was shared. We do not know the spirit with which it was given. Even in assuming the best feelings accompanied a shared recipe, we should not assume such sharing indicates that the giver and receiver stood on equal footing. Theophano explains, "Giving someone a recipe for cornbread does not require an equal exchange; it may be a token of affection, even of intimacy, but it is not necessarily evidence or indication of a symmetrical relationship" (41). Some of Martha's recipes may have come from enslaved women. In fact, the previously mentioned recipe for "Gumbo Soup" attributed to "Aunt Suentia" is a likely example. Though Martha's extensively documented genealogy shows no record of an Aunt Suentia, a list of "Clothing Sizes for Negro Women" in Martha's book bears the name of a woman named "Suey." Could this be the woman who shared her recipe with Martha? If so, we can be assured that their relationship, though possibly affectionate, was not one in which the

women regarded each other as equals. It is likely that many of Martha's recipes were regularly prepared, if not originally created, by the enslaved women she owned. Including these recipes in her book, even if she attributed them to the giver, points to the social and cultural status quo of Martha's time. Enslaved persons were property, even to benevolent owners who considered the humans they enslaved as a part of the "family" (Genovese 69). The relationship of master/mistress and enslaved person rendered every part of the slave; mind, body, possessions—even recipes; as property of the owner.

Conventions of naming and attribution provide a glimpse at the ways manuscript cookbook authors built communities and shared knowledge outside of the confines of the private sphere. While avoiding assumptions about social equality or legal and consanguineous relationships, we should understand that a shared recipe indicates that some sort of connection existed between the giver and the receiver. We should also acknowledge that that connection was important to the manuscript writer, so important that she sought to preserve it by recording it in her cookbook. This notion of preserving and sharing domestic knowledge is evident in another conventional aspect of the manuscript cookbook, namely that these books themselves were often passed from woman to woman—mother to daughter, grandmother to granddaughter, even aunt to niece and friend to friend. An argument for this sort of intergenerational usage, another form of social circulation, can be made about both of the manuscript cookbooks I examined.

Someone else kept and, evidence indicates, possibly used Annie's book long after her death. The archival folder that holds Annie's book also holds other news clippings and handwritten recipes. These were most likely loose inside Annie's book or accompanying it at the time of its donation. The recipes are on five separate small slips of paper. Three of the five

appear to be written in the same handwriting (not Annie's). They are undated and feature recipes for Oatmeal Cookies, Meat Éclairs, and Charlotte Russe and Parker House Rolls. Of the other two pieces of paper, one holds a recipe for Oatmeal Cookies dated September 1922, and the other holds six recipes including: Tea cakes, Cup cake, Ginger cakes, Light bread, Good Rusk, and some sort of preserve (the title is unreadable). Additionally, there is an undated newspaper clipping of "A Bit Domestic" a column written by Mary L. Flournoy, a popular southern cookbook author of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The clipping features a recipe for "Devil's Food" and is "for Mrs. E.F., Mississippi." This clipping is most likely from about 1916 or 1917 because a news story on the back of the clipping recounts the Battle of Verdun fought February 21 through December 18, 1916. All of this points to someone using and adding to Annie's cookbook well after her death.

Though I have no evidence of anyone using Martha's book after her death, its survival and preservation indicates someone worked to preserve Martha's book. Just who did that work is unknown. Maybe it was one of Martha's children or descendants. The archival finding aid notes that details of the library's acquisition of the book are unclear. There is not a record of who donated it or when, though it was in the library's possession in 2009. Accompanying Martha's book is a typed transcription of the book's contents. These type-written pages were included when the cookbook was donated to the University of Alabama archives. Perhaps, some relative of Martha's typed a copy of the book and then donated both items to the library. It is obvious that the book somehow survived after Martha's death and was donated to the University of Alabama archives. The efforts taken to preserve both Martha's and Annie's manuscripts indicate that these books held value to someone other than the women who created them.

## **Claiming Authority and Composing Identity**

While women like Martha and Annie used their manuscript cookbooks to record their relationships and establish intergenerational connections with other women, they also used these books to write their own personal histories. Newlyn writes,

“[T]he reinscribing of recipes permitted housekeepers some measure of individuality, authorship, and artistry, while also maintaining important communal same-sex relations. Symbolizing a prosperous and rich woman’s cultural economy, the exchange and passing down of recipes, a practice still in existence today, enabled women to become agents of their own histories by perpetuating their own customs and ceremonies and by creating their own unique narrative form: the manuscript cookbook. (“Redefining” 44)

As Martha and Annie composed their books with recipes from both personal and public sources they were agents and authors of their own histories, crafting a record of their meaningful relationships and interactions while omitting items of lesser import.

In this case, the manuscript functions as a sort of autobiography. Theophano compares manuscript cookbooks to scrapbooks in which women “self-consciously shape their identities by selecting significant memories and preserving them in images or textual fragments” (122). She continues, “In the same way, compiled recipe books are deliberate constructions of the women who kept them. They may have seen themselves as loving mothers, devoted wives, and good friends. These were the self-images they chose to project through their recipe books” (Theophano 122). Martha and Annie made deliberate choices about what their books would contain. They chose which recipes and items to include, which to alter, and which to omit altogether. Such choices indicate a sense of ownership and



authorial confidence. As mentioned previously, the familiarity of the cookbook form and its attached femininity may have helped instill this confidence in Martha and Annie. There was no fear of prying eyes or public judgment as these manuscripts were personal books, belonging just to their authors.

For Martha, her book seems to have been important and present during a large portion of her life. The dates scattered throughout indicate that she began keeping it as a teenager in the late 1840s. She continued to use the book and add to it until at least 1865, just three years before her death. Martha claimed ownership of her book by writing her name (both maiden and married) repeatedly on the inside covers. Hers is the only handwriting that appears on its pages; though, she does transcribe quotations and writings by other authors, including friends and family. Martha used the book to record both important remembrances she wanted to keep and treasure and mundane daily notes she needed in order to run her household.

Additionally, Martha made notes about the recipes in her book. Some are labeled “fine,” “very fine,” or “Excellent.” Others must not have met Martha's standards and are struck through. The previously mentioned “Mrs. Travis’s Riceit for Biscuit” must have fallen short in some way as it met this particular fate. Martha kept track of good recipes and marked out the bad. Additionally, some recipes have notes for usage. One recipe for “Peach Preserves” has the note to “make syrup first” written just beside the title. Another recipe for “Sally Lund” has the accompanying note, “if you wish to make it for tea make it up at 2 o’clock.” Even “Ma’s Cream Cakes” got some alterations as Martha notes she should use 4 teacups of flour rather than three. This practice of sharing, commenting upon, changing, and revising is a convention of recipes. Even though a woman may not be the creator of a particular recipe, once it enters her personal

collection, convention affords her with the right to change that recipe to suit her own needs, tastes, and circumstances. Of this practice Newlyn contends that:

Sharing recipes, expressing an opinion about the merits of those recipes, passing recipes on to other, and perhaps altering recipes to suit individual tastes served several functions: it reinforced bonds among women and reaffirmed their place in the larger community, helping to maintain ties among friends and relatives, while also enabling housekeepers to observe shifts and advances in American cookery, food storage and domestic arts. More importantly this process afforded housekeepers some measure of creative sovereignty and independence. (“Redefining” 45)

In reading Martha’s recipes we can see that she felt this measure of independence as altered or commented on the recipes in her collection. Martha exercised true ownership of her book and recognized that as owner she could add, remove, or alter its contents to her choosing.

This sense of ownership is also reflected in the way Martha wrote her recipes. Many of the recipes are lists of ingredients and measures with just a few accompanying cooking notes. There are very few recipes with step-by-step instructions. The recipes at the beginning of the book, possibly written before Martha was married or just soon after, are written in ink with flowing script and feature more precise instructions. After the first twenty-seven entries the recipes change. They are written in pencil in a more ordinary script and there are fewer instructions. Perhaps these recipes were written after Martha had gained experience as a housewife or at least became busier with her own home and children. Obviously, Martha wrote her book for her own level of cooking skill and understanding. She probably did not intend many other people to read or use it.

We can read Martha's life through her book. From the first section of her book, we see her as a bright, intelligent young woman with many friends. She clearly has an interest in writing and she is engaged in writing for school. Like other young women of her time and social position, Martha writes on topics that outline the moral obligations to which she is beholden—industry, imperialism, kindness, and friendship. As she approaches and enters married life her writings change to suit her circumstances, and Martha literally begins her book again from the opposite cover.

Once married and mistress of the plantation, Martha is more concerned with managing her household and enslaved workers. This includes: providing for the basic needs of the enslaved men, women, and children she owned; ensuring that meals suit her family and any entertaining occasions; and planning/overseeing the planting and production of kitchen and flower gardens. We can read Martha's increasing responsibility through the way she writes her recipes. The first recipes are carefully written in ink and a flowing, elegant script. As the book progresses and Martha's life becomes busier with children and a larger household, the ink and flowing script are replaced by quick scrawls with a pencil. As her prowess as a cook and home keeper increases she comments on, alters, and even scratches out recipes.

When we reach the war years, the years Martha presumably ran the entire plantation in her husband's absence, the writing changes again. Now, it appears Martha is grabbing her book to jot down quick notes on whatever page she can. Her book is again repurposed, this time as a memory-aid, a place to keep vital information about food stores, debts, and accounts. The notations are hurried, hard to read, and in no particular order. Notes record the dates and amounts of meat placed in the smokehouse and receipts for orders of necessities like flour, butter, and

eggs. Martha's book accompanies her through her various role-changes serving as a place in which she recorded and composed her own story and image.

Like Martha's book, Annie's book seems to have been in regular use. Presumably, she began keeping the book before her marriage and used it during her life to record recipes and keep information that was important to her, whether that information was a bit of pretty verse or instructions for the treatment of a mare with an injured leg. Without much other biographical information on Annie's life her book reveals a bit about the woman who kept it. As previously mentioned, Annie recorded forty-seven recipes in her book. Additionally, she covered many other pages with pasted-in items. Perhaps she compiled her collection of recipes and home keeping articles out of interest in becoming a skilled manager of her home. The news clippings of poetry and verse reveal that Annie had interests other than housework. Many of the poems focus on romantic and familial love. Several others have themes of death and mourning. Still other clippings are poems about women's work and girls' morality. By reading Annie's book we can see that she was influenced by the dominant issues of her time namely: religion, war, love, morality, and death. The contents of Annie's book paint the picture of a multi-dimensional woman with a bright mind and an interest in learning about things domestic and poetic.

Reading Martha's and Annie's manuscript cookbooks yields not only a fuller picture of the two women's lives, it also reveals to readers the authority and confidence each woman felt as she worked to craft her own identity from recipes and notes each compiled. Theophano notes that "by accumulating, appropriating, and transforming the material they collected into their own visions of the world" women like Martha and Annie were able to use their manuscript cookbooks to shape "communal memory to her own tastes: preserving, omitting, and altering the material she had collected. Each left a literal and figurative

fingerprint of her daily work on the pages of her recipe book. In doing so these women rewrote a cultural legacy into a personal vision of and testament to their individual lives” (154). Truly, Martha and Annie each wrote a history of their own lives as they composed their manuscript cookbooks.

### **Grappling with Notions of Womanhood/Southern Lady**

Just as we can read manuscript cookbooks as locations in which women established and preserved intergenerational relationships and composed their own identities, these cookbooks reveal the ways their authors grappled with dominant notions of womanhood. The dominant notions of womanhood during Martha and Annie’s time are epitomized in the figure of the *southern lady*. As previously mentioned, the southern lady was touted as the physical embodiment of the South’s perfection. She was divinely appointed to her role as wife, mother, and mistress and was submissive to her husband in all things. She was the heart of the confederacy (even after the Civil War) and stood in need of protection from sexual predators (either black or northern). Of course, as with most ideologies, the expectation of perfection often chafed against the lived reality. As Theophano notes, sometimes that disconnect is evidenced in women’s manuscript cookbooks,

The text becomes an emblem of the self and may encode culturally appropriate images of the feminine, of the ideal family, and of the good life. Despite their overt guise as a symbol of ideal womanhood, some texts contain overt messages of resistance, signs of political activism, or, at the least, ambivalent and contradictory commentary about women’s maternal and domestic roles. (123-4)

I analyzed both Martha's and Annie's books in search of evidence documenting each woman's efforts to either conform to or subvert their positions as southern ladies. I looked for ways, either implicit or explicit, in which their cookbooks bear record of their reconciliation of the real and the ideal.

My reading of Martha's book indicates that she upholds the norms of her region, class, and time as she performs womanhood in her text. She gives a record, first of her planter-daughter upbringing, then of her life as a plantation mistress, and finally as plantation manager while her husband was away at war. As the daughter of a wealthy planter, she writes on the virtues espoused by her class such as: optimism, friendship, industry, perseverance, and paternalism. As would be expected of the mistress of the plantation, Martha's text shows that she exercises those values as she cares for her family and the enslaved persons she owns. She records recipes for food and medicine, keeps track of goods and supplies, oversees planting and preservation of food, and ensures her enslaved workers are clothed and provided for. There is not really a hint of subversion in Martha's book.

Assuming that Annie is from the planter or at least affluent white class, her book reflects the values of her class and time. It appears that she began writing/collecting clippings in the book prior to her marriage since her maiden name is written twice inside the front cover. The recipes and clippings indicate a woman who used her book regularly and whose daily life revolved around managing a home. There are recipes for food, but there are also recipes for medicines and grafting wax and news clippings with advice for treating injured farm animals as well as tips for planting vegetables.

Some of the other news clippings Annie chose to paste into her book reflect an interest in, or at least recognition of, the role of women in southern culture and the conflict between current

societal expectations and the influence of the Wollstonecraft's feminist ideology. One undated clipping features a brief essay titled "Housework." The essay points to the virtues of housework and urges wives and mothers to reconcile negative feelings about repetitive, never-ending household chores by looking to Nature. The essayist urges, "Does not Nature herself set us an example of routine and repetition in which there is no shadow of shirkage?" The message is, yes, sweeping and scrubbing are boring work, but housework is a woman's lot and should be carried out with frequency and determination.

Another of Annie's clippings serves as a direct reply and rebuttal to Wollstonecraft's views as it upholds the Southern antebellum image of womanhood. Dated "Thursday Morning, August 16, 1866," the clipping is of a poem titled, "The Rights of Woman." The poem outlines a woman's "rights" all of which are connected to her duty to family and God including, "The right to live for those we love;/The right to die that love to prove;/The right to brighten earthly homes/With pleasant smiles and gentle tones." The poem's final stanza cautions, "Are these they rights? Then use them well;/They silent influence none can tell;/They are thine; why ask for more?/Thou hast enough to answer for." Clearly, this poem's author feels that Wollstonecraft's call for women to claim and assert their human rights is equivalent to asking "for more" than they need or can manage.

While it may not be surprising that Annie would clip and keep this poem, it is interesting when read in juxtaposition with another poem preserved in her book. This poem titled, "Domestic Bliss, A Fragment" is supposedly written by "a married lady of thirty odd." In the poem the woman recounts her day of feeding and tending her thirteen children until she is "fain to do...As did the old woman that lived in a shoe." We can recall from the nursery rhyme that the old woman who lived in a shoe, once overwhelmed by the behavior of her numerous

children, fed them a meager supper and “whipped them all soundly and put them to bed” (Opie). Nevertheless, the poet continues, this is about the time that her “poor husband” comes home from work “tired and hungry, and fierce as a Turk,” to find the house in an uproar with children screaming and crying. He then, “being rather weak of nerve,” yells at the children who all “fly to me [mother] for shelter.” Clearly, the scene this poem’s author depicts is not one of domestic bliss, though it is very likely domestic reality. Here, the mother outwardly embodies the southern lady as she cares for her children all day. Yet, she reflects very real feelings of impatience with both children and husband. First, she longs to whip the children and send them to bed, like the old woman who lived in a shoe. Second, she describes her husband as “angry as a Turk” and “weak of nerve” when he comes into the chaotic scene and essentially makes things worse rather than better. The woman in this poem is not weak or submissive and she does not revel in her “womanly rights.” Instead, she clearly asserts her frustration at being required to tend both her thirteen children and her child-like husband. Finally, to indicate that she speaks for more than just herself, the author closes her poem saying, “I’ll give you my name, lest you think me a myth:/Yours, very respectfully, Mrs. John Smith.” By ending this way, the author points to the universality of her plight as wife and mother. She could be, and is, any woman.

