

**“EATETH NOT THE BREAD OF IDLENESS”:
CHURCH COOKBOOKS AND VICTORIAN AMERICAN DOMESTICITY**

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
University of Pittsburgh in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

University of Pittsburgh

2010

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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The Victorian era in the United States saw significant changes in the social, domestic and religious roles of women. This period, from shortly after the Civil War until the First World War, marked a shift for women from traditional middle-class female responsibilities to more domestically challenging ones. This study examines late Victorian Protestant church community cookbooks as moral and cultural guides written by women for women, documenting the domestic roles and Christian practices of women in the years before and after the turn of the twentieth century.

This paper first defines the American Victorian period. It considers the relationship between women and Protestant Christianity during the era in relation to female social roles. It then examines church community cookbooks as uniquely viable and valuable historical and autobiographical sources through which to better understand Christian domestic practice in Victorian America. Protestant Victorian female ideals and gendered piety reveal the role of women as moral matriarchs, and how men factored into the domestic equation during the period. Eleven American Protestant Christian cookbooks published from 1881 to 1913 serve as case studies throughout. These texts illuminate the late Victorian period through the words and recipes of the women who wrote them. They also present recipes for food and life in broader terms as domestic and religious guides, and advertisements from the texts offer additional information about the connection between domesticity and religion during the era. This

argument concludes with an analysis of the lasting influences of the church community cookbooks on domestic manuals through the mid-twentieth century, reflecting on the relevance of the texts to the generations of women who have shared them.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0	INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1	THE AMERICAN VICTORIAN PERIOD.....	1
1.2	WOMEN AND VICTORIAN CHRISTIANITY	4
2.0	WHY COOKBOOKS?	9
2.1	CHARITABLE COOKBOOKS AS HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS	10
2.2	CHARITIES AS AUTOBIOGRAPHIES	16
	2.2.1 Individual Autobiographies	17
	2.2.2 Collective Autobiographies.....	18
3.0	CHARITIES AS DOMESTIC GUIDES	22
3.1	GENDERED PIETY	23
	3.1.1 Upholding the Temple with Her Frail White Hand	24
	3.1.2 Moral Matriarchs	30
	3.1.3 What About Father?	35
3.2	RECIPES FOR DOMESTIC LIFE	38
3.3	RECIPES FOR RELIGION.....	40
4.0	LASTING INFLUENCES OF VICTORIAN CHARITIES.....	42
5.0	CONCLUSIONS	47
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	49

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Suffragists picket the White House in 1917, three years before the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified.	6
Figure 2: Due to the success of the earlier Pilgrim Cook Book No. 1, this second volume was published. The image on the cover depicts a seventeenth century woman, harkening the nineteenth century Protestant revival of Puritan ideals.....	14
Figure 3: This advertisement from a turn of the century cookbook highlights the relationship between domesticity and female higher education, a concept also supported by the Beecher sisters.....	25
Figure 4: Advertisements like this one appealed to the religiously-minded consumer.	32
Figure 5: Charity cookbook marketing presented the reader with illustrations of the physical embodiment of a well-kept, stylish, Christian woman.	33
Figure 6: "Life" recipes like this one for "Marriage Cake" are common in charity cookbooks from this era.	39

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE AMERICAN VICTORIAN PERIOD

Because women's publications were primarily limited to newspapers, magazines and novels during this era, their cookbooks have become excellent lenses through which to view Victorian domestic life. Charitable community cookbooks (or, "charities," as culinary historian Janice Bluestein Longone calls them) had become an "integral" part of the American publishing business by the 1860's.¹ After a brief break in publication during the years of the American Civil War, the texts found resurgence with post-war organizations that wished to raise money for the "victims of the war—orphans, widows, the wounded, veterans."² The publication of similar texts has continued on into the present day, as ladies' organizations publish their cookbooks to raise profits for those in need. Whether the intention for funds earned is stated, for "use in our Church work" or "to be devoted to religious charity" or not, charitable intentions are implied.³ Though there were also "charities" published by secular associations, the majority of community cookbooks in the Victorian period were published by women for women belonging to various Protestant Christian churches in the United States.

For this study, I reviewed dozens of cookbooks, both secular and religious, from the colonial period to the present day. When analyzing these texts, I was most struck by the eleven cookbooks from the late American Victorian period (roughly 1880-1915) presented here. Unlike

the more generically formulated church community cookbooks of the present day, I found that “there is a real sense of place and period” in the books from this era.⁴ This is not to say that these charities do not follow a certain formula in their composition, but rather that they are more unique in their execution than similar books from even just a few decades later. These Victorian texts offer the reader insights into the lives and beliefs of the individuals contributing to them, as cultural products of an intensely interesting period in American history.

Few other contemporary sources can create so clear and comprehensive a picture of domestic life as can community cookbooks. As collections, they reveal local identities, telling us about *where* someone is from (i.e. the North in the case of a recipe for “Union Cake”), as well as *who* that person is. While there are certainly more recent examples of church cookbooks that could be read as sources for similar information, I’ve found that the texts printed during the Victorian period are the most definitive examples of the genre.

The books used for this study include a significant amount of information beyond instructions for cooking. Key features of these texts (other than food recipes) include brief poems and inspirational passages, advice for the cultivation of feminine moral character, “life” recipes, advertisements, and general domestic guidance. With their many facets these texts become significant domestic guides, both for the women who wrote and used them, as well as for the modern historian.

Despite the formal separation between church and state in the United States, the two entities have been inextricably linked throughout our country’s history. A nation rooted in Christian practice, the U.S. has been persistently affected by religion—politically, socially, and domestically. Though the connection between the religious and the secular has pervaded our country’s history, the most visible instances of this phenomenon can be seen during times of

change, including during the turns of centuries. For instance, as historian Peter W. Williams notes, the United States at the turn of the twentieth century was far more than the repressed and traditional society that it is sometimes portrayed to have been.⁵ This period in American history, “between the Reconstruction and the First World War,” was in fact one of the nation’s “most tumultuous” eras.⁶ Increased immigration, prohibition, lingering racial conflicts, changing gender roles and religious liberalism combined to mark the Victorian era as one of the most definable periods of change in United States history.

It is important to note here that while the British Victorian period is traditionally confined to the time of the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901), the American Victorian period is considered to have begun and to have ended decades later; its dates varying according to the historians who define them. While the influences of the British Victorian period on American Victorian life are unquestionable, the eras are not identical and it is not in the scope of this study to compare them. Nonetheless, the “Victorian” period in United States can be used as somewhat of an umbrella term to encompass the postbellum, Reconstruction, Gilded Age, Post-Reconstruction and Progressive periods in this country. For the sake of using one term to describe this period in the context of the cookbooks that I researched, I will use “Victorian.” In using this term I do not mean to mask the importance of the distinct movements that took place during these decades, but rather to identify a collective period of time in American history, shortly before and after the turn of the twentieth century.

1.2 WOMEN AND VICTORIAN CHRISTIANITY

In order to analyze the cookbooks that I have chosen as historical documents, one must first understand them as products of their era. Underlying many of the social changes during the American Victorian period are religious currents, including Protestant Christian ones. The new waves of immigration during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought with them many Christian denominations, including white, European, mainline Protestants. Evangelical Protestantism also flourished at this time, in large part due to the efforts of evangelists like Dwight L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey, who worked to convert individuals to their brand of Protestant Christian fundamentalism. As an internationally recognized preacher and missionary, Moody was known both in America and abroad. Protestant liberalism also found a foothold in communities where fear of a perceived increase in sin pervaded. Following movements like those for urban revivalism and the social gospel, the push for religion in which the convert experienced an “abrupt” shift in faith, behavior, and belief was considered by some individuals to be the only way to reform society.⁷

Changes within the American Protestant landscape were not merely religious. One finds a great many social movements evolving in relation to the Christian values of the period, the values of which become apparent in the pages of the church cookbooks from the era. When studying the Victorian period in which women gained “power” through, and approval for their domestic work, one cannot ignore the efforts of women to increase the scope of their influence outside of their homes and into the world.⁸ As movements such as the Temperance movement illustrated, around the turn of the twentieth century, women were steadily broadening the arenas in which their voices were heard. By the early twentieth century, despite the fact that the “joys” of middle-class life were “available to more Americans, the social and psychological pitfalls of

domesticity” began to be vocalized by feminists and social reformers.⁹ Social reform movements such as those pioneered by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and others made Victorian female voices heard, as they developed organizations to deal with issues of “temperance, world peace, and civil liberties.”¹⁰ In what one might term a period of “disestablishment,” women were provided with new opportunities for “leadership and innovation” through social reform.¹¹

The Temperance movement in the latter half of the nineteenth century was one which applied the Protestant Christian value of moderation to the drinking of alcoholic beverages, and later into a push for total abstinence. Led by Frances Willard (also a staunch supporter of the suffragist cause), the Women’s Christian Temperance movement was one that fused feminine “religious and political zeal” and called for the end of alcohol consumption.¹² Members’ efforts were directed toward a reformed family, and in turn, a rehabilitated American society. Religion and social action were united, as women and Protestant ministers became allies in this attempt: ministers preached about the end of lower class corruption through prohibition, while women worked to spread the message of the temperance cause.

