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Beyond the Ancestral Skillet: Four Louisiana Women and Their Cookbooks, 1930-1970

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Beyond the Ancestral Skillet: Four Louisiana Women and Their Cookbooks, 1930-1970

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
History

by

Rachael Wolfe

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Abstract

Cookbooks have a unique ability to record women's history, both private and public. Cookbooks transmit not only instructions for preparing specific dishes, but also the values of class, race and gender of the times and places in which they are created. This study will focus on several such cookbooks produced by Louisiana women in the mid-twentieth century, from the 1930s to the 1970s. Different though these works are, they collectively demonstrate that the best cookbook authors are purveyors not only of recipes, but also of class values, ethnic relations and folklore, and gender models that one generation of women endeavors to transmit to the next. Most important, this study will argue that these cookbooks provide a rich and penetrating insight into the class structure in rural Louisiana, race and accomplishment in an era of segregation, and the role of gender in domestic and professional occupation.

Keywords

Cookbooks

Florence Roberts, *Dixie Meals*

Lena Richard, *New Orleans Cook Book*

Mary Land, *Louisiana Cookery* and *New Orleans Cuisine*

Mary Irvine, *Favorite New Orleans Recipes*

Louisiana culinary history

New Orleans

Women's history

Introduction

“In Louisiana there is a tradition that when a girl marries she receives, as part of her dowry, the ancestral iron skillet. She is considered a social failure unless she develops a *haut ton* [high taste] and applies it to her cookery. And in Louisiana today gastronomes may travel to the North, to the South, or to the City and find *un vrai régal* [a true feast] on the native tables.”¹

This passage from Mary Land’s 1954 work, *Louisiana Cookery*, describes the connection between the culinary expertise of women and the maintenance of tradition. A woman’s work in the kitchen is essential to maintaining the culinary heritage of a specific region and culture. Land and other cookbook authors not only write recipes but also create a record of history and tradition that offers a unique view into a particular time and place. Cookbooks transmit not only instructions for preparing specific dishes, but also the values of class, race and gender of the times and places in which they are created. This study will focus on several such cookbooks produced by Louisiana women in the mid-twentieth century, from the 1930s to the 1970s. Different though these works are, they collectively demonstrate that the best cookbook authors are purveyors not only of recipes, but also of class values, ethnic relations and folklore, and gender models that one generation of women endeavors to transmit to the next. Moreover, writing and publishing cookbooks provides women an avenue for displaying expertise to a national audience as well as their immediate communities.

The cookbooks under closest examination in this study contain recipes of diverse origins, and they are written by women of significantly different backgrounds. Florence Roberts, whose *Dixie Meals* appeared in 1934, was a doctor’s wife in western Louisiana who wanted her readers to perfect their middle-class housekeeping skills. Lena Richard was an African-American chef and entrepreneur who brought Creole cooking to a national audience with her *New Orleans Cook*

Book in 1940. Mary Land, an outdoorswoman and writer on southern wildlife, intended to record culinary folklore that she believed was crucial to a complete understanding of Louisiana history. Her works included *Louisiana Cookery* in 1954 and *New Orleans Cuisine* in 1969. Finally, Mary Irvine, who in 1979 produced *Favorite New Orleans Recipes* (co-authored with Denyse Cantin and Suzanne Ormond), was inspired to preserve home cooking at a time when restaurants and executive chefs were taking over cookbook publishing. All four authors were influential women in their communities whose works present a wide-ranging overview of Louisiana cookery.

In addition to these works, this study draws upon a number of other primary sources. These include newspaper articles, advertisements, letters, family documents, interviews, scrapbooks, and other materials in the archives of the Historic New Orleans Collection and Tulane University's Newcomb Center for Research on Women. Secondary sources provided insights as well, from Catharine Beecher's writings in the 1850s to current studies of Louisiana cooking by Susan Tucker and Karen Trahan Leathem. Also helpful were more general works on cooking and women's history by such authors as Sherrie Inness, Laura Shapiro, and Janet Theophano.²

Drawing upon these various sources, this study will focus on the lives and contributions of Roberts, Richard, Land, and Irvine. Biographical information will place these Louisiana women into their historical context, and individual recipes will highlight the knowledge and creativity of these women in making use of local ingredients to produce the distinct cuisine of Louisiana. Louisiana's rich and unique regional cuisine has for many years drawn curiosity from a national and international audience. The recipes found in Louisiana cookbooks are the focus of this study because of their special place in culinary history. Cookbooks have a unique ability to

record women's history, both private and public. They are also a place where fantasy and expectation figure prominently, because a cookbook author can write about the world as she wishes it were and hopes it could be if readers would follow her instructions and recipes. Most important, this study will argue that these cookbooks provide a rich and penetrating insight into the class structure in rural Louisiana, race and accomplishment in an era of segregation, and the role of gender in domestic and professional occupation.

Florence Roberts—*Dixie Meals*

The poem Florence Roberts wrote for the dedication of her 1934 cookbook, *Dixie Meals*, begins with the stanza, “To you, my granddaughters, I dedicate / This book on service from the pantry to the dinner plate. / Your place in life I do not know, / But you must learn yourself. The maid to show.”³ Like many of the poems that appear in published cookery texts, as well as in handwritten marginalia in family recipe books, Roberts's dealt with several issues in addition to food. This first stanza, for example, asserted the author's desire to create not just a family heirloom but also a manual for her family, as well as general readers, that could be used as a guide to managing their households. Such poems address themes ranging from food and family to aging and loneliness. Perhaps long hours spent alone in the kitchen afforded women the opportunity to compose poetry that reflected their state of mind, and their place on the social scale, as well as what they might be cooking for dinner. Roberts's poem also reflected her status in her home as matriarch and educator of her family, and her position as a woman of influence and authority over her household staff and within her community.

The poem, like *Dixie Meals* as a whole, contained many hints of its author's ideas about the place of domestic work in a proper middle-class home. In another stanza Roberts wrote,

“May this book be a help, when you have to learn / How to cook and serve all things well, / And you, too, will have a domestic story to tell. / Contentment from employment springs / And praises for your labor rings.”⁴ In this stanza, Roberts expressed her attitudes regarding middle-class women’s place in the home and the notion that domestic work is the appropriate occupation for women. Roberts’s poem not only uncovered her ideas about what was expected of women of her class and generation but also the larger cultural demands that were pervasive in the 1930s. Women were encouraged to perform their household work with the same enthusiasm and dedication that a man might have had for his chosen occupation. These ideas reveal how some women thought of a cookery book as a place not just to spell out recipes but also to set forth examples of proper middle-class work, ethics, and what goes into making and maintaining an acceptable middle-class home.