Another of Annie’s pasted-in items points again to her desire to identify with the image of the southern lady. This small, hand-written note appears to be from a confederate soldier. The note seems to have come with a flower or bouquet of flowers. Addressed to “Dear Lady” the note asks that she keep the flowers as a remembrance of “this soldier” as he fights to rid the South of the hated “Yanks.” Annie’s preservation of this note in her book reinforces her ties to the notion of the southern lady.



In the antebellum South, the feminine ideal was embodied by both the southern belle and the plantation mistress. The belle was young, beautiful, unmarried (and unmarried sexually); and her worth was defined by her father's or family's social success. The married plantation mistress had her domestic success and virtue measured by how well she managed her household and enslaved workers (Fraser). In antebellum Southern society and to some degree for years after, affluent white men exercised ultimate authority in both at home and in public (Fraser). In reading Martha and Annie's books we can see the truth in Theophano's assertion that, "With the brief recipe texts and saved paper remnants, the writer constructs an image of herself, most often in keeping with society's values but here and there in defiance of them" (122). Both women's manuscript cookbooks work to reinforce the image of each as a southern lady, in keeping with the dominant notions of the Antebellum South. Yet, Annie includes bits of evidence that indicate some ways in which dominant notions chafed against her lived reality.

### **Reflections on Manuscript Cookbooks**

While I do not claim that Martha's and Annie's cookbooks should stand as records of their entire lives, I do claim that these manuscripts serve as records of each woman's work and life as a homemaker. And, as the only existing artifacts I can find of each woman's own writing, these manuscripts serve as a measure of their lives. More than family heirlooms, these particular books are rhetorical artifacts that give us glimpses into the everyday lives of real women. They help us critically imagine a more authentic picture of what life was like for some southern women during the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

In reading manuscript cookbooks like the ones written by Martha and Annie we can read more than recipes and notations about daily life. The women who wrote these books used their

manuscripts to talk through time and preserve knowledge important to the community of women to which they belonged. Their cookbooks are a record of their relationships and social connections. They document what was important to each woman's daily life. Additionally, when each woman recorded and altered the recipes shared by mothers, grandmothers, and friends the manuscript cookbook authors claimed authority and composed identities of their choosing. As they composed these identities within their texts, there is evidence that women like Martha and Annie struggled to reconcile their lived experiences with their society's dominant notions of womanhood.

Cookbooks, even manuscript versions, may not give us the entire measure of a woman's life, but they serve as valuable artifacts for examining the ways women wrote themselves into being. By writing their books Martha and Annie each placed value on her own voice and her own position within their respective nineteenth century households. Reading Martha's and Annie's manuscripts as rhetorical artifacts opens avenues for revaluing women's work and expanding feminist studies of rhetoric and writing.

## CHAPTER 2

### COMMUNITY COOKBOOKS: RECIPES RHETORICAL AND RESISTANT

“Community cookbooks,” compiled by a group of women or a women’s organization, are often intended for sale to raise funds for a charity or project. They may also be known as “regional, charitable, and fund-raising cookbooks” (Bower 1). Since these books are most often communally authored, sold as fund-raisers, and intended to be read by a public audience, we can read community cookbooks differently than we read both manuscript and commercially produced cookbooks. In a study of community cookbooks from Louisiana Rachel Wolfe notes that “cookbooks transmit not only instructions for preparing specific dishes, but also the values of class, race, and gender of the times and places in which they are created” (1). Through community cookbooks we can read about the women who produced the books and their communities.

The community or fund-raising cookbook is a uniquely American phenomenon. Janice Bluestein Longone traces its beginning to the Civil War when women’s groups began producing cookbooks to sell to benefit widows, orphans, and veterans of the war during the 1860s. She writes,

At a time when American women were without full political rights and representation, they found the community cookbook one very effective way to participate in the public life of the nation. Through voluntary organizations—charitable, educational, cultural, civic, professional, political, and religious—they

created networks of mutual support, training grounds for organizing, and acceptable platforms from which to influence American life. (20)

From these early endeavors the community cookbook has become a prolific form with untold numbers produced annually. Although some effort has been made to catalog and record the immense number of community cookbooks published since 1861<sup>5</sup>, Longone admits that these efforts are far from comprehensive and a great number of these cookbooks are either unknown, uncatalogued, or both (21). Despite this lack of empirical data, it is easy to find examples of community cookbooks. They grace the shelves of most every home cook, and local libraries and archives hold countless copies of books produced throughout the late nineteenth, twentieth, and now twenty-first centuries.

Understanding the community cookbook's role in empowering women's groups and the prolific number of books available, I argue that the community cookbook is a vital category of artifacts for studying women's rhetorical practices. Through these cookbooks we read the stories of both communities and the individual women who make up those communities. Marta Hess notes that community cookbooks "are more than cookbooks; they are life style guides that allow and encourage women to establish their communities and identities" (2). In essence, the women who write and produce community cookbooks are writing and producing an image of their community, a communal identity, whether that community is formed by religion, education, or some other shared interest. As a rhetorical artifact, we can read a community cookbook as a collective statement of identity, a response to dominant cultural values, and a portrait of the women who contributed their recipes to its pages. In the introduction to *Recipes for Reading*, Anne Bower writes, "...cookbooks tell stories—autobiographical in most cases, historical sometimes, and perhaps fictitious or idealized in other instances. The discourse of the discrete

textual elements and their juxtapositions contribute to the creation of these stories, which quietly or boldly tell of women's lives and beliefs" (2). Indeed, we can read a community through its cookbooks.

When a group of women come together and create a community cookbook, they write both their own and their communal identities into being. Bower argues that in reading a community cookbook "you're reading the book for information about the lives and values of the people who put it together, reading the story they've bound together with recipes" (14). The curated collection of recipes in a community cookbook reflects many things. First, it reflects the foodways and habits of the community, both what they eat and what they serve. Second, the community cookbook reflects the identities of the women who contributed their recipes. The recipes reveal how these women lived their lives, what was important to them and what they valued. Third, the community cookbook reflects the identity of the community. By putting together these books women say, "This is who we are. This is what we value. This is what is important to us." Reading community cookbooks allows us to view the social circulation of the community. We can read life stories, community histories, and familial relationships from both blood and choice kinships all within the pages of a community cookbook.

When women contribute to a community cookbook, they mark their place within that community. They claim, "I was here, and I was a part of this, and it mattered." They also add their voices and recipes to those of the others in the community. When contributing to a community cookbook the inclination for contributors is to add their best recipes to the collection. These recipes are the "crowd-pleasers" that people ask for at parties or gatherings, the meals that children gobble up when served, and the dishes that family members proclaim to be "the best

they ever had.” When a woman contributes to a community cookbook she offers her very best for the benefit of the community.

The act of sharing recipes, compiling them, and publishing a cookbook indicates that the women who participate feel some sort of expertise or authority over their domestic work. Their recipes are “tried and true,” and “From the best kitchens.” They clearly feel some confidence in their ability to produce a collection that others will want to buy. This confidence contributes to the ethos of these collections. In turn, the audience feels it can trust these recipes contributed by this group of experts. That collective expertise also boosts the women who contribute to the cookbook. This is a community of experts and they are a part of it. By being included in the cookbook, these women are validated and part of their story is permanently recorded.

In addition to serving as the record and testimony of a community of experts, community cookbooks provide women with a way to exercise social, economic, and political power. Usually designed for some sort of fundraising effort, these cookbooks mark a group of women’s concerted efforts to make a difference in their community, to contribute in two ways. First, to create a book that will bring pleasure and happiness to those who buy it, use its recipes, and eat the resulting dishes. Second, to apportion the funds raised by selling the books to a project or cause the group hopes will better the community in some way. Such projects may range from buying needed equipment or materials for a church or school to helping provide support for people who are somehow in need. Community cookbooks are unique artifacts which offer women the opportunity to doubly contribute to their communities.

Community cookbooks also demonstrate that women can work together to effect change within their communities. The history of community cookbooks demonstrates that women have been banding together to financially support their communities through food for over 250 years

in the US. Dating back to the years during and immediately following the Civil War, community cookbooks have raised funds for all sorts of causes. Women, operating within their domain of the private sphere, have produced thousands and thousands of cookbooks which have raised untold amounts of money to support local causes and charities. In this chapter I analyze three community cookbooks written by Alabama women and published between 1878 and 1922. The texts offer a glimpse at the ways in which women from three different organizations, at three different times, used the cookbook to create and preserve relational connections, compose communal and individual identities, and grapple with the notions of womanhood (particularly southern womanhood) dominant in their times.

### ***The Gulf City Cook Book***

First published in 1878, *The Gulf City Cook Book* is the work of women belonging to “The Ladies of the St. Frances Street Methodist Episcopal Church,” of Mobile, Alabama. An original copy of the book is extremely difficult to find, though a digital copy is available online via the American Methodism Project. In 1990, the original text was reprinted with an added introduction by historian George Daniels who notes that of the text’s eighty-two contributors sixty-eight can be identified as the wives of known Mobile “urban middle-class professionals—attorneys, cotton or timber factors, real estate brokers, bankers, commission merchants, or insurance executives” (ix). Therefore we can see that the women who composed and compiled *Gulf City* were the matrons of the middle and upper middle classes of Mobile society.

It is very likely many of these women lived through or during the Civil War. With this historical context in mind, it is easy to imagine that as members of the upper echelons of society, these women most likely grew up in homes with enslaved persons and servants completing most household jobs. As Daniels points out, while the industrial revolution and growing urbanization

meant that northern middle-class women of the mid-nineteenth-century faced a shortage of “girls” willing to take domestic work, slavery had meant the middle and upper class women of the South felt this burden later than their northern peers. Yet, he notes, “[the help problem] struck them with particular force when it did come” (xiv). Raised to be mistresses and home managers rather than housewives and home makers, the women of the South were not prepared to cook and clean for their families on a daily basis after the abolition of slavery. It seems the women of the Saint Frances Street church recognized this problem as they were sure to include an abundance of basic cooking information in their book. It seems that these women “looked upon themselves as filling a need by offering basic instruction for unskilled cooks” (Daniels xvii). Additionally, they shared economizing recipes and suggestions for recreating leftovers as breakfast or dishes for other meals.

While *Gulf City* may have filled a need by teaching women how to cook for their own families, the women who contributed to and compiled this cookbook recorded a history of the foodways of their city and class. The book shows how these women fed their families. Within the 243 pages of recipes, eggs are the most frequent ingredient. Many women of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century south, even those who lived in more urban areas, raised chickens for eggs. These eggs both fed the family and served as an additional form of income. Aside from eggs, sweets were clearly popular among Mobile society. One-third of *Gulf City* is devoted to recipes for desserts, candies, and preserves. Additionally, the twenty-five recipes for frozen desserts indicate both their regional popularity and the availability and affordability of ice, at least for middle class families (Daniels xxv). The recipes in *Gulf City* feature items locally available to Mobile’s middle-class of the 1870s including: eggs, game, seafood (oysters, fish, crabs), and vegetables. Moreover, these recipes reflect Mobile’s unique location. As residents of



a port city nineteenth-century Mobilians enjoyed direct access to a larger variety of foods imported from Europe and the Caribbean than their counterparts living further inland. The recipes in *Gulf City* capitalize on the resources of the city and its surrounding area aiding local Mobile wives in their efforts to provide home-cooked meals for their families.

### *Culinary Crinkles*

First published in 1909 by the Ladies of the Church of the Advent in Birmingham, Alabama, *Culinary Crinkles* went through at least three editions. For this project I focus on the first edition compiled by Mittie Owen McDavid. According to a history of the church, also written by McDavid and published in 1943, the cookbook was a fundraising effort sponsored by the church's two women's organizations, the Ladies Aid and the St. Agnes Guild. McDavid notes that the 1909 edition of *Culinary Crinkles* sold out soon after its publishing (63). The women of the two organizations decided how to use the funds raised from this project. Though I could find no record to indicate their exact use, McDavid notes in her history funds raised by the women's organization were used for various projects including: running a free inner-city kindergarten, sponsoring missionaries, and making improvements to the church like a new organ or new lights (McDavid).

Like the women who produced the *Gulf City Cook Book*, the women who created *Culinary Crinkles* were from their city's middle and upper classes. McDavid notes in her history that the women of the Ladies Aid were usually older, aged 50 and over and "were known as the wealthier women of the church, most of them wives of vestrymen who had made their fortunes in Birmingham, the Magic City" (98). The St. Agnes Guild, on the other hand, was composed of the younger women of the congregation (99). Both groups, it seems, worked together on the cookbook project as it was not attributed to just one auxiliary but to "The Ladies" of the church.

The women of the Church of the Advent seem to have been busy. In addition to their church and charitable work, these women were also involved in other organizations including more secular women's clubs. McDavid notes that in 1909, the same year the first edition of *Culinary Crinkles* was published, that the church's Parish House hosted a weekly Shakespeare class for ladies "on the insistent request of a number of club women, composed not only of members of the Advent but of various churches" (62). This literary interest is also evident in the composition of *Culinary Crinkles* which features quotations from D'Israel, Bunyan, Byron, and Ruskin throughout. Mrs. McDavid and the other women who composed this book took time to carefully find and place these literary elements within their cookbook.

This same care and attention is evident in the overall composition and design of the cookbook. The heavy cardstock cover features the image of a pretty, young woman clad in a fashionable turn-of-the-century dress. Her lavender dress, stockings, and hair ribbons provide the only color on the creamy white cover, while her black hair, black high-heeled, buckled shoes and frilly, white apron provide contrast. Bent slightly forward at the waist, the woman holds a long-handled, black spoon in her left hand. Two little drops fall into her lavender mixing bowl which rests atop the words "Culinary Crinkles." The slim book is bound together with a length of lavender cord tied through the spine. Aside from its usefulness, *Culinary Crinkles* is an attractive book.

Following its prettily designed cover, the first few pages of *Culinary Crinkles* are devoted to advertisements. All of the ads are for local Birmingham businesses and several proprietors have the same last names as the women who contributed recipes. Most all of the ads are for goods and services that women (especially wives and mothers) would require including: clothing, whalebone corsets, grocery stores, drug stores, jewelry stores, and children's

photography. Two clever business owners make a special effort to attract women through their ads. First, the ad for Sutton's Candy proclaims, "If you have not time to make your ice cream by these receipts just phone Sutton's and he will deliver it to you" (McDavid, Culinary 2). Clearly, Sutton realized that the women who would buy and use this cookbook were perhaps the same busy women who contributed to its pages. These women were involved in various community, church, and social organizations, and they could afford to buy pre-prepared ice cream. Next, the advertisement for Commercial State Bank reads, "The accounts of ladies and societies especially solicited" (McDavid, Culinary 4). The men running this bank knew the women using this book were businesswomen, the wives of affluent men, and club women who belonged to organizations that raised money and collected dues to fund their projects. These two ads make a special effort to court the readers of (and perhaps contributors to) *Culinary Crinkles*. As I will discuss later in the chapter, all of the ads in the book are a testament to the buying power of the women who would purchase and use the cookbook.

While the advertisements in *Culinary Crinkles* indicate a middle and upper class target audience, the recipes reflect the urban lifestyle of the women who compiled the book. Many recipes call for canned vegetables and fruits rather than fresh. Women living in an urban area at the turn of the twentieth century would have been less likely to grow fresh vegetables and more likely to have access to a variety of canned goods. Additionally, *Culinary Crinkles* features five pages of fish and oyster recipes. Birmingham's position as Alabama's largest industrial city and its relative proximity via railway to the port of Mobile meant that wealthy residents had access to fresh fish and seafood, too. Finally, the "Meat" section of *Culinary Crinkles* hints at the relative affluence and urban location of the women compiling (and using) this cookbook. The recipes in this section include several for mincemeat and ham but there are no recipes for game meats like

venison, quail, or squirrel. The husbands of these women were heads of Birmingham's commerce and industry; they did not go out hunting for food. Or, if they did, the ladies of the Church of the Advent did not think it necessary to include recipes for those foods in their cookbook.