Post-Civil War America saw an increase in women’s “public role,” as gender responsibilities changed with the advent of these social movements.¹³ The position taken by the Temperance and Social Gospel movements was later taken up by the suffragist cause, as women fought for equal voting rights as equal American citizens. Like other social organizations of the time, the suffrage movement was an effort by women to enter the public domain in a meaningful, vocal, and effective way. As wives and mothers who were significant members of the household, women fought for the freedom to voice their public opinion with the right to vote as United States citizens (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Suffragists picket the White House in 1917, three years before the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified.

In retrospect, we know that Victorian women were successful in both their endeavor for temperance, as well as in the suffragist cause. In 1919 the Eighteenth Amendment to the American Constitution declared national prohibition. Though this legal ban on alcohol was not permanent (it was repealed just fourteen years later), the power that Victorian women gained in bringing their efforts to fruition is not to be ignored. Bearing in mind the success of the Temperance movement, it is not coincidental that the subsequent year saw the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, allowing women equal voting rights as American citizens. These movements demonstrate how Victorian women gained power by employing their deep religious ideals and their desire to broaden their domestic influence into the public sphere.

When inspecting social movements around the turn of the twentieth century, one might

be surprised to find that the driving force behind them was Christian and female. As Ann Douglas found in *The Feminization of American Culture*, it was white women of the Protestant middle-class who began to exert their religious influence during the Victorian era.¹⁴ In a time when society and the political arena were still dominated by male control, Christian practice and devotion offered women a public space outside of the home in which they could exert their influence and voice their opinions.

I agree with Douglas' assessment that this period is marked by what can be called "the feminization" of American religion. It was a time in which women began to outnumber men in Christian religious traditions, and in turn, became the face of American Protestant Christianity. However, despite women's many efforts to burst forth into the social landscape during this era, their primary responsibilities and influences remained in the home. It is because of this lasting female-domestic bond that cookbooks of the era, as domestic texts, become important historical documents through which we can study women's roles.

Protestant visions of a Christian America emphasized the importance of the shaping of one's moral character; something that happened *first* in the home.¹⁵ While many Christian denominations supported similar values, Protestant sects were among the most prevalent at this time. Indeed, Protestant Christianity reigned in America to such a degree that other religious practices including Catholicism were considered to be "foreign."¹⁶ Of these Protestant groups Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians had the highest numbers of membership in the United States at this time. It was a time in which "a person prayed to a usually friendly God, believed that the Bible was literally true," and in the process, "was oriented strongly toward home and family."¹⁷

“For the good Christians of the nineteenth century the connection between religion and home was [both] natural and inseparable.”¹⁸ Religion provided a foundation for Protestant Christian mothers, the moral guides of the domestic world. The ways in which Victorians incorporated their Christian morals and ideals into daily home-life marked a distinctive form of domestic piety during the era, what McDannell has cleverly termed “parlor piety.”¹⁹

At a time when Christian faith was foundational to home life, even the *physical* Victorian home became a “vehicle for the promotion of values.”²⁰ As domestic space was religiously influenced, the very architecture of some Victorian homes began to mimic that of churches.²¹ One finds reference to this in the work of individuals such as Catherine Beecher and her sister Harriet Beecher Stowe. Authors and educators, the sisters were known for “their promotion of the efficient use of domestic space [and] showed no reluctance in discussing the designs of a house which would combine the functions of a church, a school and a home.”²² According to the Beechers, “like the church, the home as a [tangible] space and a kinship structure was sacred.”²³ While the idea of “parlor piety” developed in individual homes to different degrees, the majority of historical evidence points to its widespread existence. From home architecture to religious home décor, Victorians created domestic spaces that embodied their Christian ideals.²⁴

2.0 WHY COOKBOOKS?

As was previously mentioned, domestic Protestant Christian life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provided women with venues through which they could exert their influence while still remaining effective in their household duties. Through domestic texts from the period one finds that these women's lives were far from the passive ones that we associate with the era. Instead, one discovers that the lives of Victorian women were in fact challenging, tiring, and work-filled.

Through female-authored domestic texts of the period one can gain a better understanding of the lives of these women. Cookbooks, in particular church community cookbooks, offer rare and detailed glimpses into the domestic lives and practices of the women from this era. It is through these texts that we come to see the many facets of Victorian Christian practice, and the ways in which Victorian American Protestant Christianity touched every part of women's lives; both domestically and outside of the home. So closely were female Christian practice and domesticity intertwined, that it is difficult to take one from the other while preserving a comprehensive picture of middle-class Protestant Christian life in the era.

2.1 CHARITABLE COOKBOOKS AS HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

Like manuals and articles from the same period, cookbooks offer their reader windows into the Victorian home, giving them insight into women's perspectives on domestic life and work. As historian Alan Grubb notes in his study of cookbooks from the Victorian era, "for historians, particularly social historians...nineteenth-century cookery and household books may actually be [the] *most valuable* [of period sources], for they represent a kind of 'populist' literature and enable us to observe the household from within."²⁵ In addition to the practical information that they contain, the books bring to light historical, industrial, social, and domestic changes over time, and help to track these changes in a very tangible and unique way. Because of the distinct nature of these books, it would be challenging to find a clearer, more intimate, or more comprehensive way of studying the domestic lives and household duties of women from this time.

Victorian era cookbooks, like cookbooks in other periods, include recipes that reflect the specific time in which they were written. For example, it is not uncommon to find items such as "General Grant Pie" and "Union Cake" among the recipes offered in texts published in the northern United States shortly after the end of the American Civil war. On a broader level, the texts themselves claim history, as they are often presented by the authors as being sources of "tried and tested" information, their recipes are practical, careful, and approved. The books are viewed by their compilers to be the most up to date, perfected sources for domestic information available to a woman in her time. While almost all books claim such labels, whether in their titles or their opening pages, one gets the sense that each community truly believes their book to be the most original and the best.

The texts can also be useful in helping one to understand the role of geographic foodways in specific places, at specific times. For instance, the inclusion of certain types of food, (salt water fish versus fresh water, certain vegetation, or the prevalence of recipes for the preparation of specific types of livestock), not only reveal which foods may have been available in an area, but how often someone might have had access (or fantasized about having access) to certain ingredients.

The recipes in the texts are demonstrative of immigration foodways as well, presenting the reader with information about the movement and cuisine of specific ethnic/religious groups. As the increase of immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought many European Christian denominations to the New World, it becomes possible to trace food patterns through the religious affiliations of immigrants. For instance, the inclusion of multiple fish recipes in a church community cookbook may indicate Christian abstinence from meat during certain religious seasons, such as Lent. In the case of the cookbooks that I surveyed for this study, Lenten practice is primarily apparent in the Episcopalian texts, as this denomination is one that followed the Catholic practice of abstaining from meat on Fridays during the Lenten season. Cookbooks are also sources which reveal regional food preferences. These preferences are expressions of common identity and help to give the reader a sense of the ethnicity, social class and even the religious affiliation of the authors. This way of interpreting cookbooks is especially useful when considering the value of community cookbooks as historical documents.

One of the biggest challenges that scholars of cookbook literature face today is that cookbooks are associated with domestic, rather than academic study. Historically, domestic work has been viewed as a commonplace activity; therefore, cooking has not generally been understood as a literary genre worthy of much scholarly recognition. Only in recent years have

scholars come to “accept that any number of texts, institutions and events can be ‘interpreted’” as histories.²⁶ Like other personal period writings, (diaries, letters, scrapbooks) cookbooks have begun to be read as literary, rather than non-literary sources for information.²⁷

While there are challenges when using cookbooks as sources for historical information, I agree with other scholars who regard them as “invaluable social documents.”²⁸ As cookbooks become more readily recognized sources for historical information, efforts for their preservation have increased. With greater scholarly interest in the books, some university libraries have even incorporated private cookbook collections as part of their catalogs.