The family of Florence Roberts believed that her story was compelling, and various members of her family worked on an oral history project that detailed her life in Louisiana, her efforts to write her cookbook, and her three-volume novel based on her life. The history that her family recorded showed that they were proud of her accomplishments but also revealed how difficult life was for Roberts, despite her bourgeois status. Roberts was born in 1882 and experienced a great deal of change and adversity while living in western Louisiana. She became a doctor’s wife and had numerous duties and responsibilities to her family and to the community. She decided to write a cookbook so she could share her knowledge and advice regarding food and household duties. Roberts’s family quoted her words from *Dixie Meals* to stress Roberts’s belief “that the house was a woman’s place of business” and that “definite but comfortable rules” were of fundamental importance.⁵ These statements echo the ideas stated in the dedication of

Dixie Meals and show Roberts's attempts to use her cookbook to influence others' beliefs about the place of women in Southern society.

Roberts's family recognized the roots of her ideas and note in their oral history of her life that "[she] inherited ideas about civilization directly from her parents and grandparents, and having come of age near the turn of the century, Florence's view reflected late nineteenth-century intellectual trends and concerns."⁶ Among these intellectual concerns were the ideas that women's work in the home should be regarded as a profession and that women should have appropriate training for their work just as men were trained to be doctors and lawyers. These beliefs were directly taken from nineteenth-century ideas about domestic life, particularly the ideas of Catharine Beecher.⁷ Beecher wrote extensively about this subject and included discussions on the necessity of training women to work in the home in her domestic advice manuals and cookbooks. Beecher was perhaps the most influential and authoritative writer of the early domestic advice movement, and she ardently promoted education for women. Beecher's insistence that women's domestic work be treated as an occupation, which she hoped would elevate women's status in society, was somewhat contradicted by her belief that it was a woman's natural place to stay in the home and create an ideal environment in which to raise her family. She believed that "[a] habit of doing everything in the best manner, is of unspeakable importance to a housekeeper, and every woman ought to aim at it, however great the difficulties she may have to meet."⁸ Roberts's own domestic advice contained the same contradictory assumptions about the role of women as professionals consigned to a limited, domestic realm.

Like Beecher and the other pioneers of domestic advice, Roberts intended her cookbook to be used as a guide for proper home management and cookery. By writing a cookbook that included domestic advice, Robert's was able to spread her ideas about civilization and the role

that the home played in uplifting a rural area like western Louisiana. Local women could then learn the etiquette, techniques, and recipes that would supposedly quicken the process of “civilization” in their own homes and make life more enjoyable and an acceptable part of proper society.

Roberts also wrote a novel that combined fact and fiction, a technique that allowed her to reveal how the strict gender roles that she believed were essential to respectability also oppressed her. Roberts wrote about herself in the third person and said this about her life: “Since she married, she had begun to feel like she was in prison, with so many duties, and they were so binding.”⁹ Roberts went on to express the fears she had about motherhood and her resentment towards her husband for not helping her more with the children. Her writing is provocative because it shows how a woman can believe that gender roles and the sexual division of labor are essential to making a properly civilized society but, at the same time, feel trapped and oppressed by these rules regarding gender. Roberts’s family seems proud of the cookbook and novel that she wrote, and they are unafraid to reveal the dual nature of Roberts’s beliefs.

In addition to being a record of the gender ideology of the early twentieth century, *Dixie Meals* contains several indications of Roberts’s understanding of class divisions. Just as she believed men and women should not deviate from their supposedly natural employments, she believed that families of different classes should maintain strict distinctions in their manner of dining and entertaining. In a section of *Dixie Meals* devoted to “Formal Dinner,” Roberts demanded that “[f]ormal dinners have no place in small houses, nor in families with modest means.” She further explained that “[d]inner is announced by the butler from the living room door. The host leading takes the lady of highest rank, and she is seated at his right. The hostess has the place cards arranged as to seat the guests of higher rank in their proper places.”¹⁰ Class

and status were indeed on show at a formal dinner such as this, and its inclusion in *Dixie Meals* reflected her own upper-middle-class status in her community as well as the status and ideology of her intended audience.

Roberts also clearly delineated what tasks male and female servants should perform and set forth certain qualities she believed they should have. Roberts was quite particular when presenting the duties of the butler during a formal dinner; she demanded that “[d]inner is [to be] served from the pantry, and must be rapidly and quietly served, in fact soundless.” Formal dinners also require butlers, or male servants; women are only in service during less formal occasions. These passages reveal both gender and class divisions, in that male servers were required for more substantial affairs and women for more everyday events; and the “guests of high rank” did not mix with the help. Regarding the duties of a waitress or maid, her physical appearance becomes crucial to her performance. Roberts stressed that “[t]he appearance of the waitress is of great importance and requires special attention. She should not be too large or too old. The waitress should know that cleanliness and daintiness are absolutely essential. Greatest simplicity and neatness are desirable for a waitress. It is not good taste to wear jewelry of any sort. Perfect order and manners are all the adornment necessary.” Class divisions were reinforced through such social controls as denying the waitress the choice to wear jewelry, since her conformity to Roberts’s standards was what made her valuable. The working-class people in *Dixie Meals* are expected to be almost invisible, or maybe it is their work that should be invisible to the guests and mistress of the house. Roberts goes on to say that “[c]omfortable shoes or slippers with soft soles and low heels enable the waitress to move about noiselessly. The duties of a waitress vary greatly, but she should know how to: stand straight, dress neatly, step quickly and lightly, close doors without noise....”¹¹ There is an obvious separation of the classes and

sexes in *Dixie Meals* which seems to be an almost necessary arrangement for an upper-middle-class woman like Roberts.

Dixie Meals was published in 1934 while many families were struggling with shortages caused by the Great Depression. However, most of the domestic advice offered in the book was intended for those who were still running a household with servants. Considering that many middle- and upper-class homes no longer employed servants and were unable to afford domestic help even if they wanted it, especially during the Depression, it seems unlikely that the general reader would have had much use for Robert's domestic advice. The scarcity caused by the Depression is not obvious in the recipes and menus that the cookbook contains even though Roberts tells us that "[e]conomy is one of the main objects of this book, since prosperity like charity begins at home."¹² Economic concerns were foremost in the larger national consciousness of the early 1930s, and Roberts may have believed that her cookbook reflected frugality. However, Roberts also reminded her audience that people should consume an abundance of fresh fruits and vegetables that are available seasonally and that most fresh ingredients become available at approximately the same time in the Southern states. From this we know that Roberts was writing for the Southern cook and that many of her recipes and menus were planned according to Southern harvest times. Perhaps her idea of economy was to rely on the local crops that are available in season and to utilize those foods by making menus that are centered around the food available.