### ***Tried and True Recipes***

In 1922, the Alabama Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy® (UDC) published the first edition of *Tried and True Recipes*, a cookbook that would see three editions over fifteen years. Unlike the other books examined in this chapter, *Tried and True* is not affiliated with a religious organization. The UDC is a memorial association, originally organized in 1894, with the purpose of preserving “the memory and spirit” of those who fought for the South in the Civil War (“Cradle”). The Alabama Division of UDC was organized in 1897, by members of seven local-level UDC chapters in Alabama. According to a history of the Alabama Division, the idea for *Tried and True Recipes* was announced by Elizabeth Bashinsky at the Alabama Division's 1911 convention. Bashinsky was serving as the Chairman of the Scholarship Committee at the time. She planned for the cookbook to serve as a fundraiser for the organization's then, newly-instituted, scholarship program. Upon its publication in 1922, the cookbook proved a successful venture, being revised and expanded in three editions over fifteen years. Bashinsky served as chairman of the group's scholarship program for fifty years (“Cradle”).

In the introduction of *Tried and True*, Bashinsky explains the purpose of the cookbook project, “We send forth this volume on a three-fold mission—to bring education and opportunity to worthy boys and girls; to perpetuate the memory of those whose names the Memorial Scholarships will bear, and to guide the American home-makers in the important ‘Art of

Cookery” (Bashinsky 3). This mission statement indicates that Bashinsky intended the cookbook to be more than a fundraising project. As a lifetime advocate for education in the state of Alabama, Bashinsky viewed *Tried and True* as a way to bring education to many people. First, the children who received one of the Alabama Division’s scholarships would obviously have the opportunity to expand their educations. They would be educated via the funds raised by the sale of the cookbooks. But, there is a second population that Bashinsky hopes to educate through *Tried and True*. That second population is the women who will buy and use the cookbook. Bashinsky intends her cookbook to be a guide that teaches “the important ‘Art of Cookery” to the women who use it (3). Through this education of the home-maker, Bashinsky sees *Tried and True* as a response to those of her day who bemoaned the decline of cooking and eating in America. She writes, “The dishes herein revealed will refute the theories of the ‘decline of cooking’ enunciated by Octave Uzame and Henry Harvard, and convince us that the table of today surpasses that of the ‘good old times’ of a century ago” (3). Truly, Bashinsky envisioned her cookbook as a means to educating many women and children.

Aside from her mission for the cookbook to serve as a means to sponsoring education, Bashinsky had a unique vision for the recipes contributed to the text. In the preface she outlined the requirements for recipes included in the compilation, “Each contributor was asked to sign her recipe, with the understanding that her signature did not imply originality, but that the recipe had been tested by her and found true” (3). Rather than asking women to submit their own original recipes, Bashinsky encouraged women to submit recipes they used and liked. As a result, she notes, that many contributors submitted favorite family recipes. This focus on a recipe being “tested” and “true” rather than “original” speaks to the notion of recipes as dynamic, changing texts. As Elizabeth J. McDougall contends, “A recipe is never totally new; it is based on recipes

and procedures of the past, reflecting the communal sense of cooking and the long tradition behind it” (107). As I will discuss later in the chapter, Bashinsky’s formula for submission creates some interesting cases of attribution and evidences of genealogy throughout *Tried and True*.

As with the outline of the cookbook’s mission and the formula for recipe contribution, Bashinsky takes care to acknowledge her contributors and advertisers. The recipe contributors are described as “Women of culture and refinement, leaders of patriotic and literary organizations, directors in the ‘noble science’ of cookery” (3). Through this statement Bashinsky indicates these were women that lived up to the southern standard; they were women whom others should respect and want to emulate. Meanwhile, the advertisers, she says, deserve patronage “because of their integrity, the superiority of their goods, and their cooperation in the promotion of our educational work” (3). Like the recipes, Bashinsky assures readers that the advertisers were chosen because they had been tested and found true.

Though she modestly credits herself as the book’s “compiler,” by all accounts Elizabeth Bashinsky is the creator of *Tried and True*. Aside from the cookbook apparently being her idea, she wrote the preface, and is the book’s single greatest contributor. Her recipes can be found on nearly every page in every section of all three editions. It is no wonder then that she also is responsible for the book’s dedication to Helen Bashinsky Case, her deceased daughter. Compiling this book must have been a massive undertaking. *Tried and True* is not a small cookbook. The hard-bound cookbook features 254 pages of recipes followed by thirty-four pages of advertisements. There are twenty-nine recipe sections including: meats, congealed and non-congealed (gelatin) salads, desserts, cookies, breads, and cakes. The section for cakes is by far the largest with its forty-nine pages of recipes for all kinds of cakes, fillings, and frostings.

The cookbook is professionally bound and unlike the other books examined in this chapter, advertisers are featured throughout the book. Many of the ads are grouped according to recipe section. For example, Del-Monte ads are grouped with fruit and vegetable recipes and an ad for an ice cream freezer dealer is included in the “Frozen Desserts” section. Some advertisements run across the bottom or top margins of the recipe pages. Even the informational brief at the beginning of the “Congealed Fruit and Vegetable Salads” section is an advertisement for Knox Gelatin. *Tried and True* is not an average community cookbook—with its hardcover and binding, its expansive scope, and hundreds of pages of recipes, it could be mistaken for a commercial cookbook.

While the cookbook contains many recipes that might have proved useful to the average homemaker of the 1920s, the focus of the text is clearly on preparing food for entertaining or other gatherings. *Tried and True* features four separate recipe sections for salads: Frozen Fruit and Vegetable Salads; Congealed Fruit and Vegetable Salads; Fruit and Vegetable Salads; and Chicken, Cheese, and Fish Salads. Additionally, there are two sections for salad dressings and one section for sandwich fillings (featuring mostly finger sandwiches). These salads and tea sandwiches are more likely to appear on the menu for a women’s club meeting or social gathering rather than a family’s dinner table. Other evidence of *Tried and True*’s focus on entertaining appears in the sixteen-page long “Desserts” section where there are eleven recipes for “Charlotte Russe.” With its layers of whipped cream and lady-finger cakes topped with a cherry, Charlotte Russe is for special occasions and not an everyday dessert. Later in this chapter I will further discuss the implications of *Tried and True*’s focus on entertaining and community identity.

Though they differ in style, size, publication date, and fundraising purpose, the books described in this chapter all serve as valuable artifacts for examining the ways women employ cookbooks as rhetorical tools. In the following sections I analyze *Gulf City*, *Culinary Crinkles*, and *Tried and True* to demonstrate that through these community cookbooks women create a communal history and a culinary genealogy; compose and maintain a communal identity; and leverage the power of womanhood for social, political, and economic benefit.

### **Creating a Communal History and a Culinary Genealogy**

Just as nineteenth-century women used their manuscript texts to establish and preserve important relationships, community cookbooks work to create and memorialize communal connections. These memorials work to preserve stories that exist outside the confines of the dominant (male) historical narrative and in doing so create a communal history more relevant to and representative of the women who compiled it. Rosalyn Collings Eves argues that history and memory are “policed by those in power, who determine what is remembered—and what is not. As a result, memories from the margins—particularly those of women and minority groups—are often suppressed, distorted, or deliberately forgotten to make room for publicly promoted accounts of dominant culture” (281-82). When women come together to create and publish community cookbooks, they construct “countermemory” which works in opposition to “official memory” (281). Countermemory, as Eves defines it, is “a dynamic, evolving body of knowledge and stories that connects us to our pasts and informs our identity as individual and members of communities” (281). This body of knowledge, once written, published, and disseminated serves as a permanent record of the community of women who produced it. In community cookbooks we read the history of the women who contributed to and compiled these books. Eves notes, “Not only does the collection of individual memories serve as a memorial of the community as a



whole, with each individual voice embodying a representative perspective within the community, but also the sum effect of these collected memories generates sense of collective memory” (293). Recipes for wedding cakes, medicines, stain removers, beauty aids, teething biscuits, and holiday meals represent memories from the lives of the individual women who created the cookbook. In turn, these recipes both encourage other women to reflect on their own memories and become part of memories as they are incorporated into other women’s lives. Through these collected, communal memories we can glimpse individual lives. Of course, we should pay heed to Bower’s caution, “Theirs is a communal but fragmented portrait . . . no matter how elaborate the cookbook, we are only granted small portions of the recipe donors’ lives” (31). Still, we can learn from these glimpses.

Elizabeth Bashinsky understood the important ways that recipes connect women across time. In the introduction of *Tried and True* she specified that contributors signed their recipes to indicate they had been tested and approved rather than originally created. This stipulation encouraged contributors to share recipes collected over time from friends and family. As Bashinsky notes in her opening letter, contributors “sent recipes old and new, treasures gathered from the cook books of their mothers and grandmothers, traditional in their families” (3). Many of these legacies are indicated in the recipe title like “Frozen Salad, My Mother, Mrs. Ella H. Brock’s Recipe” submitted by Julia Brock Spangler or “Frozen Fruit Salad, My Daughter, Helen Bashinsky Case’s Recipe” from Elizabeth Bashinsky. Titles like this communicate a clear lineage between recipe giver and receiver. This sort of attribution creates a culinary record or genealogy that can be traced from one woman to another and extended when the recipe becomes part of another woman’s repertoire.

It is this notion of a culinary genealogy that makes sharing a recipe an act of connecting that is deeper than even the passing on of instruction or knowledge. Marion Bishop contends, “It is this ability of a recipe to bind the experience of the body, the unwritten, into measurable amounts that can be replicated, that makes the idea of a feminine culinary genealogy not just about cataloging names, but about literally preserving the *sense* of a woman’s life. Each recipe serves as a textual token—something a woman can hold in her hands that speaks of and connects her to wor(l)ds both linguistic and corporeal” (103-04). In other words, the thing that makes Helen Bashinsky Case’s Frozen Fruit Salad recipe special to her mother, Elizabeth, is not so much the food item created by compiling ingredients and following the instructions; instead, it is the fact that this recipe preserves for the mother a bit of her deceased daughter’s life. Bishop says, “[a recipe] generates not just a woman’s name, statistics, and origin, but nearly her presence as well” (103). By contributing this recipe to the cookbook Bashinsky poignantly offers to share a bit of her beloved daughter with the women of her community. Elizabeth, Helen, and their mother-daughter relationship all become part of the history recorded in *Tried and True*.

In addition to preserving traditional familial connections, sharing and attributing recipes in community cookbooks works to create new connections. Bishop notes, “Not only are women creating and affirming identity through connection, they are fostering new kinds of connections that suggest altogether new ways to configure community and family; for me to remember a recipe is to remember the woman it came from, how it was passed to her, and where I can situate myself within my culinary female family” (103). While the previous example recipes indicate a clear sanguineous familial connection, in other instances the relational connections are less clear. For example, one *Tried and True* recipe for waffles is titled “White House Waffles from Mrs. Warren G. Harding.” Without any other explanation, the reader is left to wonder about the

connection between the contributor and the US President's wife. Were they related? Acquainted? Did the recipe come to the contributor directly or from some other source like another cookbook or magazine? Perhaps the contributor feels connected to Mrs. Harding by politics or circumstance. Maybe serving her family the same waffles the President and his family eats makes her feel connected to Mrs. Harding. Maybe the recipe just makes good waffles. Regardless, the inclusion of this recipe in *Tried and True* indicates that it is part of one community member's culinary genealogy, a relationship established by choice that has now become part of the communal history of the group.

In still other ways, recipe attribution works to record relationships. Though the book does not feature many recipes with names reflecting familial relationships, the women who composed *Culinary Crinkles* made the clear choice to be identified by their husbands' names or their own married names with the title Mrs. For example, the compilation of the book is attributed to Mrs. Ned McDavid while Mrs. A. R. Dearborn contributed four recipes for "Chafing-Dish Oysters" and Mrs. John D. Weeden contributed her recipe for "Light Bread." Though this choice in naming could be attributed to the time period in which the book was published, it also speaks to this group of women's desire to establish their place within Birmingham society. As previously mentioned, many of the women contributing to the cookbook came from the prominent families of the Church of the Advent as well as early twentieth-century Birmingham. It was obviously important for the women compiling *Culinary Crinkles* to establish their own familial connections as they named their recipes.

While recipe naming can help sketch out a culinary genealogy, we should not assume that all recipes are shared with full consent or that all choice relationships are mutually reciprocated. Both *Culinary Crinkles* and *Tried and True* feature recipes attributed to women identified only as

“Mammy.” This sort of attribution reflects a slave-master or servant-master relationship between the recipe giver and receiver. To this end, we should again remember Anne Goldman’s question, “When does recipe sharing . . . become recipe borrowing, with only a coerced ‘consent’ from the domestic ‘help’?” (172). Although we cannot know whether either of the women called “Mammy” freely consented in the sharing of their recipes, the relationships indicated therein still yield information about the women compiling both cookbooks.

In community cookbooks, as in manuscript texts, naming and attribution work to link women through time. The women sharing recipes and compiling these books are connected through their community membership. Through their recipes they share parts of their lives with the community. The shared recipes invite community members into each other’s lives and work to memorialize special relationships. Unlike manuscript texts which have a more limited potential audience, community cookbooks have a greater likelihood for creating and perpetuating a non-traditional, non-sanguineous culinary genealogy. We can read for this genealogy in community cookbooks, but we must be careful to avoid the assumption of complete mutuality in the relationships depicted.

### **Composing and Maintaining a Communal Identity**

Whereas manuscript cookbooks, like those examined in Chapter 2, help women write their personal lives and stories into being, community cookbooks function as locations for composing communal identities and claiming individual membership in the community. As Bowers notes, “. . .in these cookbooks, communities of authors, deliberately or inadvertently, construct their own stories” (29). Although we cannot know whether these stories are constructed deliberately or not, or whether we are reading those stories correctly or not, we can, as Bowers suggests, work to “feel some confidence in [our] ability to perceive the experiences of

community cookbook authors and then transmit the stories found in those texts” by studying the cookbook form and the social, political, and historical contexts surrounding a cookbook’s production (30). This prep work is essential for attempting a fair and sympathetic analysis of the ways community cookbooks work to establish both individual and communal identities.

In his study of maternal pacifist cookbooks and identity performance, Isaac West urges scholars of rhetoric to examine how cookbooks and cooking practices work to “turn the kitchen into a transformative space of identity creation” (378). And while West argues that “the kitchen can be a [place] where economic, gendered, sexualized, racial, and other axes of identity are negotiated,” I maintain that much the same negotiation occurs within the pages of community cookbooks, especially for the women who contribute to and compile these texts (378). The women who work together to write community cookbooks engage in specific acts of identity negotiation as they organize and design, sell, and then allocate the funds raised from the sale of their texts. Each of these acts builds the communal identity and provides the individual women of the organization “opportunities for communicating who they are and who they might want to be” (West 358). When a woman claims part in a communal identity, she then incorporates that communal identity as a facet of her personal identity, as well.

As Bower notes, “the community cookbook [i]s a text that enacts within it a group of women’s mental, theoretical, thoughtful positions or statements. Indeed, fund-raising cookbooks are ideologically motivated...” (7). This motivation is evidenced in a cookbook’s form and content as well as its fund-raising purpose. The women who composed *Gulf City* were concerned about the ability of women in their community to produce affordable, home cooked meals. They saw their book as filling a need. Mittie Owen McDavid and the women who produced *Culinary Crinkles* hoped to support the missions and projects of the Birmingham Church of the Advent

through the sale of their cookbook. Elizabeth Bashinsky and the women on her committee hoped *Tried and True* would memorialize Confederate soldiers while raising funds to sponsor college scholarships for some high school students. The women who produced *Gulf City* were concerned that the women in their community lacked cooking skill and ability. All of these community cookbook projects allow their authors to make statements about the values important to each group. Furthermore, in producing and selling their cookbooks these women claim economic and social power that may have been otherwise denied them (especially as individuals) by the men in power around them.