The primary documents that I have chosen to examine here come from “Feeding America: The Historic Cookbook Project” of Michigan State University and the Peacock-Harper Culinary Collection at Virginia Polytechnic and State University. These collections are among the most comprehensive and well organized collections found in North America. I also chose these two collections in part because of their availability as electronic resources. Not only do the universities have relatively large community cookbook collections, but many of the documents have been digitized, thus allowing for easy accessibility and printing, and eliminating the necessity of costly travel and the concerns associated with photocopying fragile historic texts.

“Cookbooks as they are used in daily life, are works-in-progress” according to folklorist Janet Theophano, who further notes that, “they are added to, altered, and transformed to suit the idiosyncratic needs of each household.”²⁹ I argue that the texts are also generational. Along with bent corners the worn pages are often covered with centuries old stains and previous owners’ notes. These books become “texts poised between generations, genders, occupations, statuses,” and members of families and faith communities.³⁰ Often, “declarations of long experience in the kitchen were claims for authority in domestic matters,” and many such claims are made in the

texts.³¹ As testament to this, nineteenth century texts are often dedicated by older generations “to all of the housewives ...throughout the land who are aiming at greater perfection in the art of cooking.”³² They present (and market) themselves “to the housekeepers old and young, experienced and inexperienced, of [their] Church[es] and Communit[ies].”³³ These sincere dedications to young wives, mothers and cooks were included in an effort to assure the women purchasing the texts of the “tried and true” nature of their contents, issuing from the collective experience of the contributors.

The styling of the charities is also notable. Many of the books are similar in appearance to other, secular texts of the period. Their covers are dark and plain, with simple lettering, typically in a metallic color, and occasionally ornamented by an image of a small flower or other delicate decoration. Other books, such as the *Pilgrim Cook Book No. 2* have covers that suggest another time (Figure 2).³⁴ The cover of this particular book features a religious motif which depicts a warmly-cloaked seventeenth century woman carrying her Bible in one hand as she walks a snow covered path toward a small log church. The cover evokes the fashion of an earlier time, the importance of Christian worship, and the area of the country where the community originates (the Midwest, where winters are extremely cold). It is also a clever nod to the name of the Pilgrim Congregational Church community itself, as the depicted female makes her snowy pilgrimage to worship. The pilgrim motif was a popular one during the Victorian period; a Christian symbol revived from America’s Puritan roots.

While not all Victorian “charities” contain advertisements, many of them do. Because the majority of the texts were being published for fundraising purposes, it only made sense for the ladies to ask for advertisers to make contributions to their volumes in exchange for

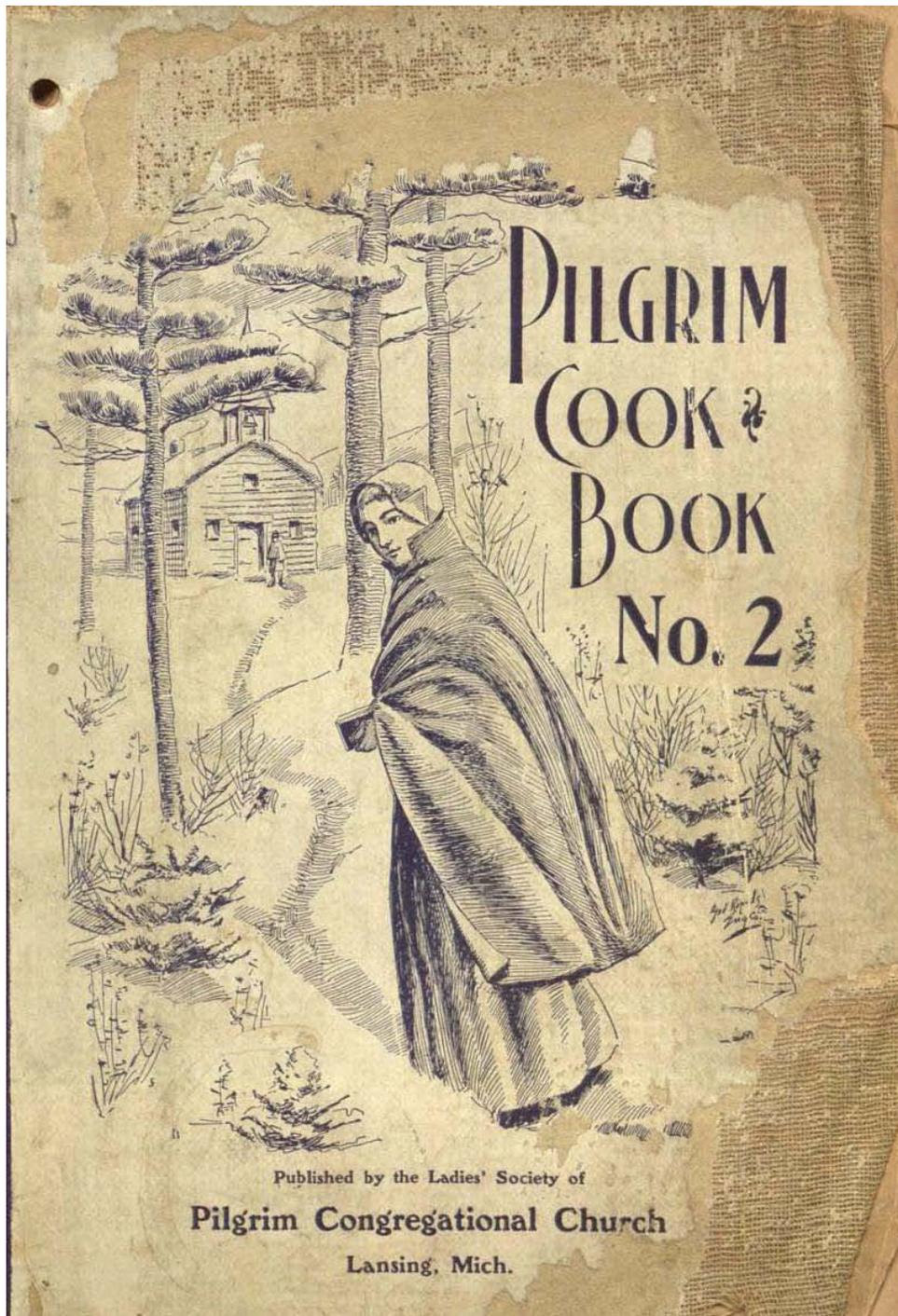


Figure 2: Due to the success of the earlier Pilgrim Cook Book No. 1, this second volume was published. The image on the cover depicts a seventeenth century woman, harkening the nineteenth century Protestant revival of Puritan ideals.

advertisement space. The donations would undoubtedly have helped to offset the costs of printing and publication, so that more of the funds raised by the sale of the books would go to a worthy cause instead of printing fees. When examining the charities it may at first seem as though these ads are not relevant or important to a historical study of the texts, but upon closer inspection they are in many instances as vital as the recipes themselves.

Advertisements in the community cookbooks were presumably chosen by the compilers of the books as representations of items and services they would be interested in purchasing. One can also assume that the ladies compiling the texts were willing to include most, if not all of the advertisements from their donors, for the benefit of both. Like any product designed for mass consumption, cookbooks were in a unique position to influence the buying decisions of the primary household purchaser. As Mary Drake McFeely notes, “women are consumers of images as well as goods,” and there is no better example of this than the use of illustrated advertising in books, magazines and community cookbooks.³⁵

2.2 CHARITIES AS AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Through community cookbooks “women were not only readers and writers, [but] they became authors.”³⁶ Cookbooks, especially community cookbooks, gave women an outlet through which to share not only their knowledge of cookery, but their literary skills and ideas as well. As Theophano also observes, “cookbooks and recipe collections [were] place[s] where women could engage in compiling, editing, categorizing, composing, and responding to written texts.”³⁷

Community cookbooks served as conduits for women’s communication needs in a time when it was not appropriate for women to share their thoughts in many other public forums.³⁸ Like nineteenth-century diaries, community cookbooks became sources through which women could share their personal stories and knowledge. The texts contributed to an increase in the public circulation of period information about domestic life. They are not autobiographies in the sense that one gains access to a single person’s (or even to a group’s) “narration of ‘a life’” in full, but rather a type of autobiography in which one is given insight into a particular view of a life/lives.³⁹

Charities also serve as a reminder that during the Victorian period it was, “around domestic life and its responsibilities [that] women...were able to construct a socially sanctioned world that was theirs to value, dissect, and embellish.”⁴⁰ Through the cookbooks, women offered glimpses into their domestic lives, whether factual, imagined, or a bit of both. “Besides creating their own collections [of cookbooks] in various combinations of print and script, women also used published cookbooks as foundations for their own [ambitions].”⁴¹ Community cookbooks became places where women could share their ideas, advice, and perceptions about domestic life without fear of judgment.