In a section called "Southern Menus," Roberts offers her readers an entire year of menus, month by month. In January she suggests grapefruit, orange slices, and a variety of oyster dishes. These are local foodstuffs that are in season in January and would be readily available to those living in Southern states that produce such items. When considering just a small portion of

the January menu it is apparent that Roberts was truly writing for a specific Southern audience, because most people in colder climates that are not close to coastal areas would find fresh fruit and oysters in January hard to come by. In May she offers menus including fresh sliced peaches, trout, and dewberries. In June it is sliced muskmelon for breakfast, corn on the cob and new lima beans for dinner, and chilled and sugared blackberries or blackberry cobbler for dessert. July's menus require fresh figs, a variety of melons, okra, blueberries and string beans. While some of these ingredients are indeed available to people outside the South, it is clear that Roberts intended her cookbook to contain the food that is eaten fresh and is readily available in the South.

The influence of the Domestic Science Movement of the early twentieth century on food and food preparation is apparent in *Dixie Meals*. Domestic scientists promoted overly fussy foods that were designed for their appearance and supposed nutrition rather than taste and enjoyment.¹³ They believed that food for women should be “dainty,” a word that is consistently used to describe food “for ladies.” Women were to match the food on the table with the color scheme of the dining room, school colors, or a particular holiday theme. They demanded that women boil vegetables, such as green beans, for hours, then cover what remained with a thick blanket of white sauce in order to disguise its unappealing taste and appearance. One of the hallmarks of this type of cookery was the gelatin salad. Recipes for jellied meats and vegetables abound during this era, and Florence Roberts did not shy away from such generic American dishes. She lists recipes for two types of jellied veal, jellied chicken salad, jellied crab salad, and shrimp and tomato aspic. Her menu for a St. Patrick's Day dinner reads like a tribute to the domestic science rules of cookery. The meal includes: White Grape Cocktail, Salmon Loaf Ring Mold Filled with Buttered Peas, Irish Colcannon, Spinach de Luxe, Vegetable Salad in Lime

Jello, Pickles, Hot Rolls, Mint Mousse, and Cakes with Green Frosting.¹⁴ This menu matches the food to the green color scheme of the holiday and suggests a jellied fish entrée as well as a jellied vegetable salad.

However, *Dixie Meals* is not merely a collection of generic dishes; it offers recipes that are specific to Louisiana, and to New Orleans. Roberts includes dozens of oyster recipes, four recipes for gumbo including shrimp, oyster, okra, and chicken varieties, artichokes, stuffed eggplant and peppers, local alternatives to sugar like cane syrup, several banana deserts and a dish truly unique to New Orleans, daube glacé. Daube glacé is a molded meat dish that is traditionally eaten in private homes in New Orleans, particularly at holidays. By including daube glacé in her cookbook Roberts demonstrates her knowledge of traditional home cooking in southern Louisiana. Her recipe for daube glacé is a traditional one calling for two pigs feet and one veal knee to create the jellied consistency, as well as four pounds of beef rump, a quarter pound of salt fat meat, five large onions, two cloves, three bay leaves, one tablespoon of lard, fresh thyme and parsley, salt, pepper, and cayenne to taste.¹⁵ This is one of the longest recipes in her cookbook because of the extended cooking time and the tedious preparation of the homemade gelatin from the feet and knees. This dish is practically unheard of outside of New Orleans and is typically not served in restaurants. Knowledge of this dish is handed down from generation to generation and is preserved in cookbooks that address New Orleans culinary tradition.

Roberts's cookbook reveals the longings of rural upper-middle-class and middle-class women to foster and maintain a standard of gentility in their homes and communities.¹⁶ Roberts promoted the ideal of a household strictly maintained by a professional housewife in part because such a household is an indication of middle- and upper-middle-class status. As the

dedication of *Dixie Meals* indicates, Roberts was concerned with the continuation of the domestic practices she outlined. Roberts left detailed instructions for domestic and culinary management so that her granddaughters and middle-class women like them would not lose the status that a fastidiously run home could confer on them and their families. In addition to the recipes and advice it offers, *Dixie Meals* records the ambitions and anxieties Roberts had for herself, her family, and her community.

Lena Richard—*New Orleans Cook Book*

In the Preface to her work, *New Orleans Cook Book*, Lena Richard explains that “[b]ecause of the praise I received for my work as a cateress in the city of New Orleans, and because of the constant and insistent demand for my recipes and menus by the housewives, I was inspired to compile my life’s work into book form. In order to do so I opened a cooking school in 1937.”¹⁷ Lena Richard’s career as a cook, author, and entrepreneur was remarkable, especially considering that Richard, who was African American, grew up working in the home of white elites in New Orleans during the Jim Crow era. Her natural talent in the kitchen did not go unnoticed by her employer, Alice Vairin, who would set aside one day each week for Richard to practice cooking unusual dishes. According to Karen Trahan Leathem, “Vairin, perhaps mindful of her own daughters’ education at Newcomb College, sent Lena to cooking school in New Orleans, then north to hone her skills at the Fannie Farmer Cooking School in Boston.”¹⁸

The Boston Cooking School was the pet project of home economists in the early twentieth century and was made famous by the enthusiastic and tireless cook Fannie Farmer. Farmer was an early cookbook entrepreneur, and her revision and updates to the *Boston Cooking School Cookbook* made it a best seller for decades. The cookbook was so synonymous with

Farmer that it is often simply referred to as the *Fannie Farmer Cookbook*. However, Richard did not believe that her time at the Boston Cooking School had a significant impact on her cooking. Richard explains that “when I got way up there I found out in a hurry they can’t teach me much more than I know. I learned things about new desserts and salads. But when it comes to cooking meats, stews, soups, sauces and such dishes we Southern cooks have Northern cooks beat by a mile. That’s not big talk; that’s honest truth.”¹⁹

While Richard might not have agreed that the Boston Cooking School taught her much about food, it did encourage her to write her own cookbook. Richard recalled: “I cooked a couple of my dishes like Creole gumbo and my chicken vol-au-vent, and they go crazy, almost, trying to copy down what I say. I think maybe I’m pretty good, so some day I’d write [it] down myself.”²⁰ Richard reportedly published a cookbook called *New Orleans Cook Book* in 1938, but no known copies of that cookbook survive today. A short time later Richard was fortunate enough to receive the endorsements of Clementine Paddleford, a distinguished columnist, and the famous food writer James Beard. Their influence guaranteed Houghton Mifflin as the publisher of Richard’s book. The second *New Orleans Cook Book*, published in 1940, was received as the best Creole cookery book of its time. It included a mixture of traditional New Orleans recipes and recipes Richard wrote herself.