In addition to their fund-raising purposes, the recipes included in community cookbooks demonstrate choices made by the women compiling the book to create and/or maintain a particular identity. Bower argues, “In community cookbooks women present their values, wittingly or unwittingly (we often can’t know which)” (2). As previously mentioned, the women of the Birmingham Church of the Advent chose not to include any recipes for game meats; however, they did include recipes for “Japanese Salad,” “Greek Cake,” “Consommé” from “a famous Swedish cook,” and “Rothcompole.” Wittingly or not, these choices communicate that the women compiling and contributing to *Culinary Crinkles* have urban, sophisticated, and cultured palates. They can prepare, serve, and dine on dishes by famous cooks from exotic locales. Additionally, these women claim the identities of home maker and mother. The section called “Discoveries” is filled with helpful hints for maintaining a home including: how to wash blankets and flannels, how to clean black lace, how to fold a man’s coat, and how to keep a puppy from crying at night. The “Stains” section outlines instructions for the removal of just about any kind of stain imaginable. The recipes in the section entitled “For the Children” feature child-friendly foods like “Pink Milk” and “Santa Claus Sandwiches.” The women who compiled

*Culinary Crinkles* take care to depict themselves as women of taste and sophistication but also as caring mothers and skilled home makers.

Similarly, the women who compiled *Gulf City* position themselves as the matrons of their society. They use their text to establish their authority as knowledgeable cooks and home makers. As such, the recipes in their cookbook focus on using locally available, even home-raised, foods and teaching basic cooking skills. Several of the book's recipe sections including: "Cakes," "Pies," "Puddings," and "Preserves and Jellies" begin with a "General Rules" introduction which provides an overview of how to prepare basic versions of these foods. The recipes following these general instructions expand on the basic renditions so that new cooks can grow their repertoires after mastering the basics. This identity and authority is furthered by the inclusion of sections entitled "Medicinals," "Comforts for the Sick," and "Miscellaneous." In each of these sections the contributors provide their combination of basic instructions and recipes to teach less-experienced home makers how to manage common situations.

As previously mentioned, many of the recipes in *Tried and True* are focused on entertaining rather than family dining. The women who compiled this book were by all accounts middle to upper class, white women who were active in various community and religious organizations. As was common for upper-middle class southern women during the early to mid-twentieth century, many of these women had domestic "help" or African American servants. In fact, the third edition of *Tried and True* published in 1937 has a secondary dedication to Martha Dismukes "Helen's Mammy who represented the Black Mammy of the Old South" (2). From this dedication and from the recipes included in their cookbook, we can understand that everyday cooking was not a major concern for the women who composed *Tried and True*. In addition to the previously mentioned eleven recipes for Charlotte Russe, the 1922 edition features eleven

recipes for punch while the 1937 edition features nineteen recipes for Charlotte Russe and six pages of recipes and instructions for creating canapés and canapé platters. Clearly, Bashinsky and the Alabama Division women who created *Tried and True* wanted to communicate that entertaining was one of their top priorities.

Aside from content and purpose, the form of the cookbook can also work to convey a message about the sponsoring group's communal identity. All three of the cookbooks examined for this chapter include a myriad of literary references. These references work in two distinct ways. First, they work to support the ethos of the women composing these cookbooks. These literary references indicate that the women composing these cookbooks are well-read and have the discernment to recognize the importance of "high art." This, in turn, communicates to the reader that the women have a sense of good taste, and the readers can then infer that that good taste extends to the recipes included in the cookbook. The message is, if the women composing these cookbooks understand and appreciate good literature, then they obviously understand and appreciate good food, too. Second, these literary snippets work to elevate the status of cooking. Cooking is important work. The women composing these cookbooks offer as evidence a mass of literary quotations from famous (male) authors explaining the vital importance of cooking to both life and culture. Readers are reminded that the work of the world is linked to food and eating. Again, these references work to build the credibility of both the women composing the cookbooks and the work of cooking itself.

Literature was important to the women of the Church of the Advent in Birmingham. McDavid's history of the church indicates that in 1909 (the same year the first edition of *Culinary Crinkles* was published), the women of the church, along with other women of the community, convinced Dr. W. E. Evans, the rector of the church, to teach a weekly Shakespeare



class at the church's Parish House. This interest in literature is evidenced by the use of a quotation at the beginning of each section of *Culinary Crinkles*. For example, the "Meats" section features a quotation from Byron, "All human history attests/That happiness for man – the hungry sinner!/Since Eve ate apples, much depends on dinner." Likewise, the section "Cakes" features this quotation from Emerson, "Too good for human nature's daily bread." The women even use a quotation to end their cookbook, attributed to Bunyan, it reads, "Some said print it;/others said not so,/Some said it might be good;/others said no." In all there are nineteen literary quotations featured in *Culinary Crinkles*.

Literary references to cooking appear in *Gulf City* and *Tried and True*, as well. *Gulf City* begins with a quotation from Edward Robert Bulwer-Lytton's 1860 verse novel, *Lucile*, which expounds man's vital need for dining:

We may live without poetry, music, and art;  
We may live without conscience, and live without heart;  
We may live without friends; we may live without books;  
But civilized man *can not* live without *cooks*.  
He may live without books,--what is knowledge but grieving?  
He may live without hope,--what is hope but deceiving?  
He may live without love,--what is passion but pining?  
But where is the man that can live without dining? (*Gulf City* 3)

This quotation serves two ethos-building purposes for the women who compiled *Gulf City*. First, it indicates that these are women of some learning and literary knowledge. The quotation communicates that they are versed in the literature of their time. Second, the quotation works to

validate the role of home maker and the cookbook project by demonstrating that cooking and dining have a place in high culture and should be important to cultured people.

Another interesting literary reference in *Gulf City* is found in the end of the cookbook in the “Housekeeper’s Alphabet.” This section contains an alphabetical list of tips and hints for women keeping house. The entry for the letter ‘X’ reads, “Xantippe was a scold; do not imitate her” (231). Xantippe was the wife of Socrates who has been branded throughout history as a foul-tempered nag. While this reference could reflect a lack of options for the letter ‘X’ available for the Housekeeper’s Alphabet, it is still revealing. This reference is particularly interesting because it indicates both the cookbook compilers’ knowledge of classical ancient literature and attitudes regarding appropriate wifely behavior.

Like the compilers of both *Culinary Crinkles* and *Gulf City*, Elizabeth Bashinsky references well-known literary works in her introductory letter to *Tried and True*. She cites famed gastronome Jean Brillat-Savarin’s quotation, “The invention of a new dish means more happiness in the world than the discovery of a constellation” as she points out the importance of good food to success and happiness (3). Additionally, in the last line of her letter she alludes to Julian Street’s 1912, food-centric memoir *Paris à la Carte* saying, “May these recipes bring you joy—a joy mingled with the fragrance of steaming soups, delicate sauces, savory roasts, refreshing beverages, pungent spices, and luscious fruits which greet you as from some ‘fire fairy’s golden casserole’” (3). Both of these quotations work to reinforce the Alabama Division’s identity as a group of women “of culture and refinement, leaders of patriotic and literary organizations, [and] directors of the ‘noble science’ of cookery” (3).

In addition to creating and establishing a communal identity, community cookbooks can work as locations for communicating cultural resistance. Goldman argues that “the reproduction

of dishes such as okra gumbo and huevos rancheros works to maintain cultural specificity in the face of assimilative pressures attempting constantly to amalgamate cultures for the benefit of the ‘melting pot’ or ‘national interests’” (172). Even though the women who wrote *Culinary Crinkles* and *Tried and True* were white and belonged to the middle or upper classes, these women were still working in some ways to fight the “assimilative pressures” placed on the post-bellum South. Through their recipes they work to claim the South as a distinctive and unique culture separate from the other parts of the United States. *Tried and True* features recipes for “Jeff Davis Pudding,” “Confederate Plum Pudding,” and “UDC Pudding.” The names of these desserts clearly show the contributors’ efforts to maintain a distinct (even rebellious), southern identity. Likewise, despite the compilers’ efforts to portray themselves as urban and sophisticated, some of the recipes contributed to *Culinary Crinkles* make specific connections to the Old South and Reconstruction. Recipes like “Mammy Emma’s Rolls” and “Poverty Pie” draw on these two facets of southern identity. Through their recipes these women worked to resist cultural assimilation and maintain what they perceived as southern culture.

### **Leveraging the Social, Economic, and Political Power of Womanhood**

While the women who compiled *Gulf City*, *Culinary Crinkles*, and *Tried and True* made some efforts in their books to preserve and promote their versions of southern culture, the projects themselves can be viewed as direct responses to the notions of southern womanhood dominant in the times. In many ways, these community cookbooks serve as evidence of their creators’ support of the dominant notions of southern womanhood which positioned the wife as the center of the home, responsible for the care and nurture of her husband and children, and without the ability to act in public matters. Instead, closer consideration of the community cookbook reveals that the form also empowered women to resist and subvert those notions.

Writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, the women who participated in these projects may have viewed their work on these cookbook projects as work outside of the home, a community service, and a form of public engagement. Bower notes,

...although women were often limited in access to recognized status-bearing discourse forms such as poetry and fiction, public speaking, and journalism, they expressed themselves through other print and nonprint materials... Whether complicit with or pushing against the constraints and categories that bound them, women acted to shape the communities around them. Thus, what we may designate as fairly private activity or discourse (sewing, the writing of letters, contributing to a cookbook) may actually have been seen by women of the past as forms of public participation. (5-6)

Though it can be argued that participation in the fundraising projects affiliated with community cookbooks is an acceptable and non-resistant form of female public engagement, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it should not be forgotten that this work empowered women to move beyond their homes and into their communities.

First, the work of organizing, contributing to, and compiling these cookbooks was extensive. These projects each took months, if not years, to complete. Each of these books is well-designed and professionally published. Elizabeth Bashinsky notes in her introduction to *Tried and True* that she first solicited contributions over a year before the volume was published. Additionally, two of these cookbooks were ongoing projects. Both *Culinary Crinkles* and *Tried and True* were published in multiple editions. Regardless of whether the books were compiled by individuals or a committee, the final products indicate that many women were involved in the creation of these cookbooks. These projects turned housewives into writers and editors,

capitalized on their skill as homemakers and cooks, and gave voice to the women who participated in their compilation and publication.

Next, the funds raised by the sale of these cookbooks were used by the organizations to support projects of the members' choice, projects with social, economic, and political implications. Ann Romines details these implications in her study of cookbooks produced by women's organizations of the Methodist Church, "Through such fund-raising projects, women's organizations tapped male enterprises (as well as women's businesses) for financial support, and they commoditized their own domestic processes and products, selling their recipes and then feeding the profits back into the Methodist Church" (84). The women of *Tried and True*, *Culinary Crinkles*, and *Gulf City* do much the same. Elizabeth Bashinsky and the Alabama Division's scholarship committee sent young men and women to college on the funds their cookbook raised. Additionally, they engaged in the political act of promoting and preserving the memorialization of the Confederacy and its soldiers. The women of the Birmingham Church of the Advent bought a new organ and new lights for the church. They also funded a free daycare for local indigent children. These are not small expenditures. While it is unclear what the women of St. Frances Street Episcopal Church in Mobile used their funds for, it is clear that they hoped to educate the women of their community on the principles of cooking and home keeping. Through these cookbook projects, the women of these organizations exercised power not associated with the stereotypical southern woman of their times; power that was usually denied them in other arenas.

Finally, aside from the funds raised by their projects, community cookbooks reveal the economic power women wield within their own communities. In these fund-raising endeavors, advertisements fund the creation and production of the cookbook. In exchange, the businesses

advertised hope to attract the attention and patronage of the women who buy the cookbooks. The women who compiled these cookbooks smartly leverage this symbiotic relationship between buyer and seller in order to fund their cookbooks and, in turn, their charity projects.

The extensive advertising sections within each of the cookbooks examined in this chapter demonstrate that women of these communities held important economic influence. By the late nineteenth century, women had increased their purchasing influence. Retailers began to understand that women shape the majority of the family's purchasing habits, and as a result, advertisers started to more actively court female consumers. Romines says ads in community cookbooks offer “a covert glimpse of the importance of women to the economy” of their cities (84). In addition to advertisements for local retailers, *Tried and True* features advertisements from national manufacturers like Knox and Del Monte. Elizabeth Bashinsky must have recognized the economic power held by the women buying her cookbook because she specifically asks in her introduction that women purchasing the cookbook make purchases from the “selective advertisers” featured in the cookbook (3). Likewise, the other two cookbooks examined in this chapter feature a vast array of local and regional advertisers vying for the money and patronage of cookbook readers. *Gulf City* contains only local advertisements from retailers selling everything from home goods to life insurance. There are ads for cotton brokers, hardware stores, wig makers, clothing stores, druggists, dentists, and banks all from Mobile. *Culinary Crinkles* has advertisers from local Birmingham companies as well as companies located throughout the state and southeast region. Notably, several of the companies feature the same family names as women who contributed recipes to the cookbook. In these instances we can see women—wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters—tapping into the family business for

financial support of their organization's project, again leveraging their power in order to engage in public work.

### **Reflections on Community Cookbooks**

Community cookbooks, like the three analyzed in this chapter, are a source of power and expression for the organizations (most often women's organizations) that compose them. Unlike manuscript cookbooks, these texts are intended for use by a public audience. As a result, the community cookbook becomes a type of public forum through which women writers can speak and act. Bowers says, "In the many community cookbooks published by women since the Civil War, the boundaries between the two kinds of talents (literary and domestic) blur, and women from whom we might otherwise never hear tell us their stories" ("Cooking" 50). These stories, told through recipes, work to create a culinary genealogy linking women not only through traditional familial relationships but also through relationships of choice. In turn, each woman who incorporates the recipe into her repertoire further extends the genealogy.

Additionally, community cookbooks present the values and ideals of the community they represent. We can read about more than a community's eating habits through a community cookbook. In the pages of a community cookbook women write this communal identity and record a communal history (literal or idealized). We can read about what that community values be it education, literacy, regional identity, or local foods. At times, this communal history or memory may work to resist cultural assimilation. Whatever the purpose, we can read community cookbooks as locations of rhetorical work by the women who produced the cookbooks.

Along with the rhetorical acts of producing memory, there are social, economic, and political implications associated with the production of community cookbooks. These volumes are sold to raise funds which the members of the women's organization then use to support

charitable projects of the members' discretion. More than a collection of recipes, community cookbooks are artifacts that trace the ways women engage in public, community service work. Advertisements, whether local, regional, or national demonstrate that retailers came to understand women's buying power. They also demonstrate that women can leverage their familial positions as wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters to secure funding for their charitable endeavors. Through community cookbooks, women have found a way to push beyond the constraints of the private to claim and exercise power in public which may have otherwise been denied them.



## CHAPTER 3

### COMMERCIAL COOKBOOKS: CASHING IN ON COOKING

While community cookbooks demonstrate some ways in which women blurred the lines between private and public, commercial cookbooks represent a woman's concerted effort to publicly earn money by sharing her knowledge and expertise in writing. These texts clearly display what Laura Schenone calls the "constant paradox" of cooking in women's lives (xv). In the introduction to her book, *A Thousand Years Over a Hot Stove*, Schenone argues that cooking has served as simultaneously "a source of power and magic" and a "source of oppression" in the lives of countless women throughout time (xv). She notes, "It has helped them win lovers, social standing, admiration, and money, too. And cooking has also helped limit women's lives, by tying up their days with endless chores, too long in the kitchen and out of the arenas of 'public' life and business" (xv). Like other women who earn money through cooking, the women who write and publish commercially sold cookbooks tap into that magic and power. They make cooking work for them.

In composing their texts, these women assert their authority and expertise. They leverage their "private" experiences to establish a public ethos. Unlike manuscript cookbooks, which are never intended for publication, or community cookbooks, which are intended for a small, local audience, commercial cookbooks are produced with a broad, public audience clearly in mind and for the purpose of benefitting the author financially. While manuscripts and community cookbooks may have an intended audience that is semi-public or private, these books are produced for a broad public, consumer audience.