Victorian era cookbooks were not only places for stories and self-reflection, but they became forums through which women could share their religious faith. Quotations, pictures, and religiously inspired advice take on deeper meaning when the cookbooks are treated as autobiographical texts. They tell stories about the compilers' lives and values, their counsel and their faith. In this way community cookbooks can be read as "literary text[s] whose authors construct [through them] meaningful representations of themselves and of their world."⁴² "After years of daily use," claims Theophano, "the cookbook [can] become a memoir, a diary—a record of a life."⁴³

2.2.1 Individual Autobiographies

Beyond instructions for food preparation, church "charities" from the Victorian period are foremost religiously influenced texts. Behind every recipe, every picture, every piece of advice for how to cure a cold or fix a marriage, right down to the design of the cover of the books, is a woman belonging to a particular Christian denomination. As collections, Victorian era charities reveal local identities, as well as individual and collective autobiographical information. The women who compile the texts also bring to their faith communities their ethnic and cultural identities, which undoubtedly impact their domestic lives.

Though details of the average American Victorian woman's domestic life are rarely documented in depth, their cookbooks offer "a glimpse" of the people who wrote and owned them.⁴⁴ Many of the texts from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries include the names and contributions of individual women (typically credited as: "Mrs. E. Bailey", etc.), as well as women who were friends and family members of the compilers. One can glean limited individual autobiographical information from the texts, for while the books are representative of

the collective voice of the community, *each* contributor helped to “define and memorialize a group of people and a way of life.”⁴⁵

As Carolyn Barros notes in her study of religious autobiography, autobiographical texts sometimes also document changes within their authors’ lives over time. Therefore, a certain element of personal “transformation” can become apparent in the cookbooks.⁴⁶ In church cookbooks we find individual transformations in broader terms. Charities were often composed by the elder ladies of a community in an effort to help ease the transition of the younger female members from girlhood to Victorian womanhood. Encouraging hard work, patience, love, and a healthy dose of Christian faith and piety, they offered what advice they could to ease the younger ladies’ female domestic transformations.

Together, these individuals—writers and readers—form a cookbook community. As Bower suggests, community cookbooks contain much more than recipes, for they also offer significant information about their writers as a *collective* unit. The compiled texts can be viewed as sources of communal identification, or as “communal partial autobiographies.”⁴⁷ While this may sound like a contradiction in terms, this type of autobiography is well suited to church community cookbooks because they can be read as representations of collective voices rather than individual ones.

2.2.2 Collective Autobiographies

While Christian religious autobiographies sometimes focus on isolated spiritual experiences, such as conversion stories, they can also work to tell a more general faith story. Church community cookbooks fit into this latter structure, as the compilers, contributors, and even

advertisers work together to paint a broad picture of religious commitment and experience as members of shared faith communities.

From church community cookbooks we also learn about the social life of the women compiling them. As Theophano notes in her analysis of cookbooks as literature, “a collection of recipes compiled over the course of a lifetime is emblematic of the social circles through which an adult woman traveled.”⁴⁸ While my case study of middle-class Protestant Christian women may seem a narrow focus, factors such as ethnicity, denominational religious affiliation and economic status give depth to the cookbook communities. The titles of the texts from this era are also indicative of the compiling community’s collective identity. Some of the texts’ titles include the name of the ladies’ society compiling them, or the name of the town where the church is located. These titles directly identify the books and their contents with the communities that created them.

It is possible when reading church cookbooks to interpret them as collective religious autobiographies. Commonly, religious autobiographies about individuals address their personal spiritual experiences. However, when thinking about communal religious autobiographies, it is necessary to examine the ways in which the *group* of authors collectively reveals their relationship to the divine. Because the format of cookbooks is not identical to that of traditional autobiographies, interpreting the texts in this way sometimes “requires an imaginative leap into the past” based upon the details about the compilers that are revealed in the books.⁴⁹ For example, information about the faith community for whom the texts were written can often be found at the beginning of the cookbooks. These details can include anything from a short prayer to a collective statement of faith, and vary with each text.

Just as there are challenges in reading cookbooks as historical documents, there are also complexities when reading them as autobiographies. As with any autobiographical text, one must consider that the biographical information given in the cookbooks is not necessarily accurate, as autobiographical writing lends itself to subjectivity. What one might interpret to be the “real” story that is being told may not be in line with what the story teller is actually trying to convey. One of the “shortcomings of these books as [autobiographical] ‘documents’” is “that they tell us largely what the writers themselves prescribed, not what most women may actually have done.”⁵⁰ Likewise, the stories that authors present about themselves are biased by their self-observations. To read the texts with this in mind is to interpret and to recreate what the *reader* understands the story to mean.

One may question what is at stake if the authors of the texts are intentionally or unintentionally describing certain aspects of their domestic lives. There are a variety of ways to approach this issue. On one hand, one may question the validity of the texts as historical sources. On the other, the information provided in the texts, biased or unbiased, is historical information. What were the women’s motives in stretching the truth of their domestic cuisine if that was in fact their intention? Are apparent foodway discrepancies attributable to a desire for perceived wealth in dining, or are they merely remnants of old family recipes handed down through generations, or even popular recipes that are contemporary to the period? How does the truth of the information provided effect the way in which one reads the texts, as opposed to how one might read them as projected, intentional realities? It is possible to argue here that the histories found in the pages of church community cookbooks are in some way written as intentional realities. With this in mind, community cookbooks can be read as personal histories with possible biases underlying the given information.

The information in these compiled books can therefore be read much like one reads the autobiographical information discussed above: the images that the authors present of themselves are those that the authors *themselves* have constructed. The picture that they construct for their audience is one tinted by self-perception, and personal motive. While the female compilers may not intentionally distort this image of themselves, the pictures remain biased nonetheless. When reading the cookbooks, such possible discrepancies can be found throughout the texts, such as in the recipes. The inclusion of recipes with what one might call “fancy” ingredients, such as seafood in land-locked states or special herbs and spices, are most likely not indicative of what a contributor was eating on a regular basis. The inclusion of such recipes may instead have been an effort on the part of the women contributing the recipe to elevate her status within the community, or to connect herself with a time/place outside of her own.

3.0 CHARITIES AS DOMESTIC GUIDES

In the Victorian period, “the home was not only a private sphere unconnected to society but the starting point for shaping the public world.”⁵¹ Keeping this in mind, I assert that by studying domestic texts of the period such as church community cookbooks, we can ascertain how the relationship between religiosity and home life constituted a particular form of Victorian era Christian morality. It was in the home that the individual first learned about faith and their society. As a result, Americans in the Victorian era “believed the home to be the nursery of both patriotism and piety.”⁵² The lessons learned at home helped to shape future generations, and as a result the future of the country.

Because the majority of Victorian Americans were Christians, efforts toward molding the moral character of future generations were naturally rooted in traditional Christian values. Middle-class evangelical Protestant Christianity was at the center of the majority of Victorian homes, and it inspired and expected from its adherents traits such as modesty, charitableness, faithfulness, cleanliness, hard work, and humility. It is these traits which one finds clearly represented in the cookbooks from the period.

3.1 GENDERED PIETY

To understand cookbooks from the era, one must first acknowledge that they are gendered texts. Commonly perceived Victorian gendered family roles were established during the time of the Industrial Revolution, and persisted into the early twentieth century. As chef Ann Cooper notes in her *'A Woman's Place is in the Kitchen: the Evolution of Women Chefs'*, "prior to the Industrial Revolution, men's and women's work roles overlapped [as] most work was confined to the home."⁵³ Many commodities were produced in the household during this era, concentrating both male and female labor in that domain. As Cooper further notes, the development of factories during the Industrial Revolution directly contributed to the "split in the family unit" that was more common in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁵⁴ In the resulting domestic model, mother remained at home, while father went off to the mill/mine/factory.

