

Using Cookbooks to Document the Challenges and Solutions of Daily Home Life:

Windermere Cookery

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Cookbooks (and cookbook research) are sometimes not taken seriously. Ferguson (2012) suggests that cookbooks deserve respect as a form of minor literature: they are written in stripped-down functional English that can be easily recognized (like poetry): they are political in nature; and the language of the recipes reflects the values of the writer, community and context.

My goal in this paper is to explore how rural community cookbooks reflect changes in food consumption. The cookbook I have based my study on is *Windermere Cookery* (c. 1954-56), a community cookbook by the Windermere Ladies Hospital Aid, in the rural community of Windermere, BC. For my analysis, I have drawn from Ransom and Wright's 2013 study of rural community cookbooks in the Upper Peninsula region of Michigan, a Midwest / Great Lakes American state. The authors studied twelve cookbooks published between 1893 and 1956 to determine how they "embraced the changing food landscape" (p. 669).

After defining community cookbooks, I look at the context for my chosen cookbook, and then use criteria from the Ransom and Wright study to point out ways in which *Windermere Cookery* represents defining features of the Windermere Valley. I conclude with suggestions about the implications of future and further cookbook research.

What is a Community Cookbook

Cookbooks may be divided into three general types: commercial cookbooks, individually authored cookbooks and community cookbooks (Ransom & Wright, 2013). Community cookbooks are composed of collections of recipes by organizations such as church groups or women's clubs, often used for fundraising purposes (Ransom & Wright, 2013). Community cookbooks represent "grassroots culinary knowledge and provide unique insights into community and households" (Ransom & Wright, 2013, p. 671). Ferguson (2012) writes that recipes in community cookbooks both "intensify a sense of belonging and a sense of community" (p. 698). For example being asked to contribute a recipe to a community cookbook was a mark of acceptance in the rural Alberta community where I grew up.

Community cookbooks have a number of standard features. They are often self-published or do not have an identified publisher. They are short on descriptors and stories. Their purpose is utilitarian and pragmatic. They usually include a dedication to their purpose and they often do not have an index or a table of contents, thus requiring users to thumb through product categories. A typical list of categories

would mostly include Breads, Cakes, Candy, Cookies, Beverages, Main Dishes, Pickles, Pies, Salads, Sauces, Miscellaneous (Ransom & Wright, 2013). The last few pages often advertise local businesses (these sometimes enable the researcher to determine the often-omitted date of publication). START HERE

The contributors are almost always female; and up to the mid 1970s, they were often identified only as “Mrs. His Name”.ⁱ Community cookbooks tend to highlight regionality that may be as simple as including regionally produced and/or respected foods like cheese or wine, or as complex as including immigrant group-based recipes and excluding indigenous foods (Ferguson, 2012).

Context for *Windermere Cookery*

Windermere Cookery was published between 1954 and 1956, a conclusion deduced from an advertisement at the back of the cookbook. The community of Windermere, British Columbia, is on the east side of Lake Windermere, not really a lake, but a widening of the Columbia River. First Nations peoples lived in and travelled through the Columbia River Valley in the southeast corner of BC for thousands of years before newcomers arrived, in the early and late 19th century, first, fur traders and then British and European settlers. With mild, snowy winters and hot summers, it’s an excellent growing area, and its early industries were farming, gold panning and logging. Windermere received its name around 1883. Windermere was formally founded in 1912ⁱⁱ and dissolved in 1963 by being absorbed into its larger neighbouring town, Invermere. Windermere is only three hours from Calgary and is now a popular tourist destination.