Alongside her recipes for New Orleans dishes, Lena Richard’s cookbook included several dishes that drew from the mainstream American cookery trends of the early twentieth century. Her selection of appetizers includes recipes for Frankfurter and American Cheese Appetizers, Sardine and Egg Canapés, and Peanut Butter and Bacon Appetizers, the latter instructing the cook to “spread the contents of a small jar of peanut butter over daintily buttered crackers and sprinkle with six tablespoons of crisply fried bacon. Serve brilliantly hot, on a platter attractively

decorated with curled parsley.”²¹ As noted, the word “dainty” appeared regularly in cookbooks, magazines, advertisements, and domestic-advice manuals that were marketed to women in the early twentieth century. Daintiness was a way to describe both what women should try be and what women should try to serve. Its inclusion in *New Orleans Cook Book* suggests that Richard was influenced more by her time at the Boston Cooking School than she might have cared to admit. However, it was her recipes for food specific to New Orleans that made her cookbook such a success. Richard’s work stands out among the cookbooks of the period because she openly praised the African-American cooks who influenced her cooking and the cuisine of New Orleans. She was outspoken about including recipes for staple dishes that were taught to her by African-American cooks in her community. Recipes for Baked Turtle in Shell, Baked Stuffed Oysters, Court Bouillon, Crawfish and Shrimp Bisque, Turtle Soup, Gumbo Filé, Creole Fired Chicken, and Baked Plantains are what make this particular cookbook stand out as a record of New Orleans Creole cuisine.

Karen Trahan Leathem believes that this cookbook is significant but also voices criticism. Leathem writes that “[t]he *New Orleans Cookbook* showcases the strong points of New Orleans cuisine, even as it reflects the long reach of generic American cooking. Congealed salads appear, but so do gumbo, stuffed crabs, and Calas Tous Chauds. More important, it stands as a record of African American cooking in New Orleans; Richard said she obtained many recipes from other black cooks of ‘old Southern families.’”²² The inclusion of Calas Tous Chauds, a dish of cooked rice made into cakes then fried and covered with cane syrup, is particularly revealing because it is a dish that was typically prepared by African-American cooks for white elites in New Orleans. It is a recipe that is not often seen anymore, but Richard

probably had experience making the dish and may have learned to prepare it by watching her mother make it for her employers.

The two recipes that Richard seemed to enjoy the most and that made her famous in New Orleans were “Lena’s Watermelon Ice Cream” and “Scaled Fish.” Watermelon Ice Cream was made from red sherbet and whipped cream mixed with green food coloring with raisins on top made to look like watermelon seeds.²³ The ice cream was set in a round mold and frozen then sliced to look like a fresh piece of watermelon. Scaled fish was a dish that was often requested at weddings or other festive occasions. It was a jellied dish with a unique New Orleans flavor. The recipe calls for a red fish to be boiled then flaked. A seasoned gelatin mixture was made from the stock from the boiled fish. A fish mold was prepared by placing alternating green and black olives to look like fish scales with a slice of pimento for the mouth and a black olive for the eye. The flaked red fish was added to the prepared mold then the gelatin mixture was poured on top. The mold was placed in the refrigerator to set, then unmolded and served with Remoulade Sauce.²⁴ Her recipe for scaled fish was clearly influenced by the trendiness of jellied dishes, but it was also recognizable as a New Orleans dish because it was seasoned with Tabasco sauce, used local red fish, and was served with a New Orleans staple, Remoulade sauce.

Like Florence Roberts, Richard included a recipe for Daube Glacé, though hers was more modern than Florence Roberts’s in that she used powdered gelatin instead of making it from scratch from pigs feet and veal knees. She also included a recipe for Daube with Gravy, which is not a congealed and molded dish but is made from slow cooked beef served hot with gravy. A few restaurants in New Orleans still serve Daube with Gravy, but it is usually served with red sauce over pasta. The inclusion of daube glacé in her cookbook is further indication of Richard’s dedication to recording the home cooking of New Orleans and its surrounding rural parishes.

Archivist Susan Tucker devoted a chapter of the book, *New Orleans Cuisine: Fourteen Signature Dishes and Their Histories*, to the unusual dish Daube Glacée.²⁵ Tucker believes that “[t]racing the history of daube glacée recipes brings one, once again, squarely within the tradition of the private, economical Creole kitchen, where certain recipes are reserved only for locals and where food has an assigned place, symbolically and literally, within the ‘culinary year.’”²⁶ The economical nature of daube glacé is a clear indication that it is a Creole dish. The tougher cuts of meat that are generally included in the dish, as well as the pigs feet and veal knees used in more traditional recipes, are examples of economy cuts that are usually reserved for home cooking. Daube glacé also requires a fairly long list of other ingredients including seasonings like bay leaves and the ever present New Orleans trinity of onion, green bell pepper and celery. The dish’s numerous ingredients, as well as the numerous steps and long hours needed for its cooking and preparation and its unusual appearance, make daube glacé a dish that appears in the home, especially on holiday tables, and not in restaurants. Even though Richards uses readymade gelatin in her recipe, she does instruct that “one veal knuckle or two calves feet may be used” in place of the gelatin.²⁷

Tucker also stresses the importance of Creole cooking in New Orleans as something that anchors food as a marker of identity and history. She says that “[e]arlier elite women, both white and African American, as well as their usually African American cooks, were first given control over the perpetuation of Creole identity through their connections to food, food preparation, and culinary literature.”²⁸ Therefore, women and food are inextricably linked to cultural identity, and the preparation of certain foods passes on the culture and history of a particular place, like New Orleans. Women’s cookbooks, too, are critical to the transmission of the traditions, culture, and history of the places where they are produced.