In order to be successful a woman writing a cookbook intended for commercial sale must construct an ethos of knowledgeable authority while also creating a text that is accessible for her audience. She must ensure that her recipes are thorough and complete. Her instructions must be clear and easy to follow, and she must decide whether she intends to write for only experienced cooks or a broad audience which may include less-experienced or new cooks. She must be willing and able to tell her own story. Unlike community cookbooks, the author of a commercially published cookbook works to construct her own story. She is claiming her own identity rather than a part in a group identity. Unlike with a manuscript cookbook, the author of a commercially published cookbook intends her work to be read by the public, people she does not know and may never meet. Therefore, she may spend more time considering the story her cookbook tells and the identity she wishes her book to portray. Additionally, with a commercially published text the author must answer to her editor and publisher. Whereas, manuscript works are perhaps more solitary works and community cookbooks are often produced by committees, the commercially published cookbook serves as a textual representation of its author. This work bears her name, holds her recipes, and proffers her accumulated knowledge and experience to the audience. In fact, the authorial narrative is an important aspect of how commercial cookbooks are marketed. The author's story serves as a compelling factor in whether or not consumers will purchase her cookbook.

Marion Bishop notes, "recipe writing is a discursive act that requires a woman to rely on her connection with her own voice...When a woman writes a recipe and then signs her name to it, she establishes a connection to her inner world" (100). If one signed recipe connects a reader to the recipe author's inner world, imagine the connections offered and established as a woman writes and commercially publishes a compendium of her cooking knowledge to share with the

world. The creative power in such an act must surely be as powerful and meaningful as any literary endeavor.

Women have been publishing their cooking texts for hundreds of years. In *Eat My Words*, Janet Theophano notes that in the early modern period women circulated and sold handwritten texts on cooking (192). Then, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as commercial printing became a more affordable option, cookbooks became an acceptable medium for women writers. In America the first commercially printed cookbooks were from Britain and were written for a British audience. William Parks reprinted Eliza Smith's *The Compleat Housewife*, in 1742, making it the first cookbook printed in the colonies<sup>6</sup>. The first American-authored cookbook, *American Cookery*, was published by Amelia Simmons in 1796.

As Theophano contends, publishing a commercial cookbook helped women expand the reach of the “private sphere”—

Print publication made it possible for women to reach beyond their immediate family and friendship circles. By becoming authors through print publication, women could extend the boundaries of their influence and, if successful, profit economically from the venture. In their self-presentations, they emphasized their own day-to-day experiences, identifying with those of their readers. They rendered their instructions with self-conscious simplicity, enabling comprehension ... They chose language as prosaic and nontechnical as they could muster to reach the widest possible audience. (189-90)

Reaching a wide audience means more books sales and more revenue. In addition to nontechnical language and clear instructions, early cookbook authors often chose to focus on the female realm of the household rather than specific roles like mistress, cook, or servant. This

broad conception of who might read a cookbook helped expand a text's possible readership. The cookbook's conventions and form made it accessible for readers across a range of abilities.

Theophano notes that "by aiming their writing at the range of workers in a household, [authors] embraced a diverse community of readers" (190). This diverse community of readers could include mistresses, servants, housewives, mothers, and even children.

Originality or uniqueness was another factor in the commercial success of cookbooks. Unlike community cookbooks which could rely on communal ties (through location, organizational membership, and charitable causes) to generate sales, commercial cookbooks often capitalize on the author's perceived expertise, creativity, and originality for attracting consumers. Theophano says, "Each author tried to out do the other by promising original, never-before-published recipes or including other didactic literature" (191). This other literature included everything from basic cooking techniques, household hints, menu planning advice, to guides for manners and comportment. In fact, "some cookbooks were more than cookbooks. Besides providing recipes, author used cookery books as a venue for the exploration of domestic life, women's roles, education, and demeanor. Printed cookery literature was a place for women to shape the images of femininity that were being debated in other forms of literature" (Theophano 191). The two cookbooks explored in this chapter serve as examples of the ways women used cookbooks to shape the femininity of their own images as they simultaneously promoted their own business careers. I chose these two cookbooks because both of the authors have unique and interesting stories. Each woman has very different circumstances, and they both write in very different times, yet their cookbooks both work to challenge the notion of what it means to be a southern woman.

**Eva Brunson Purefoy and Her Hotel**

Eva Brunson was born April 7, 1892 in the tiny south Alabama town of Highland Home. Her father built a small hotel in 1907 and Eva, the oldest of 12 children, “got her first hotel training and her desire to have her own hotel someday” (History 11). As a girl, Eva attended high school and then “studied music and art” (History 11). On June 15, 1915, Eva married Robert Peeples Purefoy. He was a widower with three young children whose first wife had died in 1913.

The first Purefoy hotel opened in Monroeville, Alabama on October 7, 1916. The Purefoy’s ran their first hotel successfully in Monroeville for four years. After this time, they wanted to expand the hotel but could not (no further explanation is given). As a result, they decided to find a new location. Mr. Purefoy started scouting for other properties and on a trip to Ashland in east Alabama he stopped in the town of Talladega. While in Talladega, Robert Purefoy told some locals that he was looking to open a hotel and was asked to consider Talladega (History 13-14). The Purefoy Hotel opened in Talladega, AL on May 17, 1920 (History 15). Apparently, the move to Talladega was not immediately successful. The original hotel property was less than ideal. There were not enough bathrooms and water had to be boiled to be potable. However, the hotel became an outstanding success. By the 1930s it had grown from twenty to 88 rooms encompassing several surrounding buildings, and the Purefoys were serving 300-400 people daily in the dining room. In fact, according to the history, the hotel once served 525 people on a Sunday. This success and the popularity of the Purefoy Hotel’s grand meals (and particularly the recipe for Raw Cranberry Sauce) led to Eva writing her cookbook in 1938.

Interestingly, Purefoy reveals in her book, *History of the Purefoy Hotel*, that these grand meals did not directly yield financial gains for the hotel. In fact, they are part of Eva’s brilliant marketing plan. The history reads,

It was seldom possible for the hotel to break even on the dinners they served, but this did not bother Mrs. Purefoy. She did not create the world's biggest dinner as a money-making proposition. Her subtle approach to the hotel business was, 'take care of the traveling men and they will take care of you.' It worked. The hotel netted a profit each year in [room] rentals. (8)

Clearly, Eva was confident that her abilities as a cook and kitchen manager could carry the hotel.

In 1939, Robert's health began to decline. Eva asked her brother-in-law (married to her sister) Edward Thomas Hyde to join the staff as manager. Robert died on December 30, 1939. Eva carried on running her hotel until 1944 when she retired and sold the hotel to Hyde. It is never clearly explained in *History* what Robert Purefoy's work in the hotel was exactly. Eva is described as running the restaurant and managing the staff and financial concerns of the hotel and restaurant. Although she sold her hotel and retired, Mrs. Purefoy did not remain so. In 1949, she and one of her sisters opened the Noble-Purefoy hotel and the Noble Inn Dining Room in Anniston, Alabama. Eva left this venture in 1958 and the two sisters retired back to Talladega.

Purefoy's career made her quite wealthy and she bought and then enlarged a historic Victorian-era home in Talladega. She and her sister and other family members lived in the house for years after she retired from her last hotel/restaurant venture. She co-wrote *History* in 1970, and though the volume provided her with direct control over telling the story of her life, Eva Purefoy's first work, *The Purefoy Hotel Cook Book*, reveals much about the woman and her unconventional life and career.

### ***The Purefoy Hotel Cook Book***

Subtitled "True and Tried Recipes of Real Southern Cooking," this cookbook was written by Eva B. Purefoy and first published in 1938, subsequent editions followed in 1942, 1946,

1949, 1953, and 1960. This chapter focuses specifically on Purefoy’s first edition, though later editions are mentioned. The recipes included in this book come directly from the hotel and restaurant Purefoy owned and managed in Talladega, Alabama. The slim, 111-page, volume is covered in stiff cardboard and features photo of the hotel, which was apparently well-known during its time. The inside front cover bears the ubiquitous verse from the previously mentioned poem *Lucile*—

We may live with poetry, music, and art;  
We may live without conscience and live without heart;  
We may live without friends, we may live without books,  
But civilized man cannot live without cooks. (np)

On the first page of the *Purefoy* cookbook, Eva offers a dedication. She writes, “Dedicated to my friends, the traveling men, who have made this book possible through their appreciation and inspiring compliments these twenty-two years that they have been patrons of my hotel” (1). The Index comes next and features eleven sections of recipes: Cocktails; Soups; Meats and Meat Sauce; Vegetables, Cheese and Eggs; Salads; Salad Dressings; Breads; Pickles and Preserves; Desserts, Cakes, Pies, Etc.; Candies; and Household Hints.

The six pages after the Index offer testimonials to the quality and quantity of the food served in the Purefoy Hotel’s dining room and restaurant. These testimonials come from a variety of sources including patrons, local and regional public figures (Congressmen, former governors, and the Chancellor of Vanderbilt University), and news articles (even one from the *NY Sun* dated 1931). In these testimonials, the writers praise and support Mrs. Purefoy’s excellent meals and hotel. They describe the food, serving style, and atmosphere of the hotel,

lending support to Mrs. Purefoy's claim that her recipes are "true and tried" examples of "real" southern cooking.

The two pages following the testimonials feature sample menus from the hotel including: Thanksgiving dinner, Sunday dinner, Everyday dinner, and a banquet dinner. These meals, served family-style at the Purefoy Hotel, must have been grand events. A report from the *Birmingham Post*, dated March 2, 1938 and featured in the testimonials at the front of Purefoy's cookbook, recounts the menu from a Sunday dinner of which reporter Harold Helfer partook.

The menu follows:

Roast duck, roast hen, baked ham, escalloped oysters, country sausage, spaghetti and meat balls, cabbage, new potatoes in cream, mashed potatoes, giblet gravy, chicken dressing, string beans, combination salad, sliced tomatoes, head lettuce, celery, stuffed celery, cottage cheese, candied yams, cauliflower, asparagus with almond cream sauce, turnip greens, half oranges stuffed with sweet potatoes, macaroni and cheese, prunes stuffed with cream cheese, stuffed peaches, cranberry sauce No. 1, cranberry sauce No. 2, black-eyed peas, glazed carrots, English peas, hot rolls, coffee, tea, milk, chocolate layer cake, home-made cherry and almond ice cream. (Purefoy 11)

Helfer notes that the hotel charged eighty-five cents per meal and customers could eat their fill and were "allowed to take as many helpings of a dish as [they] wish" (Purefoy 11). This generous offering is more impressive when we remember that at this time Eva and her staff served between three and four hundred people daily in the hotel dining room and did not count on the meals to bring in much profit for the hotel (History 15). Clearly, Eva Purefoy had a vision for both her hotel and her cookbook. In the following pages I will examine how Purefoy's



cookbook works as a vehicle for her to claim her authority, extend her reach through time, and respond to the dominant notions of southern womanhood.

### **Abby Fisher from Enslaved Cook to Business Woman**

While Eva Purefoy has an interesting story, Abby Fisher's story is singular and unmatched. It is believed that Abby C. Fisher was born around 1832 in South Carolina. Census records indicate that Fisher's mother was black and also born in South Carolina. According to these records, her father was white man born in France. Considering the time period, location, and this genealogical information, it is most likely that Abby was born in slavery. Little is known of Fisher's life apart from what can be gleaned from census records and what she herself reports in her one book, a cookbook, published in 1881. From this limited information we can make some guesses about Abby Fisher and her life.

Fisher tells in her book that she had given birth to eleven children and raised them all (72). This brief, simple statement coupled with the knowledge of Abby's work and parentage reveals much about her life. From this we can infer that Abby's enslavement experience was somehow exceptional. Unlike thousands of other enslaved blacks during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Abby's family was kept together. Many enslaved families were broken apart as husbands, wives, and children were sold to other owners. Abby's first seven children were born while she was most likely still enslaved and her eighth child, Benjamin, was born in 1864, just months after the Emancipation Proclamation. Additionally, we know that Fisher learned to cook. She worked in the plantation kitchen, a position which indicates some favor. All of this can probably be attributed to the fact that her father was white, most likely her owner or a member of his family.

Somehow, in 1859, Abby was legally married to Alexander C. Fisher (Wagner 43). It is unclear whether Abby and Alexander were free or enslaved at the time of their legal marriage. Some scholars think the couple was most likely married while enslaved and then had their marriage legalized after they were freed. Though, the Fishers may have been free in 1859. It was not regular practice to have the marriages of enslaved men and women legalized while the parties were still enslaved. Of course, Abby and Alexander's lives seem to be unique to their times, so we do not know for sure. Regardless, like Abby, Alexander is listed in subsequent census reports as "mulatto," meaning he was of mixed black and white ancestry and probably also enslaved at some point<sup>7</sup>. Although we do not know when they moved there, by 1870 the Fisher family was living in Mobile, Alabama. Census records for 1870 list Alexander's occupation as minister and report that Abby "keeps house."

According to Tricia Martineau Wagner's *African American Women of the Old West*, the Fisher family moved west in 1877, and Abby worked as a cook and caterer for some of the wealthiest families in San Francisco, many of whom were expats from the southern states (43). The names of some of these families are listed as "Friends and Patrons" at the beginning of Fisher's cookbook. In 1879, Abby was awarded a diploma for cooking, the highest award given, by the Sacramento State Fair. The next year, she presented her pickles and preserves at the 1880 San Francisco Mechanic's Fair and Institute and is pronounced "best on display" by organizers. It is at this time that the Women's Institute of San Francisco and Oakland commissioned Abby to write a cookbook. The 1880 census shows Abby and Alexander as homeowners living in San Francisco. His occupation is listed as "Pickles and Preserves Manufacturer" and hers is listed as "Cook." According to Wagner, the San Francisco city directories of the period list the Fishers'

business as “Mrs. Abby Fisher & Co.’ and ‘Mrs. Abby Fisher, Pickle Manufacturer’” (45). Clearly, the Fishers’ business was founded on Abby’s name, reputation, and expertise.

My claim to Abby Fisher as an Alabama author is one of many similar claims by feminist scholars studying her work. In the afterword of the 1995 re-release of *What Mrs. Fisher Knows*, Karen Hess frames Fisher’s work as a South Carolina cookbook (74). Likewise, Tricia Martineau Wagner claims Fisher’s as a Californian author in her book *African American Women of the Old West*. I base my claim on Fisher’s own assertion from the title page of her cookbook. Here, she positions herself as “Late of Mobile, Alabama” (3). It was important for Abby Fisher’s ethos that she establishes herself as a southern cook. It also appears to be important for her to claim Alabama as home over her birth place (and likely location of enslavement) in South Carolina. Regardless of the location, Abby Fisher’s cookbook is a unique text through which we can read a bit about Fisher’s life, work, and negotiation of experience and voice.

### ***What Mrs. Fisher Knows about Old Southern Cooking***

With her successful catering and manufacturing endeavors and her awards from state and local fairs, Abby Fisher published her cookbook in 1881. *What Mrs. Fisher Knows about Old Southern Cooking* was published by the Women’s Cooperative Printing Office in San Francisco and draws directly from Abby’s cooking experiences during and after slavery. The original edition is a small volume of just seventy-two pages, measuring about eight inches by six inches, with the title embossed in gold script across the black fabric-wrapped cover. In 1995, *What Mrs. Fisher Knows* was re-released with an afterword and historical notes written by Karen Hess. In these notes Hess proclaims Fisher’s book as “the first African American cookbook” (90). This notion was disproved by Jan Longone in 2001 when she wrote of her discovery of the 1866 cookbook, *A Domestic Cook Book: Containing a Careful Selection of Useful Recipes for the*

*Kitchen*, published by Melinda Russell, a free black woman living in Paw Paw, Michigan (“Early” 98). Nevertheless, Fisher’s book remains one of the earliest examples of American cookbooks published by a formerly enslaved woman.