It is significant to note that as the twentieth century progressed, some women also began to relinquish a degree of housewifery in favor of entering the workforce. Despite their labor outside of the house, women continued to be responsible for their homes, and cooking for one's own family "remained a sign that a woman took her gendered responsibilities seriously."⁵⁵ It is also interesting to consider that a significant portion of the female workforce was employed in domestic labor, "so while getting into the 'job force' was new for women, their work was not."⁵⁶

Even higher education during the period was geared toward helping women to earn a bachelor degree while educating them how to run a household. In a community cookbook from 1903 one finds a similar ideal in an ad for the Michigan State Agricultural College. Upon close inspection, one finds a photograph of young women in long dark dresses, wearing starched white aprons and hats in a laboratory. The program for a Bachelor of Science degree promises "a thorough training in the natural sciences," with the intention that the learned knowledge will be

“applied as far as possible to domestic economy, including cookery, sewing, [and] house sanitation.”⁵⁷ This ad is an excellent reminder that during the era, even a woman’s college education was directed toward preparing to maintain her household to the best of her ability. The ad also promises the young ladies in attendance at the College piano lessons and instruction in foreign languages, art and literature, so that they might serve as well-rounded examples for their families and society (Figure 3).

The home, and especially the kitchen, became channels through which women could act out their superior domestic authority, and exercise their influence in a male-dominated world. Domestic duties, in particular cooking, became for women “an area of work” that they “controlled, often when they controlled little else.”⁵⁸ Bearing expectations for women’s domestic roles in mind, Victorian church cookbooks are valuable sources for examples of domestic gender responsibilities during the period. As Shari Benstock suggests in her volume of essays about autobiographical writing, one can interpret Victorian gender “places” in terms of women having their ‘domain’ (the home) within what was ultimately a ‘man’s world’.⁵⁹ At this time, gender distinctions were made in terms of which realms were viewed as being the most suitable for each gender.

3.1.1 Upholding the Temple with Her Frail White Hand

Expectations for Victorian motherhood and womanhood were not entirely unique to the era. Domesticity at this time was, in some ways, similar to earlier notions about “Republican motherhood” dating back to the American Revolution. Women during the Revolutionary period had also been seen as the primary figures in their households (and in society) when it came to



MICHIGAN STATE AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

IS A SCHOOL OF APPLIED SCIENCE. It believes in broad, liberal culture for women, especially thorough training in the natural sciences. It believes also that a course of study should not stop with an abstract knowledge of these sciences, but that this knowledge should be so taught as to be readily applied to the practical affairs of life. It offers very thorough training in chemistry, botany, physics, biology and bacteriology; this work is applied as far as possible to domestic economy, including cookery, sewing, house sanitation, etc. In addition to the practical features of the women's course, it offers two years' instruction on the piano free of charge, together with thorough courses in art, modern languages, history, literature, mathematics, etc. This course combines the best features of liberal and technical courses, is four years in length, and leads to the degree of Bachelor of Science. The Women's Building at this institution is one of the finest dormitories for young women in the country and affords a very pleasant and commodious home.

This College also offers to young men thorough courses in Agriculture and Mechanical Engineering. No tuition to residents of the State.

Expenses very low. Send for catalog to

J. L. SNYDER, President.

7

Figure 3: This advertisement from a turn of the century cookbook highlights the relationship between domesticity and female higher education, a concept also supported by the Beecher sisters.

raising virtuous citizens. It was these expectations which ultimately led to the cult of true womanhood, which later helped to provide a foundation for Victorian motherhood. As historian Barbara Welter notes in her famous analysis of “true womanhood” during the pre-Victorian period, “it was a [woman’s] obligation, a solemn responsibility—to uphold the pillars of the temple with her frail white hand.”⁶⁰ Rigid ideas conceived about “true womanhood” and domesticity in the early nineteenth century contributed to later expectations for Victorian female piety.

In her analysis, Welter also notes four main attributes that were fundamental to what formulated the ideal woman of her era (1820-1860): piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity; qualities also highly valued by Victorian society.⁶¹ Together these characteristics “spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife—woman.”⁶² According to Welter, no one of these qualities superseded the others, as all were equally vital to a true woman’s constitution. Because piety, purity and submissiveness are Christian virtues, their connection to Victorian Christian domesticity is important to consider. It was only through a woman’s domestic duties *and* her religious devotion that she, as an individual, was made complete. In a time when the home was central to one’s life, and mother was the family member most associated with the home, the two were inextricably linked. Religion became the source of woman’s strength as wife and mother, her foundation for raising her family.

It is also interesting to consider that religion was particularly significant in a time in which mortality rates were still relatively high in the United States. While all members of the family would certainly be affected by another member’s untimely death, women in particular were touched by this grief. Wives and mothers must have lived with constant worry, as “the lives of Nineteenth century women were threatened first by the diseases of [their own]

childhood, then by...childbearing.”⁶³ Because infant mortality rates were high, even after childbirth women often felt deeply the ever-present reality of pain, sickness, and the sadness of death in their lifetimes. Religious practice and Christian belief offered these women comfort in their tribulations, and supported them as they grappled with the most troubling times of their lives.

During the Victorian period domestic work became “both an *extension* of a woman’s role in nurturing her family and a *vehicle* for it.”⁶⁴ The authors of “charities” in the Victorian era were fond of including in their compilations brief quotations and sayings to uplift their weary readers. While not all of these positive affirmations were religious in nature (some merely relate to food), others refer more directly to Victorian female domestic life in relation to Christian faith. Many of these selections featured a rhyme scheme, or other verse forms. For example, a quote preceding a section on poultry dishes begins, “Behold the fowls of the air;/For they sow not, neither do they reap; yet your Heavenly/Father feedeth them.’-Matt. 6:26.”⁶⁵ In this instance, food and biblical inspiration combine as a spiritual lesson about relying on one’s faith that is taught through the process of preparing a meal.

Other verses encouraged women to uphold a model of hard work and sacrifice in their female domestic duty, reminding them to “looketh well to the ways of [their] household[s], and to “eateth not the bread of idleness.- Prov. 31:27.”⁶⁶ One also finds verses that expound similar virtues without the aid of biblical support. For instance, a passage found in many of the books from the period reads, “With weights and measures just and true/Oven of even heat/Well buttered tins and quiet nerves/Success will be complete.”⁶⁷ Thus, it is the level-headed, careful and well-prepared lady whose recipes will turn out best.

The Beecher sisters were pioneers in producing texts about domestic life during the nineteenth century, and the works of Catherine Beecher in particular are excellent sources about women. One of Beecher's most famous texts, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy for the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School*, offers young women a comprehensive guide to domestic life. In this text, Beecher offers advice on everything from healthful food and drink, proper clothing to wear through the seasons, and exercise to housekeeping, education, and of course, meal preparation.

The daughter of prominent Presbyterian minister Lyman Beecher, Catherine was also very much concerned with the topic of religion in her texts. In her *Treatise*, she emphasizes that "there is nothing, which has a more abiding influence on the happiness of a family, than the preservation of equable and cheerful temper and tones in the housekeeper."⁶⁸ To cultivate the right disposition was the best way for a lady to set an example and influence her family. Beecher was not blind to the fact that women's lives could be very difficult because of the many expectations placed upon them. She suggests that, beyond a healthy diet and exercise, a woman must also strive to keep her mind healthy. This could be achieved in part by recalling that, "every parent...needs daily to cultivate the spirit expressed in the Divine prayer, forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."⁶⁹ As Protestant Christian practice was part of many American Victorian women's lives, it seemed natural to encourage the weary housewife to call upon God when she was in need of inspiration to remain cheerful in her daily duties as a wife and mother.

Similarly, period magazine articles encouraged women to make an effort to devote time to leisure activities in order to keep their minds healthy and calm by engaging in activities outside of domestic work and motherhood when possible. Ladies magazines, such as *Ladies'*

Home Journal and *Good Housekeeping*, include articles like, “More Freedom for Young Mothers,” which appeared in 1904. This *Good Housekeeping* article emphasized the importance of women developing talents while their children slept or were otherwise safely occupied to, “avoid falling into a rut” and “eliminate from [female] life the elements of drudgery.”⁷⁰ In the same vein as Beecher’s work, these period magazine articles suggested that keeping one’s mind happy and healthy made for a more pleasant disposition and contributed to more effective mothering.

Advertisements in the charity cookbooks promote their products to potential customers by stating that the purchase of their “unpretentious” goods will contribute to one’s striving for proper character as well.⁷¹ For example, grocers advertise that their goods are known for “Purity, Strength, Freshness and Flavor,” assigning desired moral, as well as culinary attributes to their goods.⁷² A shoe ad in one book reminds the lady reader that “the comfort of the housewife is the first and most important of all the details to be looked after in the preparation of a meal,” for “there is nothing takes away your appetite quicker than an unpleasant-looking face, no matter how inviting the dish.”⁷³ This ad goes on to suggest that housewives are undoubtedly tired from their many duties, yet they must strive to maintain their own comfort to continue their domestic work pleasantly and efficiently.