Lena Richard's career was as remarkable as the food she made. She started a catering business out of her home in the 1920s, opened a lunch room in the 1930s, and also cooked at the Orleans Club, a private organization for elite white women. The experience that she gained while attending cooking schools was parlayed into starting cooking lessons of her own. With the help of her daughter, Marie Richard Rhodes, she was able to teach classes three nights a week.²⁹ Richard was lured to New York State to be the head chef of the Bird and Bottle Inn. There her signature dish was a New Orleans-style soup that she called Shrimp Soup Louisiane, which Clementine Paddleford said was the Inn's "most unusual dish."³⁰ Her soup was so popular that the Bird and Bottle Inn made a canned version and sold it through mail order.

Richard did not stay long in New York and soon returned to New Orleans where she opened her own restaurant called Lena's Eatery in 1941. This restaurant served New Orleans-style food including stuffed crabs, gumbo and red beans and rice. Richard placed an advertisement for her restaurant in the local newspaper to rally support for her first anniversary and for the war effort. The advertisement proclaims that "[w]e will celebrate by offering you delicious meals away below cost, and many Feature Attractions Free. See 'Win the War' and 'How to Save Food For Victory.' These tasty dishes will be served and explained as necessary contributions to the all-out war effort."³¹ She further urges readers in the advertisement to "Buy War Bonds," "Save Your Waste Fats for the Government," and "Buy War Stamps." Her support for the war effort in print is notable because there is a lack of war-time cookbooks with a New Orleans theme. Perhaps cooks in New Orleans felt that they were already frugal enough, perhaps rationed items like sugar were not great problems because satisfying alternatives were already in use, such as cane sugar, cane syrup, molasses, and sorghum. While meat was something that was rationed nationally, the abundance of fresh local seafood and shellfish may

have offset the need to find unusual alternatives. Whatever the reason, there is little evidence that cookbooks created in New Orleans during World War II reflected the national trend of wartime rationing.

Although Lena's Eatery seemed to be successful, Richard was once again enticed to leave New Orleans and head north, this time to Colonial Williamsburg, to be the chef at the Travis House. The Travis House was a part of the John D. Rockefeller Foundation, and her assignment there would bring Richard national recognition. Richard cooked at the Travis House for approximately two years, from 1943 through 1945, during World War II. She cooked for the British High Command and for Clementine and Mary Churchill, the wife and daughter of Winston Churchill. While there, Lena Richard invented new specialties that garnered much attention from local elites and food critics, and led to the addition of a popular take-out menu for the Travis House. Her most famous dish was called Scalloped Oysters, which she created to replace Oysters Rockefeller because Mr. Rockefeller feared that people might think it was a publicity stunt.³² Richard's cooking received a great amount of attention from the press, and she appears to have done a significant amount of cooking for private functions for visiting dignitaries and locals of importance. She received a thank-you letter from the Office of the President of Colonial Williamsburg for her fabulous cooking at his event. Kenneth Chorley writes, "Everyone of our guests, not only at the dinner but from time to time as we have seen them since, has commented on how attractive and delicious the first course was. The chicken was superb, and I have never tasted better dressing. Of course you are developing a state-wide reputation with your oysters. The dessert was excellent and the birthday cakes were so light and fluffy and yet so tasty that I just cannot find words to describe them."³³

Even though Richard enjoyed her great success in Colonial Williamsburg, she returned to New Orleans in 1945. With the help of her daughter she opened a new catering business, and in the late 1940s Richard made history as the first African-American woman to host a weekly cooking show, on New Orleans television station WDSU.³⁴ She also opened another restaurant in 1949 called the Gumbo House. Her entrepreneurial instincts led her to start her own line of frozen foods. Bordelon Fine Food Company distributed the food, which was cooked and prepared in a facility on Metairie Road that employed mostly female workers. Richard claimed to do all of the cooking herself, and her food was sold for shipment in five- and ten-gallon containers or sold locally in smaller quantities. Her frozen food products included shrimp creole, shrimp remoulade, turtle soup, grillades, chicken fricassée, gumbo filé and okra gumbo.³⁵ Her frozen food line represented the best of her Creole style of cooking and the food of New Orleans that made her such a popular chef both at home and nationally.

In 1950 at the height of her success Lena Richard passed away unexpectedly. Karen Trahan Leathem believes that Richard's career is significant because "[s]he turned a common employment for African-American women—cooking for white families—into a career and became an entrepreneur. She served both a white and black clientele, managing to balance her catering, cookbook sales, and television appearances in the white world with a grounding in her community, serving food at a neighborhood restaurant...and passing her culinary skills on to another generation."³⁶ Indeed, in Richard's neighborhood restaurants, black and white customers dined together, ignoring the standards of segregation that plagued the Jim Crow South.³⁷ Richard dedicated her cookbook to her childhood employer Alice Vairin who had encouraged her to experiment with food in her early years. Susan Tucker stresses that "it is important to remember that not until the twentieth century would African Americans be encouraged to write

down their recipes for publication. The first of these was Lena Richard, who interestingly dedicates her book to her former employer, an elite white woman. In this Richard inverts the tradition of white women who thanked African American women, while also cementing the role of both races of women as purveyors of Creole cooking traditions.”³⁸

Mary Land—*Louisiana Cookery and New Orleans Cuisine*

“Mother didn’t set out to be unconventional, she was simply born that way.”³⁹ This remembrance of Mary Land by her daughter, Pat Stevens, seems to be an accurate description of a true pioneer. Land’s unconventional lifestyle, her passion for the outdoors, her deep love of food and culinary history, and her groundbreaking career as a journalist all influenced her to write two of the most significant cookbooks ever written on Louisiana and New Orleans cuisine.

Land was born in 1908 near her grandfather’s home, Rough and Ready Plantation, near Shreveport. In the Forward to *Louisiana Cookery*, she wrote that her father “had wanted his only child to be a boy, and when I came along, he simply did the best he could with what he had.”⁴⁰ Land included this bit of family history in her book probably because it made such an impact on her life. From a very young age she developed her great love of the outdoors and learned how to shoot a gun and how to hunt and fish. Being raised in much the same way a boy of her generation would have been brought up may have inspired in Land the confidence to attempt the type of occupations that were typically reserved for men in the early twentieth century. Land also enjoyed a formal education that included boarding school in Mississippi, and she was particularly influenced by her classes with the poet Vachel Lindsey. In fact, Land initially aspired to be a poet and published several books of poetry early in her career.