On the title page, Fisher begins her book by listing her professional awards and giving a “Preface and Apology” (3). Here, she admits her illiteracy. From this we can assume that Fisher’s cookbook is a transcription, making it a unique form of cookbook. Later in this chapter I discuss the negotiation between dictation, transcription, and authorial voice that occurs in Fisher’s text. Also in the preface, Fisher explains that she was asked by friends and patrons to publish her knowledge of southern cooking. She writes, “The publication of a book on my knowledge and experience of Southern Cooking, Pickle, and Jelly Making, has been frequently asked of me by my lady friends and patrons in San Francisco and Oakland, and also by ladies of Sacramento during the State Fair in 1879” (3). The names and addresses of nine of these “friends” are listed beneath the Preface and Apology on the title page. The last line of Fisher’s preface is important. Here, Abby notes that her book is a “complete instructor, so that a child can understand it and learn . . .” (3). Clearly, Fisher wanted her cookbook to be usable and helpful for cooks of all skill levels. A highly technical book would have a much smaller consumer audience. Fisher’s attention to teaching makes her book accessible to a diverse audience of home cooks. Additionally, a focus on sharing knowledge and teaching is in keeping with the conventions of women-authored cookbooks.

Following the title page is the “Contents” section. This four-page section is more like an index than a table of contents. While the Contents section lists the recipes based on category, within the text the recipes are organized numerically and are not grouped by course or category. There are one hundred sixty recipes in *What Mrs. Fisher Knows*. These recipes span all types of

dishes and include forty-one recipes for pickles, sauces, and preserves—Abby’s award-winning area of expertise.

### **Composing Identity and Claiming Authority**

With their commercial cookbooks, both Purefoy and Fisher seek to establish themselves as authorities, professional women who have expertise to share. Through their cookbooks they fashion identities that leverage their successful business careers for increased profit. These identities rely on the authors’ lived experience but offer only carefully selected portions of that experience for consumption. Neither woman reveals too much about her personal life through her cookbook. Each uses the relationships formed through business to build ethos and support her claims at authority. Then both cement their authority and demonstrate their expertise by sharing recipes advice in a way that is accessible to a wide consumer audience.

Eva Purefoy’s ethos as a hotel-owner lends credibility and gravity to her recipes and advice. She establishes her authority in a variety of ways. First, she begins her book with the dedication thanking all of her many patrons over the years. She specifically references her “twenty-two years” of hotelier experience. Who else can better explain how to prepare meals, clean rugs, or remove water rings from polished furniture than a woman who owns and manages a busy hotel?

At the beginning of the recipes section, Purefoy notes that a star ★ designates “An outstanding recipe” (13). She does not clarify whose opinion rendered the recipes outstanding, but the assumption is that these are customer favorites. So, it follows that if Purefoy’s “traveling men” loved these recipes a reader’s family will, too. Throughout the cookbook, Purefoy strives to make her recipes accessible to the woman cooking for her family (considerably less than 300-

400 people). One feature that a home cook would find helpful is servings a recipe yields. Several recipes feature serving yields, and most recipes serve four or more. A few recipes are suitable for a larger crowd without doubling. The recipe for “Delicious Creamed Chicken” notes that it “will serve 15 people” (21). Purefoy’s is one of the few cookbooks I analyzed that regularly indicates the amount of people each recipe will feed.

Another way that Purefoy establishes her expertise is through her recipe instructions. Her recipes offer very specific instructions for home cooks. Her recipes and tips focus on sharing her knowledge and teaching women how to cook. For example, the recipe for “Grand Roast Turkey” specifies: “Kill turkey a day or two before it is to be cooked and keep on ice” (21). Her recipe for “Raw Cranberry Sauce,” noted as one of her “most famous recipes” and the impetus for the cookbook, offers three different serving options as a sauce, a congealed salad, or a dessert. Some recipes come with cooking temperatures and times, still not yet a standard feature in cookbooks in 1938.

In a move that speaks to her knowledge and creativity as a cook and household manager, Purefoy teaches her readers about taste and economy with instructions for pairing foods and recipes for using leftovers. For example, she notes that candied sweet potatoes are “delicious with fried chicken” (45). She also includes lists like “Combinations of Fruits that Make Good Salads,” “Combinations of Meats that Make Good Salads,” “Dates May be Stuffed With,” and “Fruit Salad Combinations.” For using leftovers, Purefoy shares recipes like turkey club sandwiches, turkey au gratin (a “tasty post-Thanksgiving lunch”), and turkey a la king (“another grand meal for which you can give ‘thanks’ all over again!”) (22). The end of the Meat section also features a list titled, “Many ways to use meat leftovers.” In addition to the recipes that utilize leftovers, some of Purefoy’s recipes, she notes, are “inexpensive meals.” For example, the

recipe for “Chop Suey” notes it is “a wholesome, appetizing, nourishing, and inexpensive meal” (24). The reader can feel confident in following Purefoy’s advice because she demonstrates her knowledge about cooking, nutrition, and economy.

In addition to sharing her recipes, Purefoy uses the “Household Hints” section of her book to share her knowledge and experience as a housekeeper. She includes information on what types of cookware to invest in, how to clean ducks, how to garnish/decorate serving dishes, how to remove stains from linens, how to combat ant infestations, how to make floor wax, and how to clean furniture before waxing. With her recipes and home keeping advice, Purefoy parlays her experience owning and managing her hotel into a second identity as cookbook author and domestic arts expert.

Like Eva Purefoy, Abby Fisher uses her professional experience to build her ethos, as well. In her preface she notes both her prestigious awards and her successful business manufacturing pickles and preserves. Additionally, she notes the names (and addresses) of some of her friends and patrons, all well-connected in San Franciscan society, who encouraged her to compose her cookbook. Finally, she references her recent home of Mobile, Alabama, to support her claims of knowledge in southern cooking. Who can better teach readers how to cook than a southern woman who makes her living cooking for the rich and manufacturing products from her own recipes?

Unlike Purefoy, it is Fisher’s pre-professional life that earns her credibility with her contemporary audience. Without stating it directly, Abby Fisher subtly informs her audience that her expertise in “old southern cooking” comes from her experience as an enslaved cook. Rafia Zafar notes that publications like Fisher’s “are particularly notable because their authors do not explicitly take up the matters of slavery, sexual oppression, and racial discrimination” though

they do “display the invisible labor” that made “a certain kind of lifestyle possible for generations of European Americans” (“What” 88). Instead, we have to read closely to glean information about Abby Fisher and her experience with “Southern Cooking.”

Many of the recipes featured in *What Mrs. Fisher Knows* come with directions that indicate Fisher had experience preparing food she would not be eating herself. Recipe 159 for “Cheese Pudding,” like many other recipes in the cookbook, includes a last instruction to “send to table as a vegetable” (72). Recipe 112 for “Boiled Turkey” notes to “send gravy to table with the turkey” (55). Recipes often give serving suggestions or instructions, but a woman preparing a meal for her family or guests is not likely to “send” the food to the table. This is something a servant cook would need to know.

Likewise, Fisher’s revealing note at the end of her last recipe “Infant Pap” lets her readers know that they are reading the cookbook of a formerly enslaved woman. As previously mentioned, a portion of this recipe reads:

... Whenever you are ready to nurse or feed the child, grate one tablespoonful of the boiled flour and stir it into half a pint of boiled milk while the milk is boiling; sweeten the same with white sugar to taste. When the child has diarrhea, boil a two-inch stick of cinnamon in the pap. I have given birth to eleven children and raise them all, and nursed them with this diet. It is a Southern plantation preparation. (72)

To modern readers this recipe may seem old fashioned, even strange, though not particularly revealing. However, a closer reading reveals a few clues that point to Abby Fisher being an enslaved woman. First, the last line of the recipe notes that this was a “plantation preparation,” leading readers to understand that this was a common recipe on southern plantations (72). For



Abby Fisher to have learned and used this recipe it is likely she lived on or near a southern plantation. Second, the recipe indicates that the preparation should be readied “whenever you are ready to nurse or feed the child” (72). This indicates that while living on a plantation, she fed children. White women on a plantation rarely nursed or fed their own children. White children were cared for by enslaved women. If Abby was preparing this pap for her own children, she was most likely not a white woman. Finally, Abby tells her readers that she used the recipe herself as she raised all eleven of her children. Again, if Fisher was using this recipe on a southern plantation to feed her own or any children, she was most likely doing so as an enslaved person. These clues combined strongly indicate that Abby Fisher was formerly enslaved. Though, as Zafar notes, these clues also indicate that Abby was most likely favored during her enslavement, “If she were like many African-American children of planters, she got a better than the average Black woman’s deal in life because of that [partially white] lineage” (“What” 90). Abby left these indirect clues throughout her cookbook so that her readers could understand just how Mrs. Fisher gained her expertise in old southern cooking. By doing this, she leverages both the trope of “the faithful slave” and the obsession of late nineteenth-century whites for southern nostalgia in her favor.

The trope of the “the mammy” or “the faithful slave” can be traced from the beginning of American culture in the late eighteenth century. In *Clinging to Mammy* author Micki McElya argues that this pervasive narrative “dates back to at least the 1830s, when members of the planter class began using these stories to animate their assertions of slavery as benevolent and slave owning as honorable” (4). This narrative paints the relationship between enslaved person and master as familial, paternal, and even affectionate. White masters claimed they were responsible for providing all elements necessary for their enslaved workers’ “well-being,

including clothing, food, housing, and medicine, and they bore this burden for the lifetime of their slaves as their obligation” (McElya 6). For their part, the “carefree” enslaved persons contributed work, loyalty, and heartfelt fidelity that came from their “love for and dependence on their owners” (McElya 6).

After emancipation and the Civil War the narrative was adopted on a national scale as whites, both southern and not, struggled to reconcile a new reality. As freed blacks like Alexander and Abby Fisher left the South en masse in 1877, moving north and west in search of better opportunities, local and national curiosity was piqued. McElya writes, “Sentimental evocations of plantation abundance and benign slavery held increasing allure for non-southern whites as well, as it appealed to their own racism, fears, and postwar concerns” (11). This national interest in plantation nostalgia led to the birth of the Plantation School, a group of regional authors that produced nationally popular work devoted to the antebellum ideal of “moonlight and magnolias, cavaliers and fine ladies and of course faithful slaves” (McElya 10).

This national interest in the Old South was not just evidenced in literature. Popular culture from this time is rife with examples of Mammies and cheerful black characters. Minstrel performers regularly appeared in black face to sing about “old times.” Advertising campaigns for products like Cream of Wheat and Aunt Jemima’s Pancake Mix, both featuring black characters (caricatures) as spokespeople, were also created in the late nineteenth century. Additionally, many white-authored cookbooks from the time harken back to the “plantation cooking” that had been the responsibility of women like Abby Fisher for decades. Perhaps it was this interest in antebellum nostalgia that led Fisher’s patrons to encourage her to compile her cookbook. Or perhaps Fisher saw the opportunity to capitalize on a cultural moment and agreed

to dictate her recipes for publication. In either case, Fisher's book is unique as it presents a first-hand account of "old southern cooking."

As previously mentioned, Fisher admits her illiteracy in the preface of her book. Still she is savvy and smart. Just a few short years after arriving in San Francisco she had used her culinary knowledge and skill to build a reputation, business, and influential clientele. Knowing of Fisher's illiteracy and reading the stilted, writerly prose of the preface, it is safe to assume that someone, maybe one of Fisher's white friends or patrons, transcribed her recipes. The preface notes that Fisher is unable to read and write and that her husband is "without the advantages of an education" (3). Though "after due consideration," she "concluded to bring forward a book of [her] knowledge" (3). Reading the language of this passage, we can assume that Fisher's transcriber "translated" her dialect. In his essay "Talking Recipes," Andrew Warnes notes that the preface of Fisher's cookbook "reveals that the transcriptive processes that commit her spoken words to paper are of a particularly interventionist and transformative kind ... so aggressively styled into formality as to leave little to no trace of black vernacular speech" (65). This translated version of transcription works to erase Abby Fisher's vernacular speech and muffle her authentic voice.

There could have been multiple reasons for this move to translate Fisher's oral, vernacular recipes into a conventional form and a formal voice. We may assume that Fisher's "transcribers" decided to change her speech with "a benevolent desire to circumvent the negative connotations" of the vernacular and to avoid the caricature of black voices so popular in this time (67). Such a move can be seen as protective of Fisher and perhaps a sign of the esteem in which her collaborators held her. Yet, Warnes argues, "Fisher's dependency on these Californian collaborators situates her cookbook not only as a signifier of racial progress but also as an

example of the intense and often anxious fascination with blackness that filtered much contemporary white American cultural production” (65). Still, the racial implications of the translation of Fisher’s cookbook cannot be overlooked.

Fisher lived in a time when contemporary white consumer culture was nigh on obsessed with blackness and the “commodification of African-American cultural materials for white bourgeois consumption” (Warnes 65).<sup>8</sup> This was an uneasy obsession that sought to slice African-American culture “into manageable mouthfuls of stereotype” which bore no trace of the horrific realities of African American life after Reconstruction—lynching, poverty, disenfranchisement (Warnes 66). With this in mind, the translation of Fisher’s vernacular can be read as an effort to “cleans” her recipes of blackness; thereby satisfying the consumer desire for African-American food filtered through a grammatically acceptable voice.

Of course, there is the possibility that the cleansing effort may not have been solely the choice of Fisher’s translators. Another possibility to consider is that perhaps it was Abby Fisher’s own choice to change her vernacular speech to stilted, writerly English. This cookbook was a serious professional endeavor for Abby. She obviously worked hard to get her business started and become successful in a short amount of time. Yes, there was a popular fascination with black culture in the moment during which she was living and working, but the seriousness with which she took her work is evidenced by her awards at the mechanic’s and state fairs. Perhaps the decision to remove the vernacular from her cookbook was intentional on Fisher’s part. While the choice to dictate her book was most likely due to her illiteracy, it is very possible that Fisher wanted her cookbook to be successful because of her expertise and her recipes, not because her potential audience might find her personal history novel. This is at least a fair

consideration based on the evidence that she was obviously a smart, successful, and savvy business woman.

No matter who made the choice to strip Fisher's cookbook of her vernacular voice, there are moments where the cleansing efforts fail. Apparently, Abby's transcribers/translators were not very familiar with southern cuisine themselves. This lack of familiarity with both southern cuisine and dialect cause the transcribers to fail to contain Fisher's vernacular. Some of these moments are evident in the titles of several recipes in *What Mrs. Fisher Knows* such as the recipes for "Ochra Gumbo," "Circuit Hash," "Jumberlie," and "Caroles." Ochra Gumbo is mistranslated for Okra Gumbo. Circuit Hash is really the corn and lima bean dish Succotash. Jumberlie is Jambalaya, and Caroles are the sweet doughnut-like pastry Crullers. Warnes notes that in these instances, "fingers slip, wires cross, and the vocabulary at the disposal of Fisher's transcribers fails to accommodate the language spoken by their subject" (70.) Here, Abby Fisher's southern "lilt is suddenly, unexpectedly, wonderfully retained;" her true voice slips through (70). Here, within these recipes, the reader can hear Abby Fisher's own voice speaking through her text.

### **Intergenerational Connections**

While both Eva Purefoy and Abby Fisher focus most of their rhetorical attentions to establishing their professional expertise through their cookbooks, there is some evidence within their texts of concern with issues of intergenerationality. In addition to establishing their own themselves as experienced and knowledgeable cooks and professional business women during their times, these women both work at creating legacies through cooking and sharing recipes. Just the act of publishing cookbooks indicates that these two women wanted their knowledge recorded and preserved for the future.

Abby Fisher's cookbook demonstrates a direct intergenerational connection. She is writing to share and preserve the recipes of her experience in old southern kitchens. As chef Harry Haff notes in his *The Founders of American Cuisine: Seven Cookbook Authors, with Historical Recipes*, "As a slave who spent most of her time in the kitchen, Mrs. Fisher would be the recipient and practitioner of cooking traditions and recipes passed from generation to generation" (69). Of course, this would have been an oral tradition. Fisher's move to have this knowledge recorded in writing indicates a desire to share these cooking traditions and recipes with others outside of her immediate location and time. In her book they are more permanently preserved and shareable.