As Christian mothers one of women’s duties was to act by example; “to dispense comfort and cheer” to her loved ones.⁷⁴ Purity and piety also required that Victorian women went about their domestic work with joyful and willing spirits, despite the challenges that they undoubtedly faced on a daily basis. One finds small reminders of these strivings interspersed throughout cookbooks from the period. Quotations such as, “Who sweeps the room with motive pure,

makes that and the action fine,” and “Not meat but cheerfulness makes the feast,” served as small motivations for women to keep light hearts in their domestic work.⁷⁵

3.1.2 Moral Matriarchs

Feminist scholar Elizabeth Langland suggests that “the wife, the presiding hearth angel of the Victorian social myth,” sat at the center of her family as moral guide and teacher.⁷⁶ “It was mother’s duty to teach the children about what it meant to lead a Christian life, and to demonstrate such a life to her children by example. This responsibility continued through a woman’s childrearing years and beyond, where she served as moral matriarch, not only to her family, but also to her community. The daily, constant, female faith relationship is fascinating to consider, for it was the woman who was primarily responsible for the good, Christian, moral character of all members of her household, and by extension, her community and country.

Women of this period were seen as having naturally pure and moral dispositions. As a result, “in most cases women were the expected agents of cultural conformity. Victorians assumed that because women were inherently more virtuous [they] could teach purity to men.”⁷⁷ Though their purity was perceived as innate, these women were subjected to many of the same temptations to which their male contemporaries were exposed. Consequently, religion could be considered a sort of “tranquilizer,” which helped to subdue “the many undefined longings which swept even the most pious girl.”⁷⁸ A Victorian woman’s Christian faith, and the set of moral expectations which accompanied it, helped guide her in her quest to become the pious, pure, domestic figure society expected her to be. Religion was also an acceptable outlet for women at this time because it did not take them away from their “proper sphere”: their homes and domestic duties.⁷⁹ Religion was not only a useful tool in the Victorian middle class housewife’s life, but

also an acceptable part of it because it did not distract her from her gendered domestic responsibilities.

In addition to moral leadership the female domestic role played out in a variety of ways, including housework. To aid them in their efforts, women of the Victorian period often turned to published domestic texts for guidance in learning how to keep their homes. In my research I've found that during the Victorian period these texts often included passages about cooking as, "[it] was the clearest extension of the mother's nurturing role."⁸⁰ Meal preparation served as an outlet for female creativity, and, if done properly, was a way for women to cultivate healthy, moral families. A mother's role was vital, for family life was crucial not only to salvation, but also to survival and success as Victorian middle-class Americans.

Church community cookbooks reveal the connections between domestic life and Christian faith during the Victorian period. As Colleen McDannell notes, "the proper Christian home worked toward the salvation of the family."⁸¹ One way in which community cookbooks helped women to achieve this ideal was through the cultivation of moral character. As domestic texts demonstrate, "culinary activities provided women with a context for reading, writing, and communicating with one another without neglecting their domestic responsibilities."⁸²

With this in mind, some advertisers in the "charities" made a concerted effort to gear their ads to a religiously-minded population. A personal favorite of mine is the ad for a department store in which a picture of a stout gentleman in a top hat and waistcoat reminds the ladies that "Eve was the first maid...though the male representatives of the genus homo have always claimed that Adam was the first made" (Figure 4).⁸³ There are also advertisements in the church cookbooks for Bibles, Prayer books, hymnals and other articles used in Christian

religious practice. The advertisements in the books, like the cookbooks themselves, synthesize Victorian womanhood, Christian practice and domesticity.

Figure 4: Advertisements like this one appealed to the religiously-minded consumer.

Although the advertisements do not issue directly from the pens of the compilers of the church cookbooks, they are included by choice to represent the ladies and their lifestyles. In the ads beauty and virtue go hand in hand. They emphasize the important role of women as moral, maternal influences over all of the members of their households, and encourage them to become the epitome of domesticity in housework, meal preparation, appearance, and faith. While not all of the ads in the books are explicitly religious, many do make biblical references and encourage the good, Christian moral character of the ladies to whom they market.

With these basic concepts in mind, one can better understand what the ads in the

books from this period tell us about the women they were written for. Specifically, from the ads one concludes that female appearance was critical; proper attire and grooming and the latest fashions necessary. It should be emphasized however that it was important for a lady to not get too enraptured with her own appearance. Catherine Beecher and others warned that though a woman should be “in haste to be in fashion,” it was crucial that she not “go to the extremes.”⁸⁴ One’s hair should tidily be swept up, her clothing neat and feminine, her accessories (for example, a cross as an outward symbol of her Christian faith) modest and appropriate. From stationery, to cooking utensils, to baking ingredients, “quality, fashionableness and correctness in style” were promised to Victorian women seeking them.⁸⁵ It was the Victorian woman’s responsibility to not only to have a tidy and becoming inner self, but a matching exterior, so as to serve as an example for others (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Charity cookbook marketing presented the reader with illustrations of the physical embodiment of a well-kept, stylish, Christian woman.

Beyond female appearance, advertised products in the cookbooks were geared toward women with products marketed in ways that appealed to a woman's desire to meet the expectations Victorian society placed on her character. For instance, in an advertisement for a druggist is a list of ways in which a woman can achieve happiness. The list includes keeping one's temper, "practicing temperance," never being in an "unfitting hurry," "maintaining dignity without the appearance of pride," and remembering that "ofttimes the blackness which we believe we see in others is only our shadow."⁸⁶ The advice in this particular ad is geared toward the cultivation of a patient and prudent female character. The ad succeeds by interspersing the name of the company into every few lines of advice: "buy all of your drugs" at this pharmacy, and come to this pharmacy "and you will be politely waited on," merging marketing and morality.⁸⁷

Frugality was also considered to be a virtue of the typical Victorian housewife. To be frugal was to be a good steward of God's blessings in life; to be wasteful was a sin. Quotes contributed by the compilers of church cookbooks, as well as those from their advertisers, serve as reminders of the importance of this feminine attribute. They encourage ladies to "make use of everything good and waste nothing, however little it may be."⁸⁸ These lessons sometimes even take the form of recipes themselves: "To make a perfect salad there should be spendthrift for oil, a miser for vinegar, a wise man for salt and a mad-cap to stir the ingredients up and mix them well together -Spanish Proverb."⁸⁹

3.1.3 What About Father?

When examining gender roles in history, we as scholars often turn our attention only toward the feminine, virtually ignoring the masculine as its own entity. This narrowing of focus is not without cause, as women have historically been stigmatized as the gender to which little significant attention has been paid, and therefore are typically the focus of gender study. However, it is important to offer insights into male as well as female roles and responsibilities when engaging in any study that involves gender.

One might ask what traits and responsibilities were left to men during this period? The movement of men out of the home and into the factory in the mid-nineteenth century marked a widening gap between the home and the outside world. As labor patterns shifted and more males entered the industrial labor force to work long hours outside of the home, they relinquished the relative strength of their domestic position as patriarchs of their households (though not the position itself). As a result of these changes, Victorian males became distanced from home life, further increasing the necessity and importance of women's domestic roles.⁹⁰ Although there were also women who joined the industrial workforce, the majority of middle-class Victorian women remained focused on the smooth operation of their homes and families.

The primary religious role that males played within the Victorian Protestant Christian family was that of household preacher. When religious authority, biblical knowledge, or family leadership was needed, men took control of domestic Christianity.⁹¹ It was therefore the head male figure of the household's responsibility to lead daily family worship, while "women were assumed to be experts in religion when it was equated with sentiments, feelings and emotions."⁹² Man's religious role, therefore, was action-oriented, while woman's perceived role echoed the supposed passivity attributed to all aspects of her life.

Though men of this era were well aware of their perceived moral inferiority compared to women, they were nonetheless expected to strive for religious piety and devotion. The onus for male purity however, did not rest entirely upon men's shoulders. Male actions were also linked in some way to female influences. For instance, as Warren Belasco notes, "a husband's failures could be attributed to his wife's indifferent housekeeping."⁹³ Consequently, a woman's domestic shortcomings were seen as directly contributing to a man's vices. Men coming home to a 'disorderly house' and 'comfortless supper' were driven to the grog-shop, or the gambling room where they could go to seek solace from their unfit homes.⁹⁴ In the late nineteenth century when Christian salvation was based upon one's moral character, an unfit, sinful home was something to be feared and avoided.