However, it was her great enthusiasm for the outdoors and hunting and fishing that shaped her career as a writer. She was “employed by the Louisiana State Department of Conservation as a staff writer for the *Louisiana Conservation Review*.” Land claims that while writing for this publication she began to think about the need for a book on the “edible flora and fauna of Louisiana.” She was also involved in organizing chapters of the Louisiana Wildlife Federation, as well as writing a syndicated column called “Outdoors South” for the Louisiana Outdoor Writer’s Association. Land wrote similar columns for newspapers in Mississippi and was a staff writer for the *Mississippi Valley Sportsman*.⁴¹ Karen Trahan Leathem writes that “[i]n such work, she was a woman in a man’s field: in 1947, she was the only woman member of the Louisiana Outdoor Writer’s Association and one of six women who attended the national convention of the Outdoor Writer’s Association of America that year. She was conscious of her status and perhaps saw herself as a trailblazer for other women.” Land, who was quite accomplished at fishing, would repeatedly encourage women to try fishing and hunting and would remind women that these sports were not just for men. Land wrote that “[w]omen think, for some inane reason, that fishing is a man’s sport. This misconception has been planted in the female mind for generations.”⁴²

Land’s groundbreaking career as a nature and outdoor sports writer was as unconventional as her personal life. She was married for the first time at age sixteen to a jazz musician. Her daughter was born a year later. Her daughter Pat Stevens says that her parents met at a hotel rooftop party and that their relationship was “very Scott and Zelda, and it was...just the twenties kind of thing.”⁴³ She did not stay married to her first husband for long, and by the end of her life she had been married five times. Land lived in several areas of Louisiana but particularly enjoyed living in the French Quarter in New Orleans. It was there that

she could express her creativity, mix with artists and musicians, and indulge at the famous restaurants she would later write about. Land was notorious for keeping an alligator in her courtyard until it became too large and unmanageable. Her son had a pet tiger that he would sometimes bring along on visits to her in the Pontalba building in the French Quarter until the neighbors started to complain. Stevens recalled that her mother “lived in the Quarter a long time and loved it...and then she loved to hang out in the piano bars. So, she used to say she had her daytime friends and her nighttime friends.”⁴⁴

Her idea for a cookbook on wild edibles and native game was something that she had been considering for years, and she had already been writing recipes for game in magazine articles. She was encouraged to expand her book to encompass all of Louisiana cuisine to make it more marketable. The result of her effort was an encyclopedic cookbook with an impressive amount of history, folklore, and recipes. Her purpose in writing this type of cookbook was that she “believed that Louisiana gastronomy should not be shrouded in darkness, and that the fundamentals of this cuisine are easy to understand and use.”⁴⁵ *Louisiana Cookery* was well received by both local and national critics. The New Orleans writer Harnett Kane said that Land’s book was “the finest Louisiana cook book ever written by anybody, any time.” The *New York Times* said it was “definitely a worthwhile [investigation of] the cuisine of one the of the regions of the United States richest in culinary lore.”⁴⁶ Indeed, *Louisiana Cookery* has few rivals in regard to its scope and contents. Land’s experience with preparing fresh game, her knowledge of Louisiana and its folklore, as well as her long career as a writer, all make *Louisiana Cookery* a reference book as much as it is a cookbook.

Folklore and kitchen traditions are an essential part of *Louisiana Cookery*, so much so that the Anthropology Department at Louisiana State University used it as a text in their folklore

classes.⁴⁷ In the first few pages, Land explains the relationship between early French settlers and Native Americans in regard to the food, especially herbs, that were relied upon in the early years of settlement. She goes on to explain the beginnings of plantation homes and the exchange of knowledge of foodstuffs between Native Americans and African slaves. What follows is a lengthy chart of native herbs, spices, and wild foods. She includes roots like bulrush and button snake root that should be eaten boiled, but also reminds readers that snake button root can be carried as a good luck charm. Her instructions for pokeweed were to “[b]oil young shoots in two waters with [a] teaspoon of vinegar. Eat young leaves raw for ‘poke salet.’ Berries and roots are poisonous.” She provides several folk cures in her section on beverages. A Potion for Asthma directs readers to “[p]eel and cut up several roots of Indian potatoes. Place in a crock and cover with whisky.” A Potion for Dropsy requires one to “[m]elt two cups of wild honey and warm with one cup of water. Add two cups of Geneva gin. Take in small doses.”⁴⁸ Land believed that the Creole cook took into consideration any good ingredient that was available, and that Louisiana’s rich culinary heritage afforded cooks a connection to the food of their ancestors. It may seem strange to see this type of folklore in a cookbook that was to have such a wide release and was created to demystify Louisiana cooking. Yet Land did not see cooking as something that separated the classes but united them through common culinary experiences.

Louisiana Cookery contains extensive details, directions and recipes that pertain to a surprising range of game. This is perhaps the cookbook’s most impressive section, and it too begins with the history and folklore associated with game and hunting. Land writes that the “Choctaw and Chickasaw were not alone in valuing bear meat for its juice and flavor. In the early days of the province, the Louisiana black bear ranked with the buffalo or bison in numbers and importance, and bear oil was an article of trade.” Bear is so important to Land that she

opens her chapter on game with seven recipes for bear, after lengthy instructions for proper field dressing for large game. She directs that “[o]nly the meat of a young bear is tender enough for broiling, and during the mating season, the meat of the adult male is not good in any form.” Although she clearly had great affection for bear meat, she provided no fewer than thirty recipes for venison, which is a far more common type of game and would have been found on dining tables throughout Louisiana. Her collection of recipes for small game are remarkable and include meat that is typically not found in modern cookbooks, especially those written by privileged women. The recipes include: Sherry Muskrat, Chipmunk, Fried Marsh Hare, Idle-Acres Plantation Possum, Coon Vin Ordinaire, and Squirrel Head Potpie which requires ten boiled squirrel heads to be baked in a pastry crust.⁴⁹ There are also recipes for blackbirds, owls, crows, and alligators. What is perhaps most surprising about her recipes for game and her long instructions for killing and dressing a variety of animals is that these types of recipes typically appear in cookbooks that were written by men and were intended for a male audience. Land broke through gender barriers in her professional life as a journalist writing about the outdoors and in her cookbook, which combines more recognizable table fare with exotic ingredients typically reserved for hunters preparing game in their camps.