Eva Purefoy's cookbook works to preserve not only her knowledge, but her hotel's reputation as a premiere accommodation in the Southeast region. With its testimonials and reviews right up front, Purefoy's cookbook serves as tangible proof of her success that endures years after the hotel itself has vanished. In fact, without the existence of Purefoy's cookbooks there would be little left today to mark the Purefoy hotel and Eva's successful career. The hotel was closed and razed in 1960 to make way for a bank. However, Purefoy's cookbooks and recipes are still sought after today. A recent Internet search yielded several recipe-sharing sites with discussion threads about Eva Purefoy's cookbooks and recipes. Additionally, copies of the various editions of *The Purefoy Hotel Cook Book* are still available for purchase from online retailers and auction sites. Eva Purefoy's legacy of hospitality and sumptuous southern meals lives on through her books.

### **Responding to Southern Womanhood**

As demonstrated in the previous sections, both *The Purefoy Hotel Cook Book* and *What Mrs. Fisher Knows* are rhetorical texts that can be read for information about their authors' lives

and experiences. In addition to examining these texts for the ways Eva Purefoy and Abby Fisher work to establish their authority as cooks and writers and the ways each woman links her knowledge to generations before and after her, we can read among the pages of these cookbooks the ways these women respond to the notions of womanhood dominant in their times. For both of these women the dominant notions of womanhood provide challenges to their professional careers and each woman responds in unique ways. These responses, some supportive and some subversive, are mitigated by the unique interplay between time, race, and class in each woman's life. Nevertheless, if we look closely, we can read these responses through their cookbooks.

Reading *The Purefoy Hotel Cook Book* we may assume that Eva Purefoy, with her devotion to “the travelling men” mentioned in the book's dedication, strived to embody the ideal of feminine southern graciousness and hospitality (5). Such assumptions give little consideration to Eva's professional work and skill. A closer reading reveals instead that she was an intelligent, astute business woman who understood both the hotel business and her clientele. In the dedication Purefoy specifically calls the hotel “my hotel,” not my family's hotel, our hotel, or my husband's hotel (5). Another example of Purefoy's purposeful claim at professional status is the way she chooses to use her own name, Eva B. Purefoy, as author of the book. As evidenced in the other cookbooks examined for this project, it was customary for married women to be identified by their husband's name. Eva Purefoy chose her own name rather than Mrs. Robert Purefoy or even, Mrs. Eva Purefoy, when she published her cookbook. Finally, I would argue that the lack of attribution in Purefoy's recipes is a move that both works to build her credibility as a cook and demonstrates her attention to her professional position.

A look at *History of the Purefoy Hotel*, co-authored by Eva Purefoy, seems to support this close reading of her cookbook. This book reveals information about Eva Purefoy that is

especially interesting when her co-authorship is taken into account. According to *History*, the Purefoy's business lives seem to be determined by Eva. While *History* describes Eva as "a gracious southern lady" who "devoted 47 years of her life to serving superb food to the public," this description seems a rather straightforward, typical description of a southern woman of Purefoy's time (9). Still, other statements show that Eva was not a typical southern woman for her time. For example, when Eva married Robert Purefoy he had three small children. Those children were raised in the hotel which was apparently not necessarily considered appropriate at the time. However, it seems that Eva was not concerned as *History* notes, "Any opposition to rearing children in a hotel was countered by Mrs. Purefoy who believed that a lady commanded the respect of those around her wherever she might be" (12). In other words, nobody had the courage to question Eva's choice to simultaneously run her hotel and raise Robert's children.

While she is depicted as a compassionate woman, who considered both her regular guests and employees a part of her "hotel family," Eva is definitely a career woman. In *History* we read, "Early in her business career, Mrs. Purefoy discovered that it is best to help people help themselves and to inspire them to save for their old age. 'People who are building and creating something with goals to reach make far better helpers than those who lack vision as they go about their everyday tasks,' believes Mrs. Purefoy" (25). Eva understands financial prudence and considers her hotel "her business career." Another example comes from a description of the first few years of running the hotel in Talladega. "The circumstances were so deplorable that Mr. Purefoy tried to persuade Mrs. Purefoy to go to a more suitable location. Mrs. Purefoy refused, however, feeling that their investment was too great for them to consider leaving. So with determination and optimism she went on with the business" (History 15). Again, Eva Purefoy is depicted as both the brains and brawn behind the hotel. She is "determined" and her husband



yields to her business acumen. Additionally, it is noteworthy that in *History* it is Eva, not Robert, who is named as “creator of the hotel” (9). Regardless, this biography paints Eva Purefoy as a strong, confident woman who did not necessarily bow to convention/societal norms about women in business. This picture of Eva is underscored by a careful reading of her cookbook.

Like Eva Purefoy, Abby Fisher was a successful business professional in a time when many other women were not. Unlike Purefoy, Fisher’s success is even more noteworthy when we consider both her race and time period. Though her cookbook reveals little about her directly there are clues found among Fisher’s recipes that help us understand the ways in which she responded to the notions of womanhood and the image of the southern lady.

First, like Purefoy, Fisher uses her cookbook to advertise and promote her business. The cookbook serves as an extension of her work as a cook and pickle manufacturer. As she claims both of these endeavors as her own, Fisher works to subvert the notions of womanhood which position women as powerless within the public realm. We should remember that Fisher and her family had only been in San Francisco for a few years when she won the awards at both the state and mechanic’s fairs. In that time she had obviously worked hard to build a clientele and reputation as a cook and food manufacturer. With this cookbook she further establishes that she is a business woman who offers her cookbook at the request of her friends and patrons. The cookbook serves as evidence that Fisher has found power and influence by expanding and commercializing the reach of the “private” sphere.

Next, as mentioned previously in this chapter, Fisher claims southern heritage on the first page of her cookbook. While the claim “Late of Mobile, Alabama,” does work to support her credibility as an expert in “old southern cooking,” it also works toward revealing her identity—both her race and her previous enslavement (3). Therefore, I argue that just the act of Abby

Fisher publishing her cookbook was a direct subversion of the image of the southern lady. By doing so Fisher makes clear that African American women, once enslaved in the homes of others, felt the right to claim the identity of southern woman. Additionally, though Fisher subtly reveals her former enslavement, she uses that revelation to establish her expertise. This works to again subvert the image of the southern lady as a white-only identity. It also works to establish the claim at intelligence and business success for black women.

### **Reflections on Commercial Cookbooks**

Both Eva Purefoy and Abby Fisher successfully employ the form of the commercial cookbook. These women use the book to market and support their professional endeavors. They are women who have captured the “power and magic” of cooking and used it to their own benefit (Schenone xv). Through their books we can examine the ways these business women assert their authority as both cooks and authors. In *The Purefoy Hotel Cook Book*, we can read the ways that Eva Purefoy used food to her employ business philosophy of “tak[ing] care of the traveling men” (Purefoy 8). She reveals her strategy for good service and great food. Likewise, in *What Mrs. Fisher Knows about Old Southern Cooking*, we can read how Abby Fisher overcame life as an enslaved cook to become a successful mother and business woman.

Both women use cooking as a source of power in their lives, not oppression. They both make the “private” sphere “public” as they engage in professions that earn them money and success through cooking. By doing so, these women establish a legacy for themselves that is recorded in their cookbooks. Additionally, both of these women subvert the dominant notions of womanhood, especially the southern ideal. Raising her children among the hustle and bustle of an 88-room hotel, Eva Purefoy was simultaneously a wife, mother, and successful hotelier. By claiming both her southern heritage and her enslaved beginnings and leveraging these identities

into a successful career, Abby Fisher explodes the notion that southern womanhood belongs only to white women. Through their commercially published cookbooks we can truly read the measure of these women's extraordinary professional lives.

## CONCLUSION

*“Women who are out of touch with their motherlines are lost souls. They are hungry ghosts inhabiting bodies they do not own, because for them the feminine ground is a foreign place.”*

*–Naomi Ruth Lowinsky*

*“A woman writing thinks back through her mothers.” – Virginia Woolf*

The human need for food is a universal constant. No matter our differences—age, gender, sexuality, income, religion, nationality, ethnicity, or social status—we all need food to survive. This similar need links us together. Food binds us. It is a common language we share. Cooking, too, is a language. It has its own vocabulary, style, and conventions. For centuries, cooks (mostly women) have worked in this language building and sharing a body of knowledge that exists outside of public accounts of history. As Laura Schenone writes,

In some ways, cooking helps us find a secret language of women because it has been communicated entirely outside of the usual accounts of history—wars and great men—and outside the usual realms of historians and universities, though this is just beginning to change. For generations, women’s ways of cooking were never even put into written words but rather were passed on largely through action, from mother to daughter, friend to friend, and only recently, via diaries and cookbooks and the faded ink of recipe cards. (xv)

Cookbooks are the codices of that secret language, that history outside of the official history. As Rosalyn Collings-Eves notes, cookbooks are artifacts of vernacular memory which can work to counter or contradict official memory (282). By reading and studying cookbooks feminist scholars of rhetoric uncover women's rhetorical work and reveal the (not-so) "secret" language women have spoken for centuries.

As a feminist scholar, it is my goal to reclaim and reinterpret the notion of "women's work." Mary Drake McFeely notes, "The woman who has to provide a hot dinner for her husband and family every night is effectively tethered to the stove and limited in how much she can accomplish in the outside world" (1). Like McFeely, I accept that cooking and other "women's work" has been historically linked to women's repression and I also understand that, "at the same time, cooking has been an area of work that women controlled, often when they controlled little else" (McFeely 1). In essence, "women's work," like cooking, has also historically been a source of power for women. With this project I seek to acknowledge and revalue the power that cooking and cookbooks have given to women throughout time. In analyzing the cookbooks featured in this project, I have shown that "women may have been trapped in the kitchen by cultural demands, but they have also found ways to resist them. For some women, the kitchen has been a place they can control as well as a place for expressing something of the private self" (McFeely 4). Women have often recorded that expression of the private self in their cookbooks.

These cookbooks, like autobiographies, allow us to see into women's daily lives or at least see the lives they hoped to project. Schenone calls food and cooking "a window that we can look through" (xv). She contends that reading recipes and cookbooks gives us "a chance to ask larger questions about who American women were, how they felt about their lives, and what

their place has been in society” (xv). Essentially, these are the questions I ask in this project. Of course my answers are interpretive. This is the point at which Royster and Kirsch’s concepts of critical imagination and strategic contemplation become essential. The historiographic nature of this project meant that I had to think imaginatively about the women whose writing I analyzed. As Royster and Kirsch note, I had to “tak[e] the time, space, and resources to think about, through, and around” my analyses (21). The women whose writing I read are not available to answer my questions. I had to combine historical evidence with contextual supposition in order to critically imagine what their lives might have been like.

### **Searching for the Everyday**

Archival research is much like a treasure hunt. The hunter/researcher begins the search with hopes of what they might find, and knowing that there are equal chances for the search to prove fruitful or futile. This sense of the unknown combined with the hope for success makes archival research simultaneously frightening and thrilling. For me, working on this project, both feelings were my constant companions. I was always excited to find a new source and always worried that the sources I gathered may not be helpful for making my argument.

Continuing with the treasure hunt analogy, archival research is time consuming. I spent days in the archives learning to decipher the nineteenth-century handwritten script in the manuscript texts I gathered before I was able to read for analysis. The work of hunting, gathering, and picking through sources is slow and often frustrating. As David Gold notes in his essay, “The Accidental Archivist,” the process of archival research is largely organic and “messy as hell” (18). Making sense of the materials you collect takes time and lots of it. Additionally, working in different archives involves learning and navigating each institution’s protocols which

also adds time and stress to the research process. Thankfully, I was able to work in two archives staffed by experienced, knowledgeable professionals who were always helpful and encouraging.

Still, even with help, finding primary sources was a challenge. Of course, much of that challenge stemmed from the nature of the subject matter I set out to study. Instead of looking specifically for the sources I wanted to find, I had to think creatively about how these items may be situated within the archives. For example, the finding aid for Martha's cookbook identifies it as a scrapbook. Some cookbooks and recipe collections are part of collections of family papers. Another way that I found leads about cookbooks that fit my project's parameters came as I looked through records of the university archive's old exhibits. Here I found a brochure documenting a 1993 exhibit of fifty historical Alabama cookbooks. While many of the books from the exhibit are not held by the university libraries, I was still able to gather publication information that aided in my search and led me to other archives like those of the Birmingham Public Library. In all of this I found that archival research requires creative thinking and the willingness to allow your project to be shaped by the archival materials.

Another consideration inherent in the search for primary source materials is the nature of archives and the materials they hold. Archives are created to house materials of some historical importance. Of course, someone has to make the determination of what "historical importance" actually means. As Gesa Kirsch points out in her essay, "Being on Location," what a researcher finds in the archives comes down to "a single decision made by archivists—whose papers are worth collecting under his or her own name..." (21). Such a decision, Kirsch continues, "...can greatly influence accessibility and coherence of materials as well as the recognition accorded to an individual's achievements and contributions to public life" (21). So again, archival researchers rely on the archivists for materials.

In the case of my research, I found that the collected cookbooks written by “Alabama women” are, perhaps not surprisingly, mostly from white, upper and middle class women. Even though the University of Alabama houses the Lupton African American cookbook collection, a large collection of cookbooks written by African American men and women, it was still difficult to find cookbooks written by women of color from Alabama. As I will discuss later, this is one area of the project that I hope to revisit and expand with future research. I am sure there are primary sources of this sort somewhere; I just need to reframe my search and expand to other archives in order to find them. This may mean reframing and expanding the definition of “archive,” as well. Because the ordinary nature of the documents I seek to study sometimes makes them less appealing to large institutional archives, I think that searching smaller, local archives may be a helpful step. These smaller, local archives could be associated with historical societies, churches, community libraries, and even personal collections.

Nevertheless, I found that Gold was accurate in his contention that the available materials shape the course of archival research (19). In addition to finding primary source material, I discovered that biographical information was vital for me to understand and contextualize the cookbooks I analyzed. As a result, I spent hours and hours searching for biographical and supplementary information about the women and organizations that produced the cookbooks in this project. This research was just as exciting for me as finding the cookbooks themselves. Through this research I was able to interact with the sources and envision the writers as real women, not just countless words on dusty pages. The contextual information I gathered helped me to be both respectful to and critical of the women whose writing I analyzed (Kirsch 24). The information I gathered during this research shaped not only the ways in which I interacted with the primary sources, it shaped the project as a whole. It allowed me to include a biographical



context within the dissertation for each of the primary sources. This context works to further situate the primary sources and flesh out the women who composed these sources—again, making them real for both researcher and reader. In the following section I explore the connections I made with some of the women whose work I examined.

### **Connecting with Sources**

As I worked through each chapter and source I took great care to first immerse myself in each woman's writings. I spent days carefully reading the cookbooks. Next, I sought out as much biographical and contextual information as possible in the hopes that I could get a more vivid picture of the women and gain some insight into both their personal lives and their authorial intent. As previously mentioned, the work often felt like a treasure hunt. Some days, as I did nothing but dig for elusive clues, I felt exhausted and frustrated. Other days, I unearthed tidbits of treasure—census records, marriage records, family histories, still-living relatives, and photos—which added flesh to the bones of my research and made these women real to me. Those days were thrilling and invigorating. Slowly, these women became part of my life. I lived with their stories. I cooked with their recipes. We connected across time and space through the language of food.

Two of the women featured in this project have come to hold special meaning for me. I did not know of them before my research, but I have spent so much time reading their writing and searching out their lives that I feel connected to them now. Martha Jane Coleman Banks, whose manuscript I analyze in Chapter 2, is the first woman I encountered when I began researching this project three years ago. She was my first source and my first treasure hunt. Holding her book in my hands is still thrilling, and honestly, I feel very protective of it. It is priceless, literally one-of-a-kind. Conversely, I “met” Eva B. Purefoy toward the end of the

project. Her cookbook, which I analyze in Chapter 4, has seen many editions and reprints. Though out of print, it is easily available via Internet retailers. Yet, as with Martha, I have come to care deeply about Eva's life, work, and story. These women "bookend" my research experience for this project; it begins and ends with them.