The community that developed after the railway went through in 1886 started out as a mixture of farming pioneers and inexperienced English immigrants who were attracted by railway advertisements of a fruit-growing paradise. Danes, Swiss and other Europeans followed in the 1920s and 30s. The Windermere Ladies Hospital Aid started in 1911ⁱⁱⁱ. An early resident described the group as “...wonderful. Their concern for the hospital was keen and constant. They turned up to help whenever possible, at whatever task needed their attention the most.”^{iv} Their early get-togethers involved cooking, cleaning, sewing pillowcases and sheets and doing the mending for the hospital, originally located in Wilmer (a small community in the Windermere Valley) and then moved to Invermere about 1914. The Ladies Hospital Aid retained its Windermere name and focus. Membership lists have not been located. Gatherings always involved food: a local creamery delivered five pounds of butter each week and “a lot of it went into cakes”^v. *Windermere Cookery* was a logical outcome for the group’s interests..

Daily life in the Windermere Valley of the 1950s probably did not include full electrification, as BC Hydro had not yet come to the valley. A young physician who arrived in the Valley in 1949 wrote that modern medicine had bypassed the Windermere District Hospital^{vi}. It was heated by oil and run by

generators. There were no refrigerators in the hospital, only ice-boxes maintained with ice from the frozen lake. The sick and injured were transported via car, truck and sometimes horse and wagon. The fundraising efforts of the Ladies Hospital Aid were desperately needed.

Description of *Windermere Cookery*

Windermere Cookery is small, about half the size of a sheet of regular paper, with no table of contents or index, no page numbers, and a plastic coil binding. On the second page, the subtitle is: *Recipes Collected from Windermere Valley Cooks and Published by the Windermere Ladies Hospital Aid with Proceeds for the benefit of the hospital* at the bottom of the page. The recipe book is “gratefully dedicated to K.J. Williams, M.D., G. Duthie, M.D. and the staff of our district hospital”. All recipes were hand-lettered by several different people. The sixty pages include 140 recipes, five pages of small local advertisements and a one-page poem, *The Valley of Windermere Sunrise: Sunset* by F.S. Symons, Montreal. Since no pages are numbered, the recipe divisions are important; in addition to most of Ferguson’s 2012 list, *Windermere Cookery* included its own twists with Vegetables, Mother-in-law Favourites, Husbands Specials and Game^{vii}.

The eight-page Game section occupies the first few pages with recipes for pheasant, marinades, Canada goose, venison, grouse, moose chili con carne, bear, wild duck, mountain goat and Indian curry of wild meat. Three hints for cooking game were provided: “Trim off fat as it is strong; Use salt pork strips to lard game: and Marinate meat from all old animals” (n.p.). One contributor of several game recipes was married to the Provincial Game Warden^{viii}. Of the 21 Vegetable recipes, almost half were for potato variations (two of the 19 advertisements at the back of the cookbook were for potato farms). Mother-in-law favourites were eclectic in focus, from chestnut dressing for turkey to green tomato pickle. Husbands’ specials included a detailed recipe for spaghetti, two alcohol-based recipes and a recipe from George Duthie, M.D. for Scotch Oatmeal Dressing:

2 c. Scotch style oatmeal (Ogilvie product)

½ c. finely chopped suet

1 medium onion fried in butter

Salt, pepper

Mix oatmeal and suet, salt and pepper. Mix in onion – stuff bird – wash down with liberal draughts of bitter ale.

Windermere Cookery had a total of 40 unattributed recipes out of 140. Forty different people put their names on the remaining recipes, four men and the rest women. The top three contributors contributed 42 recipes among them - Betti Zinkan (listed as Mrs. Ted Zinkan) contributed 16 recipes including most of the game recipes. Greta Marples (listed as Mrs. K. Marples) added ten and Joy Williams (Mrs. K.J. Williams) put in ten as well.

Without these three women's recipe offerings, *Windermere Cookery* would have been one-third smaller. Brief biographical information available from the Windermere Museum website gives a little of their backgrounds. Betti and Ted Zinkan ran the Rocky Mountain Boys' Camp. This might indicate a reason why Betti contributed so many game recipes, supposing that she had ample game to cook. In actuality, the Rocky Mountain Boys' Camp was an upscale establishment located in a summer home formerly owned by a McGill University professor of pathology and bacteriology^{ix}. Greta Marples was a rancher's wife. Joy Williams was the young mother of two children and -the wife of one of the physicians to whom the book was dedicated.