Not all of the recipes in *Louisiana Cookery* are as exotic as Ragout of Bear, but they all emphasize the native foods of Louisiana. Land opens her cookbook with “A Few Fundamentals” in which she notes that “[t]here are five requisite elements in Louisiana cookery; the iron pot, the *roux*, stock, herbs, and alcoholic liquids. The component parts of the *cuisine Louisianaise* are the mystic cachet that has changed gourmands into gourmets.”⁵⁰ She includes several recipes for gumbo and jambalaya, shrimp and oyster dishes, buster crabs, and mirlitons, all staple foods of southern Louisiana. The recipes in *Louisiana Cookery* are different from those in most twentieth

century cookbooks because Land does not start any of them with a list of measured ingredients. All recipes are narratives ranging from a few short sentences to long paragraphs, but none begin as a list of measured ingredients. Many older cookbooks had recipes arranged this way, but by 1954 it was quite uncommon. Land also departs from the typical standardized measurements that most American cooks had come to expect and depend on in cookbooks. She wrote a simple recipe for Spiced Beets in her section on salads that instructs the chef to “[c]ook one bunch of beets in water and spices for forty minutes or until tender. Peel. Marinate in vinegar and spices in refrigerator. Slice and serve on lettuce with French dressing.”⁵¹ There is not one indication of quantity in the entire recipe. Land’s son in law, Phineas Stevens, remembered how people would telephone his house to ask questions about particular recipes. Stevens said, “I remember getting calls from friends who were busily cooking something and they’d come to some herb or wine or something. ‘Mrs. Land doesn’t tell how much of this to put in there.’ My response always was ‘Mary Land is an artist, not a pharmacist. She doesn’t describe these little details. Just use your imagination.’”⁵² Her creativity with food and her departure from what was expected from cookery texts of its time, make *Louisiana Cookery* an essential cookbook in the study of Louisiana cuisine.

A recipe for daube glacé appears in *Louisiana Cookery*, but this version, true to Land’s unique style, is called Glacé de Viande, and its main protein is venison not beef, although it was not uncommon for home cooks in Louisiana to use whatever meat was available to them. Her recipe uses essentially the same ingredients as other daube glacé recipes, but she uses pigs feet and veal knuckles and not packaged gelatin. Considering her fondness for game and other exotic foods it is no surprise that she does not take advantage of shortcuts like powdered gelatin. Another reference to daube glacé appears in her second cookbook. Daube glacé is at last

featured as a holiday dish; she declares that “[m]ore preparations are made by families in New Orleans for Mardi Gras than there are at Christmas. Long before this eventful day hams are baked, daube glacé is prepared, cakes are baked, and general preparations are made for all friends who will come in hungry and tired.”⁵³ After reading in other cookbooks that daube glacé is a dish for holiday tables it is interesting to finally see it appear as a part of a holiday feast.

According to Land, her 1969 work *New Orleans Cuisine* “was written to preserve the traditions, customs, cuisine, and way of life of New Orleans. As New Orleans is an international city with a rare culture, this book attempts to give the reader a comprehensive knowledge of the background of this culture and the cuisine that has been nurtured from this mingling of nationalities and methods in cookery.”⁵⁴ Just as *Louisiana Cookery* was as much a history text on Louisiana as it was a cookbook, *New Orleans Cuisine* is as much an attempt to describe New Orleans as it is a collection of recipes native to the city. For instance, Land endeavors to explain what is meant by “Creole,” especially as it pertains to cooking. She says that “the adjective ‘Creole’ came into use early in Louisiana history, usually designating anything originating in the French or Spanish colonies of America or the West Indies. Creolism is a way of life in Louisiana, employing the artistry of gracious living with *savoir vivre*. It is well preserved in Louisiana homes today.” In *New Orleans Cuisine*, Land presents the glory and oddity of New Orleans through the medium of food and culinary history. The sections of the cookbook are devoted to such topics as “Customs and Service,” “Traditions and Superstitions,” “River Boat Cuisine,” “Places to Dine,” and “Kitchen Lore.” The chapter on “Traditions and Superstitions” offers an impressive list of holidays with recipes that are unique to New Orleans. For example, Land explains that “the ceremony of the twelfth night cake originated with the ancient custom of a *beanfeast*, which was celebrated twelve days after Christmas. A cake was cut in which was

hidden a bean and the fortunate man to cut the bean was declared lord of misrule and bean king.”⁵⁵ (King cakes are the modern version of twelfth night cakes, though the custom is now associated with Mardi Gras and a tiny plastic baby has replaced the traditional bean.) Land presents other holidays with their corresponding recipes, such as Candlemas Day Pancakes, New Year’s Day Cabbage, Good Friday’s Custard Pie, and other concoctions associated with All Saint’s Day and Saint Joseph’s Day. Even a reader who is unfamiliar with New Orleans must gain some understanding of the importance of feast days in the city’s culture.

“Places to Dine” is one of the most significant portions of this cookbook. Land began this section with the same characteristic history lesson that makes her cookbooks so intriguing. Land writes that “[c]hefs consistently concoct the culinary creations that have made New Orleans a mecca for epicures since the birth of the city. Time has not altered the distinctively French character or Latin temperament of New Orleans; the citizens of the city have carefully guarded the unique culture that is their birthright. New Orleans is still culinary host to the world.”⁵⁶ She offers readers a list of some of the most influential and popular New Orleans restaurants followed by recipes for some of the restaurants’ signature dishes. Antoine’s is the first restaurant featured and a detailed history of the origins of this eatery is presented, followed by a recipe for Gumbo Filé Creole. Arnaud’s recipe is for Boiled Red Fish, Brennan’s suggests its menu for breakfast, Commander’s Palace provides a recipe for its famous Turtle Soup, and Pascal’s Manale lists several Italian dishes such as Stuffed Artichokes and Chicken Cacciatore.⁵⁷

The marginalia found in a copy of *New Orleans Cuisine* once owned by AmyBess Miller records the restaurants that she dined at, variations on recipes, and the meals she had prepared at home.⁵⁸ Miller recorded the date of her fifth trip to New Orleans, March 17-22, 1975, in the opening pages of her copy of Land’s book. She also placed a check mark next to recipes,

presumably those she had either eaten in restaurants or prepared at home. Miller checked Brennan's Fillet of Trout Blanc and next to the recipe wrote, "Brennan's also broils trout with a coating of finely chopped almonds—butter—lemon."⁵⁹ She also used this cookbook as a place to record social gatherings and what was served. Miller wrote that she had "boiled crawfish—had this at Denny's, 3-17-75, served with cocktail sauce. Crawfish stew—had this at Edith's before symphony, 3-19-75. Brennan's Eggs Benedict: AB had this at lunch given by Margie and Charles Stietch, 3-21-75, only oysters not eggs. Edith told this story. Pommes Soufflés—lunch at Antoine's on St. Joseph's Day with Edith. 3-18-75."⁶⁰ This cookbook was clearly significant to her since she spent so much time updating her notes on recipes and holidays. The marginalia reveals how one person documented not just recipes but also the social relationships that surround them.