Recovering Martha's remarkable life was a thrill. Her cookbook is kept in the University of Alabama's archival collection. There is little information about its provenance. No one is quite sure how the book ended up in the university's archives. Nevertheless, it is a treasure. As I searched out records of Martha's life I grew connected to her even though our circumstances are quite different. She was a woman born into a life of wealth and plenty. She lived and died over one hundred years before I was born. Yet, something about her life touched me. Her writing reveals a woman who was intelligent and interested in learning. She worked hard and kept records of her work. She cared for her family and those in her charge.

In reading Martha's writing and the records of her life, she became real to me. During my research I uncovered records that revealed Martha died when her youngest child was just three years old. She was just about my age when she died. Her young child was sent back to Alabama to live with Martha's elderly mother and was then raised by Martha's brother and sister. I wept as I realized Martha's story ended so sadly. Then, I immediately wanted to know how her three children fared after their mother's death. I tracked them as far as I could through census records and their family history. I needed to know they were okay without her. I found myself hoping that Martha's daughter, fifteen year old Mary Gray, was able to see, touch, and read her mother's cookbook. I hope she had that bit of her mother to keep.

As previously mentioned, this sort of research is impossible to conduct without help. In addition to the librarians and archivists I worked with on this project, I had the added good

fortune to connect with two of Martha's descendants. This bit of luck demonstrates that conversation is one of the best tools of historical research. Just recently after finding Martha's cookbook in the university archives, I excitedly related a story of my search and discovery to one of my professors. She was very interested to know that Martha was from Eutaw, Alabama, a town this professor had lived in for some time years ago. In the course of our conversation my professor mentioned that she had a friend who might be related to Martha and who definitely knew the history of the town. She offered to contact her friend and see what help the friend could offer. I was more than happy to accept. Over the course of the next few days, this "friend-of-a-friend" connection yielded a plethora of biographical information about Martha. I was able to connect with the self-appointed family historian and was able to learn even more about Martha's life and death.

Interestingly, just as Royster and Kirsch counsel, this information-sharing relationship proved to be reciprocal, too (14). I was able to share information with Martha's descendants, just as they shared with me. Though they were versed in the family history, neither of Martha's descendants knew about her cookbook. They both were surprised and pleased to know that this bit of their family's history was preserved in the university archives. Communicating with Martha's descendants also reminded me of my responsibility as an archival researcher. Even though Martha, like all the other women I researched for this project, is dead, I am ethically responsible to these women and their descendants. I must treat the primary sources, the contextual information, and the women themselves with dignity and respect even as I engage critically with them.

While I "met" Martha at the beginning of my project, I "met" Eva Brunson Purefoy at the end. Like Martha, Eva was an exceptional woman. In reading about her life, it seems she decided

at an early age to make a career as a hotelier. She learned the trade from her own parents before striking out to start her own hotel in 1916. At this time, not only was Eva newly married but she was also a new mother. Her husband, Robert Purefoy, was a widower with three children. Twenty-three year old Eva became a wife, a mother, and a hotel-owner all in a year's time. She was clearly a strong and determined woman. Additionally, Eva must have been a woman of her own mind. Though she owned the business with her husband, it appears that he conceded to her business knowledge and financial acumen. When he wanted to abandon the rundown Talladega location of The Purefoy, Eva held firm. Within a few years she had had the property renovated and was seeing a profit. Moreover, she saw no conflict in raising her family while she worked full-time in her hotel and it seems any who questioned her were quickly silenced.

As I read more and more about Eva, I realized that not only was she interested in creating a successful hotel, she cared deeply about helping those in her employ create their own success. Many of her employees worked for her for decades, first coming to her with little or no training. She shared with her employees her financial savvy and encouraged them to save their money, buy their own homes, and plan for the future. In her writings, Eva calls both her employees and customers part of her "hotel family" (History 18). She understood that people who feel cared for and supported are better workers; and, she understood that in a service-oriented business those feelings of care and support are also communicated to the customer.

As with Martha, my search for background information about Eva was very interesting. In the university archives I found a small volume co-written by Eva and published in 1970. Titled, *The History of the Purefoy Hotel*, the book is really a history of Eva Purefoy's life and work. Here is where I found information about Eva's early life, her marriage, and how she came to be the owner and manager of a series of successful hotels and restaurants. It was also from this

text that I learned about Purefoy's interest in helping her employees and even members of the local community create secure financial futures through homeownership, education, and savings. Additionally, I learned that Eva considered the hotel "her hotel" and worked in all aspects of the business. *History* helped to contextualize Eva's cookbooks and painted a clearer picture of the woman she was.

While Martha's legacy and story are shared mostly among her family and perhaps those interested in the history of Eutaw, Alabama, Eva's reach is a little farther. Internet searches reveal online conversations on cooking blogs about recipes from the Purefoy hotel and Eva's cookbooks. Most interestingly, I found that Eva's recipe for Cranberry Relish, the recipe she claims in her cookbook's introduction to be the catalyst for her writing the cookbooks, is readily available and popular among modern cooks. Old editions of the cookbooks themselves are readily available through online retailers and auction sites. Online posters and commenters note that they remember their mothers and grandmothers using *The Purefoy Hotel Cookbook* as they seek out copies of Eva's cookbook. Her recipes are part of their family histories.

As worked on this project I tried out a few of the recipes from the cookbooks analyzed. I found that some recipes translate well to modern tastes and others do not. Eva's Cranberry Relish is a recipe that is pleasing to a modern palate. I even included it on my Thanksgiving table, and it was a success. Cooking with their recipes also helped me to connect with the women I researched. Though out times and material circumstances differ greatly, I could imagine these women as they prepared their recipes for family, friends, and even customers. The work—measuring, mixing, chopping, and stirring—is the same, no matter the time or circumstance.

As with Martha, I connected with Eva Purefoy. In time, circumstance, and more, our lives are very dissimilar. And yet, in her story I read (what I hope is) a bit of my own. Eva's

determination, her clear ideas and goals, her lack of concern for her critics, and her abundant concern for the security of those in her care—all of these are traits I strive to cultivate for myself. To read her writing and see that she worked with others to build her own success is inspiring. Eva Purefoy, like the other women featured in this project, is little-known. In the dominant historical narrative there is little, if any, mention of her accomplishments; but, through her cookbook I have come to know her or at least a part of her.

### **Thinking of Future Research**

As I finish this dissertation project and look toward the future, I see several possibilities for ways to continue and further the research started in this project. The major goal I would like to achieve is the expansion of this project into a book-length work. To accomplish this, I hope to collect a much larger sample size. The scope and breadth of the sample examined here is small. I have analyzed seven cookbooks produced in a period of just less than one hundred years. A larger sample size will offer a better developed sense of the ways women rhetorically used their cookbooks.

In addition to a larger sample size generally, I want to expand the diversity of the women whose books I analyze. The majority of the books in this dissertation come from women of higher social status. I think this can mostly be attributed to institutional archive standards—there are some people whose papers are considered more historically valuable than others. These people usually come from families of a more prominent social status. Such institutional archival standards are a reality, but they also limit what is available for historical study. For example, even though the University of Alabama is home to the David Walker Lupton African American Cookbook Collection which houses 450 volumes, I had trouble locating cookbooks by black Alabama women during my time period. Foodways scholar, John T. Edge calls the Lupton

collection “the South’s destination-worthy foodways collection” (104). Yet, there are few cookbooks in that collection that suit my research parameters. I contend, given the importance of the church in southern, African American culture, that surely in the early twentieth-century groups of African American women in Alabama were producing cookbooks. I want to find those books and read the stories they hold.

To broaden the diversity of the women in my research I aim to look outside of traditional, large institutional archives. Smaller, local archives like public libraries, historical societies, church archives, and personal collections could prove more fruitful locations for finding cookbooks from women of color and women of lower social status. To address this issue, other cookbook scholars like Janet Theophano, Janice Longone, and Marion Bishop have created their own collections of rare and unique cookbooks. During this project I started collecting interesting local cookbooks and hope to continue growing my collection. Of course, this avenue for gathering research material takes time and money and may not be the most practical way to collect data.

In addition to broadening my scope to encompass a larger, more diverse group of women, I envision other possibilities for my future research. Expanding beyond the state of Alabama into other southern states is a viable and exciting option. This expansion could also help address some of the limitations I found in my previous research by revealing more archival options. And, it could also help give me a better picture of how across the South women responded to the ideology of the southern lady. Expanding to a regional scope may also reveal location-specific differences in the ways women lived and wrote. Were mountain women experiencing life differently from women in the Low Country? How did the notion of the southern lady fit into

Cajun or Creole culture? Was the ideal of the southern lady different in working class or minority neighborhoods? These are questions that I would like to explore further.

Along these same lines, I hope to use cookbooks to trace changes in the ideal of the southern lady. In this project we can see that some women outside of the white, upper classes challenged the notion what it means to be a southern lady. Abby Fisher, a freed former slave, while not necessarily claiming the position of southern lady definitely pushed against the ideal as she claimed a southern identity in marketing her cookbook. Eva Purefoy, a woman of the working middle class, claimed the ideal of southern lady even as she worked daily in a hotel, cooked in a restaurant kitchen, and raised her children. I am interested to see how time, shifting material circumstances, and even wars (WWII) helped to shift and transform the ideal of the southern lady and women's responses to that ideal. Cookbooks are an interesting place to read those changes.

Another avenue for the further research I envision is a more expansive focus on community cookbooks. These books evidence groups of women working collectively to leverage their power and influence their local communities. I would like to further explore the political and social implications of community cookbooks. I want to see how the women who compiled these books worked together—finding organizational records would be helpful for this. I am interested in learning how much money was raised and what charitable projects these cookbooks funded. How many people were influenced by the funds raised through cookbook sales? Also, I would be interested to see if working on cookbook projects led some of these club and church women into other community service or political work. Did they run for public office? Join other organizations? Move further from the private into the public sphere or blur the division between the two?



One last area that I hope to address in future research on cookbooks and southern women is the Food Science Movement. I did not examine any home economics cookbooks in this dissertation; however, as early as the late nineteenth century, the Food Science Movement had a tremendous impact on the ways women cook and the form of the cookbook itself. Aimed mostly at women of color and lower social status, this movement often ignored local traditions and cultures as it linked food and hygiene to morality. I am interested to explore the influence of the movement on southern women's cooking, cookbooks, and the ideal of the southern lady.

Clearly, the possibilities for continued research are expansive. As I move to transform this dissertation into a book I can envision looking beyond traditional archives and into the larger southern region as I seek for a broader range of cookbooks reflecting an array of women's voices—voices of women of color, working women, women from a variety of states and sub-regions (Appalachia, Low Country, Cajun and Creole). Additionally, I hope to look more closely at the ways in which these women responded to the ideal of the southern lady. Was she a pervasive ideal or an ideal only for white women of higher status? How did time change the notion of the ideal? Finally, I hope to examine the ways women used their community cookbook projects as springboards into further blurring of the lines between public and private. As David Gold writes about archival research work, "One is never really finished. The work always leaves unanswered questions, which is actually a blessing. Unanswered questions are the fuel of the scholarly process" (18-19). This work has left me with many unanswered questions and much fuel for future work. For that I am grateful.

### **Writing Back Through "the Motherline"**

I came across the two quotations at the beginning of this chapter toward the end of my project. I was struck by how they so succinctly explain the way I have felt over the past few

years of working on this project. For me, writing this project has been about affirming my connections to my motherline. In my definition the motherline is the women related to us by blood, marriage, and choice whose love and care works to nurture our bodies, minds, and spirits. The motherline, to me, is not comprised solely of one's mothers. Nor is the motherline a simple linear construct. Instead, it stretches far back and wide across time. It is not just the women of the past; it is the women of the present and future. The motherline is the network that connects women through time and space as it shares collected knowledge and expertise in "women's work." This women's work is not necessarily the work of cleaning houses, preparing meals, or washing clothes. It is the work of infusing our world with the feminist ideas of care, compassion, and equity. Through time, some of that infusion has come in the form of caring for one's family and loved ones. Some of it has also come through community action, civic involvement, professional practice, and academic endeavor.

This project has allowed me to spend time pondering the scope and influence of my motherline. As I immersed myself in the writing and papers of the women whose cookbooks I analyzed, I began to think about the ways I am connected to my own motherline. Food, recipes, and cookbooks are a part of that connection. When I cook with the recipes of my motherline I feel connected to those women. I recall their faces, their photos, or their stories. Eating dishes prepared from their recipes works to nourish my body and my spirit. I am reminded that I am not a lone, isolated figure wandering this Earth. Instead, I am a member of a vast, interconnected web of souls each moving through time with a responsibility to both past and future. My work and life form part of this web. Through me the past, present, and future are connected. The women featured in this project have become a part of my motherline. Now as I write, I write back through them. This project links their stories to mine. As a feminist historiographer I hope

that I have treated these women and their families with care, compassion, and respect even as I have tried to think critically about their lives and writing.

Additionally, I hope that this project opens new avenues of research for the feminist study of rhetoric. For too long the academy has overlooked the ordinary, everyday, and extra-curricular as sites for scholarly inquiry. The number of stories lost to this overlooking is innumerable. It is thrilling to know that scholars, feminist and otherwise, from across the academic disciplines are moving to restore, recover, and reinscribe these stories, these histories. As David Gold reminds us, these “histories are, after all, our own” (17). I am proud to add this project to the body of work available today that values the voices of the marginalized.

Now, at the end of this project, I would like to make a confession. The first idea for this endeavor that has consumed so much of my life for the past four years stemmed from what can only be described as a “gut feeling.” When asked about my project for the first year or two my response was, “I’m not really sure what it’s about. It has something to do with cookbooks.” I felt strongly, and still do, that cookbooks are important artifacts. As demonstrated by this project, cookbooks and recipes are sometimes the only remaining evidence of a woman’s life and story. They provide numerous and valuable sites for inquiry. Through cookbooks we can read women’s lives, the identities they claimed for themselves, the communal identities they built with other women, the relationships they hoped to preserve, and the ways in which they grappled with the socially dominant ideals of womanhood. It is my humble hope that the previous chapters stand as firm evidence of this claim.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Martha's mother and sisters did the same thing back at Grassdale in Alabama. Local histories indicate that the plantation was home to many women, children, and older men during the war. Legend has it that Martha's mother, Rhoda, successfully defended the home from plundering Union troops by sitting on the main staircase and refusing to move, telling the soldiers that they would wake a sleeping baby if they proceeded (Cite). A letter from Martha's niece, Alice Coleman Meriwether, to her husband and confederate surgeon, Dr. John Samuel Meriwether, tells of numerous relatives (in addition to Martha's mother and sisters) living at Grassdale during the war years including: Alice's father, James Cobb Coleman (Martha's oldest brother); Alice's infant daughter, Juliet; an Aunt Dorcas (Alice's mother's sister); and a girl named Annie, presumably a cousin or sister of Alice or Dr. Meriwether. From the letter it seems that both Annie and Aunt Dorcas were or had been ill in some way.

<sup>2</sup> There is no indication of who Ida might be, but she is credited with a few of the recorded essays as well as some of the poetry in Martha's book.

<sup>3</sup> The 1860 Greene County census lists William as the four year old son of William Perkins, a retired merchant. The older William Perkins built a grand home in Eutaw, AL, in the late 1850s. The Greek Revival style mansion still stands and is listed on the National Register of Historic places under several names including: the Perkins-Spencer house, the Perkins-Browder house, and Freemount.

<sup>4</sup> This count includes only the handwritten recipes, not pasted in clippings.

<sup>5</sup> See Margaret Cook's *Americas Charitable Cooks: A Bibliography of Fund-raising Cook Books Published in the United States (1861-1915)*. This project catalogs more than 3000 charity cookbooks published prior to 1916. Longone speculates that her own research "can probably double that number" (20).

<sup>6</sup> Smith's book was originally published in Britain in 1727. It went through sixteen editions.

<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, while the 1870 and 1880 census records list the Fisher's as mulatto, the 1890 census lists Alexander (66), Abby (68), and their two youngest daughters, Jennie (30) and Millie (22), as white.

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, Fisher's cookbook was published just a few years before the Quaker Oats company unveiled their Aunt Jemima and Rastus (the Cream of Wheat Cook) trademark logos.