Though male contributions to charitable cookbooks are generally limited to advertisements, one will rarely come across a food recipe by a man. An example of this is a selection from "Johnnycake" by one Bishop Williams (the uncle of one of the cookbook compilers, of whom little other information is given or known): "A forgetful old bishop/All broken to pieces/Neglected to dish up/For one of his nieces/A receipt for 'corn pone'/The best ever known. So he hastes to repair his sin of omission/And hopes that, in view of his shattered condition/His suit for forgiveness he humbly may urge/So here's the receipt and it comes from Lake George."⁹⁵ The otherwise simple recipe is unique in that it continues on for two full pages in rhyming couplets.

This particular selection is worth mentioning for two reasons. Although the poetical form of the recipe is not unique to the period, its length and the inclusion of Christian religious ideas, like sin, is. Secondly, this is the only church cookbook recipe that I have encountered in my research that was contributed by a male. Not only is the author male, he is also a clergyman.

Unfortunately further information about the Bishop is unknown. Nevertheless, his rare presence in the text as a male contributor is noteworthy.

When reading the advertisements in Victorian era community cookbooks, there are a few attributes that become immediately apparent. First, the ads are geared toward American, Christian, *Victorian* women. They are therefore filled with images of how a well-put-together Victorian lady should appear. These ads typically depict domestic life and work, and often emphasize these elements as they relate to food preparation. While women were the primary compilers and audience for the cookbooks, the advertisements in the books were contributed by men. Some of the texts acknowledge their contributors with statements of thanks: “We would also like to acknowledge the help from the many business men and firms who have purchased advertising space herein.”⁹⁶ This is significant because the woman compiling the cookbooks are including ads in them that present to their readers period feminine ideals that have been constructed by men.

I find it important to note here that gender roles in the Victorian home were not merely played out by father and mother. Beyond the members of the nuclear unit that one might define as a family today, Victorian homes consisted of “parents, boarders, servants, in-laws, children [and] guests.”⁹⁷ Each member of a household had specific scripts of gender into which they were expected to fit. Mother and father were therefore the traditional leaders of domestic life, but they were certainly not the only participants.

3.2 RECIPES FOR DOMESTIC LIFE

When researching this project one of the most interesting things that I encountered in Victorian community cookbooks was the inclusion of what one might term “life” recipes. These “recipes” are not entirely separate, but are rather interspersed between recipes for food, typically in the same format. Many of these “life” recipes include advice for proper marital equilibrium, including directions for such things as “How to Preserve a Husband;” the intended outcome of which is a happy married life.⁹⁸

Of the many components in this recipe, one finds advice on how to select the best ingredients, “not...too young, and take only such varieties as have been reared in a good, moral atmosphere,” and how to prepare “poor varieties,” should one find her choice[s] unsatisfactory.”⁹⁹ It is suggested in the recipe that an unsatisfied wife need only to “garnish” her husband “with patience, well sweetened with smiles,” and to “wrap [him] well in a mantle of charity, and to keep [him] warm with a steady fire of domestic devotion.”¹⁰⁰ Similarly, one finds “recipes” for things like “Marriage Cake” and “A Happy Day” in the texts. These recipes include Victorian Christian values like faithfulness, patience, industry, purity, cheerfulness, happiness and common sense. When all of these “ingredients” combine, the woman finds that she has achieved “domestic happiness” and a “well-spent day” (Figure 6).¹⁰¹

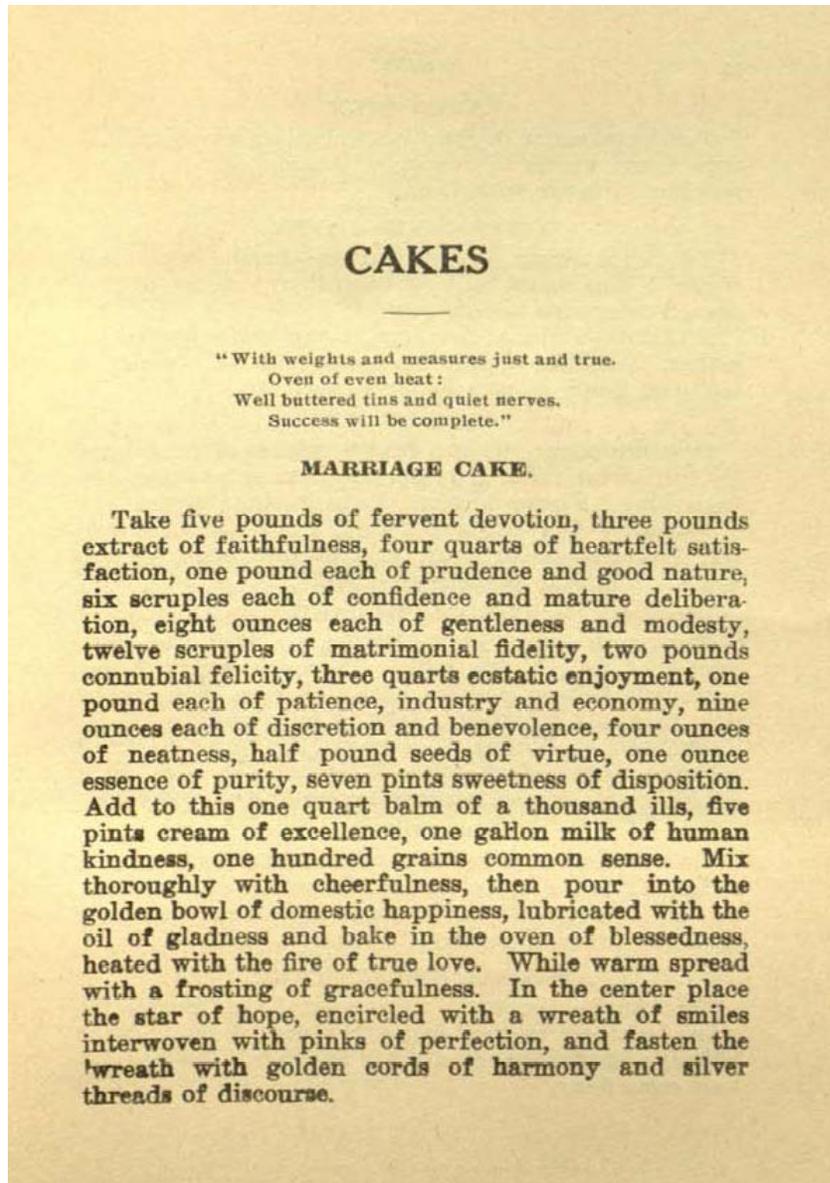


Figure 6: "Life" recipes like this one for "Marriage Cake" are common in charity cookbooks from this era.

One also encounters less optimistic recipes. "Misery Sauce" calls for a pound of envy and a quart of tears, while a "Recipe for Quarreling" instructs a woman to "take a root of saffras and steep it in a pint of water and put it in a bottle and when [her] husband comes in to quarrel, [to] fill [her] mouth with it and hold until he goes away."¹⁰² While there is undoubtedly an element of wit in these "recipes" one must remain cognizant of their importance in

understanding Victorian Christian morality and domestic life. In all of these recipes the underlying intention is for the woman/wife/mother/housekeeper to maintain her composure, patience, and her joy, despite the many struggles associated with maintaining a household. From the cookbooks one learns that it is a woman's Christian faith which helps her to strive for the ideal so that her family might learn by her example.

3.3 RECIPES FOR RELIGION

In addition to recipes for regular fare, church community cookbooks from the era contain religiously inspired recipes for their readers. These types of recipes have names that include and go beyond “angel” and “devil's” food cakes (interestingly, both recipes entered cookbooks during the Victorian period). Some even take on scripture-like formats. One of the most popular from the period is “Bible” or “Scripture” cake. Found in several texts from the period, “Scripture Cake” is a Bible lesson and food recipe in one. “Scripture Cake” recipes from the era typically take one of two forms. In the first, the recipe is written out as such: “1 cupful of butter...Judges 5:25, 3 ½ cups of flour...I Kings 4:22, 3 cups of sugar...Jeremiah 6:20”, and so on.¹⁰³ In the second, the baker is asked simply to use 1 cup of Judges 5:25, or 3 ½ cups of I Kings 4:22.¹⁰⁴

The ingredients called for in the recipe are all food items referred to in the corresponding biblical passages. In the first instance, the baker uses the recipe as a guide, and is expected to recall the biblical passage, and perhaps to read it while she prepares the cake. In the second, she is expected to remember the biblical passage and recall the food reference in it, or if necessary, to turn to her Bible as an aid. In either case, the recipe's purpose is twofold: to prepare a cake,

while also using the time for the study of scripture. In a Protestant denominational culture where the Bible was central to one's Christian practice and understanding, the recipe for Scripture cake is clever and practical.

