

‘Tried and Tested’:

Community Cookbooks in Australia, 1890 - 1980

Sarah Jane Shepherd Black

BA (Hons), Grad Dip Ed

Discipline of History

School of History and Politics

University of Adelaide

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Abstract

'Tried and Tested': Community Cookbooks in Australia, 1890 - 1980

Australian community cookbooks are an under-recognised and under-utilised trove of historical information about the life of the nation. Special features of form and function make this cookery genre distinctively revealing not only of the evolution of Australian food culture, but of twentieth-century discourses of identity. Community cookbooks express the voices of “ordinary people” in everyday life, in particular the large cohort of mostly middle-class twentieth-century women who recognised the community cookbook as a way they could help themselves and their communities. In doing so, they made their social, religious, political and cultural values manifest in the fabric of the community and thereby contributed to the building of the Australian civil society. They also left an enduring record of the foodways practiced in Australian homes.

This thesis undertakes a genre study of the Australian community cookbook.

Investigation of the history of community cookbooks in Australia positions them in the context of a fast-changing social and political culture, within an emergent and maturing nation. Careful dissection of the community cookbook demonstrates the significance of the special features that distinguish this genre – the important principle of the volunteer community group and the role of the recipes. The thesis discusses how Australian community cookbooks relate to the three pillars of cultural history – class, gender and ethnicity. It further reflects on a trio of themes with particular resonances in Australian social history – technology, regionalism and the development of the Australian national and civic culture.

Survey of a large number of texts helps to refine understanding of how the genre has been mobilised in Australia, and how it has contributed to the broad history of

Australian communities and community endeavours. Closer reading of selected texts allows a deeper investigation of the themes of the community cookbook and produces a rich picture of Australian social and culinary culture at the domestic level.

Sharing food is the most basic human communal activity. The sharing of recipes through community cookbooks has evolved as a multifaceted way of building social capital, making it a small but sturdy plank in the civil society. Community cookbooks are very flexible in reflecting individual communities, their foodways, their needs and their views of the broader society. This study of community cookbooks is a contribution to the field of Australian social and cultural history, particularly food history, and to the pursuit of history “from the ground up”.

Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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My late grandmothers, Una Shepherd and Eloise Niday Brown, were both busy, community-minded twentieth-century women. From them I inherited my first community cookbooks, Australian and American respectively. Though they were falling apart from years of use, I kept these books on my kitchen shelf. After some years' perusal and quite a bit of baking, I began to reflect on what set them apart from other cookbooks. My grandmothers showed me how to live a good life, be a good citizen and get the food onto the table. They also, by leaving me the "unpretentious little books" that beckoned me first into the kitchen and later into the study, gave me the germ of the idea for this thesis. To them, then, this work is dedicated. May it be even half as useful as the CWA cake calendar or the Grace United Methodist Church recipe collection.

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Table 1 : Community Cookbook Subtypes.....82

Australian Food Terminology

<u>Australian</u>	<u>American / British (as needed)</u>
billy, billycan	metal pail, campfire cooking receptacle
biscuit	cookie
“cocky’s joy”	golden syrup (see below)
damper	flattish quickbread; traditional camping food
golden syrup	sugar by-product; milder than treacle
swede	rutabaga
trombone	type of vegetable marrow or squash
tucker	food
yabby	type of small, freshwater crayfish

List of Abbreviations

CWA	Country Women's Association
SACWA	South Australian Country Women's Association
QCWA	Queensland Country Women's Association
WMA	Women's Missionary Association (later WMU)
WMU	Women's Missionary Union
PMU	Presbyterian Missionary Union
PWMU	Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union
AFL	Australian Football League
NMAA	Nursing Mothers' Association of Australia
CAA	Community Aid Abroad (now Oxfam)
RSL	Returned Servicemen's League
<i>The Presbyterian</i>	<i>Cookery Book of Good and Tried Receipts</i> (until 1950) <i>The Presbyterian Cookery Book</i> (popular name adopted as title after 1950)
<i>The Worker</i>	<i>The Worker Cookery Book</i> (legitimate editions) <i>The Mary Cookery Book</i> (pirated edition)