The additional section of Husbands' Specials possibly alludes to women's changing roles and men's potential involvement in cooking. A recipe for "Pork chop something" was submitted by Adolf Sattmann. He lists the first ingredient as "4 pork chops or as many as fit in frying pan".

Bev Harris's contribution of "Strawberry Jam Escoffier" has an apologetic tone:

This method of making jam is swiped from the famous French chef,, whose recipe is a trifle unnerving at first, but well worth following as ammended [sic] here. Windermere strawberries should be used. n.p.)

Analysis of *Windermere Cookery*

For my analysis, I have drawn from Ransom and Wright's 2013 study of rural community cookbooks in the Upper Peninsula region of Michigan, a Midwest / Great Lakes American state (henceforth referred to as the Michigan study). The authors studied twelve cookbooks published between 1893 and 1956. They selected this time period to "correspond to broader patterns of industrialization sweeping the agriculture and food (agrifood) sector" (p. 670).

They used ten criteria to code representative recipes from each cookbook.

1. **Diversity** (were ingredients or recipes modified to meet one's personal taste)
2. Required **specific** environment (e.g. snow, cellar)
3. Could not be easily reproduced today
4. Required **sensory** engagement (cook had to judge doneness, amount of seasoning to add, etc.)
5. Communicated in textual style (**paragraph**).
6. Referenced principles of standardization (**standard** layout with ingredients first followed by procedure)
7. Referenced modern **technology** (i.e. labour-saving devices)
8. Referenced **processed** products
9. Advocated **brand names or local products**
10. Contained **stories**, myths or other personal information (Ransom & Wright, 2013)

In my analysis, I looked at all 140 *Windermere Cookery* recipes and coded each one. While my coding is informal and emergent, it gives me some data to compare to the Michigan study.

#1- diversity	#2- snow/cellar	#3- not reproducible	#4- sensory	#5- paragraph	#6- standard	#7- technology	#8- processed	#9- brands/local	#10 stories
<i>Windermere Cookery</i> - 1956									
8%	[0]	26%	10%	31%	68%	[0]	18%	9%	9%
Michigan Upper Peninsula - 1956									
25%	[0]	25%	35%	10%	90% ^x	2%	70%	10%	10%

- In 1896 over 70% of the Upper Peninsula recipes were written in paragraphs compared to 25% in 1956 (Ransom & Wright, 2013, p. 679). The number of recipes written as paragraphs in *Windermere Cookery* (1956) was about 1/3 of total recipes.
- Standardized format was used in almost 90% of the 1956 Upper Peninsula recipes and 70% of the *Windermere Cookery* ones. Ransom and Wright noted that standardized format gives cooks less opportunity to be creative and to make their own desired changes. In the Michigan study there was also an increase in “diversity” or adding of seasonings “to taste”.
- About one quarter of the recipes in each case could not be reproduced or replicated today with the same ingredients. For example, many bread recipes in *Windermere Cookery* called for yeast cakes and these would be difficult to find in 2019.
- Almost ¾ of the Michigan recipes used processed or prepared foods, but only about 1/5 of the *Windermere* recipes did. The most common convenience foods in *Windermere Cookery* were canned soup, canned vegetables and canned fruit. Distance from grocery stores might have been a factor (Michigan is more highly populated both then and now).
- The use of brand names and/or local foods was about the same in each case (1/10 of the recipes specified brands or local produce).
- Stories, myths and legends were provided in about 10% of the recipes. This concurs with Ferguson’s observation (2012) that community cookbooks are intended to be collective representations of values and beliefs, not those of one person alone: “The language of the recipes iterates and reiterates the values of the community”(Ferguson, 2012, p. 702). To focus too much on one person would defeat the idea of creating community identity. Another reason for the lack

of stories in community cookbooks is their particular form of literature. Recipes are spare and succinct; they are above all, utilitarian and meant to be used, not merely read.^{xi}

The comparison with the Michigan Study highlights some of the community standards and values that were in operation in Windermere in 1956. We might conclude that:

- Wild game was readily available in Windermere
- Processed / prepared foods were not as readily available in Windermere as in Michigan.
- The Windermere cooks had been influenced to about the same extent as their Michigan counterparts in terms of recipe standardization.