Other charities include biblically-inspired non-food recipes. For example, the "Commandments that Rule Housekeepers" include: managing a "household so that the comfort, health and well being of every member shall be insured," seeing "that every part of the home is kept clean always, because dirt is degrading and brutalizing and leads to disease and crime," "do[ing] everything by example, by influence, by encouragement, and by sympathy, to make those who dwell under the roof good and virtuous", and "seek[ing] to extend...influence beyond the four walls of [the] home; to benefit those outside, because the best use a woman can make of her home is to share its comforts with those who have none."¹⁰⁵ While this selection sympathizes with women in recognizing that keeping these commandments is no easy task, the rules are nevertheless her guideposts for a proper domestic life.

From this catalog of ideals the many facets of character that Victorian women were instructed to refine become apparent. Duty decrees that they must ensure that their homes and families were both proper in behavior, as well as comfortable. This passage exemplifies the aforementioned concept that Victorian American wives and mothers were to lead by example, keeping themselves tidy both in person and spirit. These commandments also reemphasize the idea that women were to seek opportunities to share their pious and positive influence with those outside of their homes and immediate families. Finally, women were to uphold all of these (and many other) ideals with a cheerful and willing heart, for "a clean and pleasant home [would ultimately create] a place for the inculcation of proper middle-class values" and morality.¹⁰⁶

4.0 LASTING INFLUENCES OF VICTORIAN CHARITIES

In the nineteenth century many middle-class white Protestant American homes had domestic servants to help with household labor. While wives may have played this role alone in poorer households, better-off families typically had one or more domestic servants to assist in household work. Whether a family had one housekeeper or a staff of many, women were fortunate to be relieved of some of their domestic responsibilities. It is notable that even housewives with domestic help continued to “devote most of their time and energy to the care of their homes and families.”¹⁰⁷

One is reminded of this by ads such as one for Shredded Whole Wheat Biscuits, which offers the lady of the house a versatile product that will give her “something to lean upon...when cooks fail, and servants fail, and everything else fails.”¹⁰⁸ It was the homemaker who was ultimately responsible for the household functioning in the best and most beneficial way for all of its inhabitants. At the turn of the century and into the 1900’s, advances in technology also began to ease the burden of housework. This eventually led to a decreased need for additional hired domestic help, placing many ladies of the house back into their kitchens. As scholar Mary Drake McFeely notes, though some household labor was delegated to businesses outside of the home as technology advanced, food preparation and child-rearing remained mother’s work.¹⁰⁹

Texts composed during the earliest part of my timeframe have recognizable formats as cookbooks in terms of the composition of their recipes, but their contents also vary. The ways in

which the ladies' organizations present themselves as compilers at the beginning of the texts, as well as the ways in which the books are styled, reveal that the books are not mere copies of one another. While researching I found that the earlier books presented unique information in terms of the quotations that the ladies chose to introduce recipe chapters and the miscellaneous advice offered in the back of the texts (including things like recipes for home medicines, instructions for how to treat injuries, etc.). It is this additional information that is most often repeated, and sometimes even copied in later community cookbooks.

As one goes through books from subsequent years, one finds that the later books often borrow from one another, as well as from the earlier sources. Not only are recipes repeated, but one finds similar, if not verbatim counsel about domestic life. Perhaps the later generations find the advice and format of the early texts to be valuable as it is, and that it is not in need of more than minor alterations. Or, perhaps it is a nostalgic look into their own upbringing that gives them comfort in reproducing tried and true domestic manuals. Whatever the case, by the early twentieth century, some groups no longer bother to claim novelty, choosing to admit that, "for a few only of [the] recipes do we claim originality; they are simply commended as being favorites in use by the ladies whose names are attached to them."¹¹⁰

Books including outside contributions attest to their worthiness with affirmations like, "very many of the most noted housekeepers in other churches, and in different parts of the country, cheerfully contributed to our pages."¹¹¹ Statements such as this one suggest that the resulting book is in fact superior to one comprised of merely local recipes. The text becomes a collection of the *best* recipes by an extended community from around the country, rather than those just from the immediate community.

To demonstrate the information's verity and merit as borrowed sources the books go on to suggest that the very names of the individuals contributing to the volume are those of *friends*, good and tried as the recipes themselves.¹¹² This was no doubt geared toward the purchasers' understanding that the advice of a trusted friend is valuable. Through such proclamations of legitimacy, even mostly copied texts present themselves as sources of useful and worthwhile information for their potential readers. The resulting books are therefore the "combined effort" of generations of women, strangers and friends, who came to form "social, cultural, and economic" relationships over time.¹¹³

The inclusion of outsiders into an intimate undertaking like a church cookbook works to broaden this community. Where earlier texts from the period connect women within a local religious congregation, one finds that later books work to expand these communities into groups which include women from other places and faith backgrounds. The effect of this expanded sense of community is the construction of a network of Christian women in the United States that shares advice on food, faith and domestic life.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Fannie Farmer also served as a domestic role model for the women of her era. Like Beecher's texts from the mid nineteenth century, Farmer's writings were aimed toward young women learning how to keep a home. Farmer dedicated her work to easing the burdens of domestic life, particularly in the area of food preparation. Indeed, one of her most notable efforts was to create standard methods for measurement in recipes in order to help women's food preparation to be more consistently successful.¹¹⁴ If one's recipes were carefully measured, they were more likely to be successful, and to make life a little simpler for the women who prepared them.

Nineteenth-century domestic help texts had a lasting impact on the lives of American women. In later years, particularly following the Second World War, women entered the American workforce at a unprecedented level due to wartime labor.¹¹⁵ Despite the increase in the amount of time women spent outside of their homes, gendered expectations for their domestic roles remained much as they had during the Victorian period. In particular, women retained their duty as the primary food preparers of the household. In addition to local community cookbooks produced by ladies' organizations, mass marketed cookbooks and domestic texts were also widely published.

By the mid-twentieth century, new housing plans and jobs made for neighborhoods where literally "everyone was new."¹¹⁶ Because of these social changes, the responsibility of teaching a woman to keep a home, shifted from the family and community to more public (and sometimes commercialized) mother figures. Like Fannie Farmer generations before, Betty Crocker texts, and other mass marketed cookbooks, became surrogate sources of domestic advice for women living away from their families.¹¹⁷

Much like the real-life compilers of community cookbooks from the past, "Betty Crocker" and other fictionalized female role models began to impart domestic advice onto the next generation of housewives. In fact, the impersonal nature of widely produced public manuals for cooking does not seem to have bothered women of these post-war generations. The Betty Crocker character became so real to her readers as to have a physical image generated by marketers in order to make her advice (and her *products*) more familiar and appealing to female consumers. Her image is one that has changed through the years, undoubtedly in an effort to keep her appearance relevant to contemporary women who buy products from the brand.

Despite some similarities between the Victorian community and non-community produced texts, the biggest difference between them was the intention for the proceeds of the publication. The mass-marketed non-community texts were not created with charitable intentions for the revenue that they would bring in, they were created with purely secular intentions in mind. Unlike church community cookbooks, these texts were not composed by a group of like-minded individuals with similar (often religious) purposes. The texts are similar however in their inclusion of counsel for homemaking beyond instructions for food preparation.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

The Victorian era in the United States was a period in which significant social, domestic and religious changes occurred. Though their voices were not always heard, the women from this era strove to share their expertise and ideas through the venues that were available to them, including through domestic literature. Through their church community cookbooks one comes to learn that these women worked through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to become better wives, daughters, mothers and American citizens. When reading community cookbooks in this light, they become “maps of the social and cultural worlds” from which they come. While a woman’s social world expanded throughout the era, her primary attention and the substance of her labor continued to center in and around the family and home.

The lasting influences of the charities from the American Victorian period are evidence of the fact that the texts are sources for important historical evidence. Though it is only recently that scholars have taken the time to view cookbooks—including community cookbooks—as historical documents, the study of the church related texts for this information remains a surface merely scratched. Though I have briefly touched on the use of charities to approach domestic life and Christian practice, the topic remains one into which much more depth of exploration can and should be undertaken. I hope to have articulated here how these texts can be used as historical, private, and public documents, charting the female Victorian American relationship between domestic life and Protestant Christian practice in this country. The texts are indeed

places where gender, work, food and faith combine to create an intricate web of interconnections between women and Protestant Christian belief and practice in one of the United States' most significant periods of change at the turn of the twentieth century.

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