Questions for further study include:

- Is there any relationship between increasing standardization of recipes and decline in cooking skills?
- What is the meaning behind the emphasis on cooking local game? What further exploration can be done about underlying class consciousness, racism or discrimination?
- What has been lost and/or gained in the transformation from paragraph-style recipe writing to standard format? Also, is it possible that more complicated recipes discourage cooking because they entertain rather than provide solid information?
- What is the future for community cookbooks? Could they become a useful vehicle for teaching valuable cooking skills? What is transferable to the present day?

Conclusion

Taken in their entirety, community cookbooks reveal community standards and values, indicate issues of everyday life in a community and pass on practical knowledge. They show what food was available locally, and the extent to which outside influences have filtered in, for example in the use of processed and purchased ingredients.

On a final note, *Windermere Cookery* is still available. It was reproduced in 1997 and the local drugstore still sells copies, with the addition of 19 more advertisers. The *Windermere Ladies Hospital Aid* dissolved about the same time as the village of Windermere in the 1960s.

References

Ferguson, K. (2012). Intensifying taste, intensifying identity: Collectivity through community cookbooks. *Signs*, 37 (3). 695-717.

Ransom, E. & Wright, W. (2013). Constructing culinary knowledge: Reading rural community cookbooks. *Food, Culture & Society*, 16 (4), 669-689. DOI: 10.2752/175174413X1375863981895.

Valley History and the Windermere District Museum Archives.

<https://www.windermerevalleymuseum.ca/>

Windermere Cookery. (1956). Author.

ⁱ Ferguson (2012) uses the fascinating term “coverture-based cognomens” (p. 709) to describe the labelling of married women by their husband’s name. In my experience, this practice that makes women invisible declined in the 1970s in Canada.

ⁱⁱ Windermere. <https://columbiavalley.com/communities/windermere/>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://windmeredistricthistoricalsociety.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/2017_02.pdf

^{iv} The Ashworths. Valley History and the Windermere District Museum. (2009).

https://windmeredistricthistoricalsociety.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/2017_02.pdf

^v https://windmeredistricthistoricalsociety.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/2009_11.pdf

^{vi} Eight years with a dull scalpel: The country doctor. Valley History and the Windermere District Museum. (2017). https://windmeredistricthistoricalsociety.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/2017_02.pdf

^{vii} The exact divisions in order were Game (21 recipes), Main Dishes (28 recipes), Vegetables (21 recipes) Breads (15 recipes), Desserts (16 recipes), Cakes (16 recipes), Cookies (13 recipes), Pies and Pastries (10 recipes), Mother-in-law Favourites (10 recipes), Husbands Specials (8 recipes), Jams and Pickles (8 recipes) and Odds and Ends (11 recipes, including gin fizz, and candy)

^{viii} The Provincial Game Warden was Jack Mackill. His wife was listed only as “Mrs. Jack Mackill”.

^{ix}

Dr. J.G. Adami was vice-chancellor of the University of Liverpool and was also professor of pathology and bacteriology at McGill University, Montreal 1892-1919. Dr. and Mrs. Adami owned “Edenhowe” on the East side of Lake Windermere. Edenhowe was later “Rocky Mountain Boys Camp” owned and operated by Ted Zinkan. https://windmeredistricthistoricalsociety.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/2006_08.pdf

^x This number is interpolated, as it is not clear in the Ransom & Wright study (p. 679)

^{xi} Internet recipes are notorious for extremely long and unnecessary explanations of simple procedures. See: <https://slate.com/technology/2017/12/why-does-every-online-recipe-begin-with-the-preface-to-a-personal-memoir.html>