The meaningful social bonds that developed from sharing recipes are illustrated in the written correspondence between Mary Land and the naturalist Caroline Dormon. These two women wrote to each other frequently, often about food, recipes, and the memories associated with them. In one letter, Dormon confesses that she had been feeling "puny" and decided to reread her friend's cookbook for inspiration. She admired all the research that went into producing the cookbook, yet she expresses some criticism of the contents. Caroline asks Mary, "What the thunder is 'orgeat syrup'? You sound as if everyone should know."⁶¹ Never having used the sweet, almond-flavored syrup in her own cooking, Dormon is understandably confused. She also scolds her friend for not including sweet basil in the cookbook; as an accomplished botanist, Dormon was obviously well versed in growing and using culinary herbs. A recipe for pilau particularly interests her because it reminds her of her own childhood. In a letter dated February 19, 1970, Dormon writes:

By the way, do you know rice pilau by that name? The Cane River folk call it “dirty rice”—such a nasty name! My mother came from South Carolina, and of course her family got it from the Huguenots. From the description of pilaf (from the Middle and Near East Countries), I feel sure it is the same thing. Of course the Huguenots brought it with them from France, and they could have learned it from pilaf. Mama cooked rice in ham liquor, seasoned it properly, then cut up hard-boiled eggs in it. Sometimes mixed in tiny bits of cooked sausage. How we kids loved it!⁶²

This letter demonstrates how recipes evoke memories and reveals specific details about places and people. Discussing food is something that these two women seem to have done frequently, and this type of sharing demonstrates how important food is to people and how it can anchor the past in the present.

Many of the recipes from *New Orleans Cuisine* first appeared in *Louisiana Cookery*, but the addition of a large section devoted to the bounty of drinks, especially alcoholic beverages, sets this cookbook apart. Land characteristically offers a succinct history of the spirits of New Orleans with a particular emphasis on Antoine Amedée Peychaud, who came to New Orleans from Santo Domingo in 1793 to open an apothecary.⁶³ He invented Peychaud’s Bitters which is still a staple ingredient in many New Orleans cocktails. The Sazerac and Ramos Gin Fizz are said to be invented in New Orleans. Of the Sazerac Cocktail Land writes:

[The] Sazerac which originated in New Orleans was at one time called a “green goblin” because of the absinthe included, so it is especially apropos for St. Patrick’s Day. To make a Sazerac muddle together a teaspoon of sugar and a few dashes of Peychaud bitters with a good jigger of rye whiskey. In another old fashioned glass pour enough absinthe to rinse the glass well. Add the ingredients from the first glass, pouring over two lumps of ice and adding a twist of lemon peel. The edge of the glass may also be rubbed with lemon. Two jiggers of rye may be used, if desired.⁶⁴

Absinthe, is a drink popular in Paris, was a particular favorite in bistros in New Orleans.⁶⁵ She offers an alternative to French absinthe, a Spanish version called Ojen, as well as instructions for an Absinthe Drip, and recipes for the Absinthe Suisse and the Absinthe Squirt. Her selection of menus in *New Orleans Cuisine* suggests Absinthe Suisse for breakfast.

According to the recipe it was known as a “glorified hangover drink.” “The Suisse” she said “may be made by placing two jiggers of absinthe per person in a shaker with a small amount of crushed ice. One jigger of crème de menthe is added and a dash of orange flower water. Beat the whites of two eggs stiff and add to the shaker. Shake until frothy.”⁶⁶ Such a drink for breakfast alludes to the New Orleans appetite for revelry and its acceptance of alcohol as a part of everyday life. This cookbook establishes New Orleans dining as significantly different from the culinary experiences of other American cities. *New Orleans Cuisine* was highly praised when it was published and one critic wrote that it was “not just a cookbook, but the preservation of a way of life in New Orleans, of its traditions, customs, and cuisine.”⁶⁷

Mary Ellen Hunter Irvine—*Favorite New Orleans Recipes*

Mary Irvine was born in Honduras in 1901 while her father, who was a doctor, was working there. When she was eleven years old she was sent to a French boarding school in New Orleans called Holy Angels Academy. She continued her education at Tulane University’s Newcomb College and received a bachelor’s degree in English literature in 1925. Irvine became a high school teacher in the New Orleans area where she taught both English and Spanish courses. She became the head of the Spanish Department at the Ursuline Academy, a Catholic institution administered by nuns, but a scandal ensued when she married in 1931. Irvine was promptly fired, and she sued the school for breach of contract. The case is famous for the trial being held in the convent itself because of a New Orleans law that prohibited nuns from appearing in court. Irvine lost her case and apparently decided to finish her education, going on to receive a master’s degree in Spanish literature from Tulane University in 1932.⁶⁸ Irvine had an active career as a researcher, translator, and librarian for the Middle American Research

Center in New Orleans. During World War II she worked as a translator in the Office of Censorship. Irvine was active in numerous women's organizations in New Orleans and collaborated with her friend Suzanne Ormond on a book about Newcomb pottery.

When Irvine was in her late seventies she began another collaboration with Ormond, this time a cookbook. A third woman, Denyse Cantin, also worked on the cookbook, which was called *Favorite New Orleans Recipes*. In the Preface, Ormond wrote that “[p]roducing just another New Orleans cookbook seemed to us foolish, so we...set out to write a book in the three languages of the cultures Louisiana has experienced since 1718—French, Spanish, and English. These three cultures have tempered our cuisine, each adding its flavor to the native foods, until today the refinement is perfect.”⁶⁹ Much had changed since the 1950s and 1960s when Mary Land's cookbooks were considered groundbreaking works. By 1979 so many New Orleans cookbooks had appeared that theirs obviously had to have a specific purpose. Many of the popular New Orleans cookbooks from this era featured the recipes of famous restaurants or were written by their executive chefs. In contrast, *Favorite New Orleans Recipes* was written to preserve home-cooking recipes and to ensure that staple New Orleans dishes would not be lost among all the new cookbooks. Ormond writes that “[h]aving made this decision, we looked through our files and notes for the best of the recipes. Many were only handwritten notes, some dating back to the middle of the nineteenth century; others were hastily jotted ingredients. We have carefully chosen recipes which may be done anywhere, adding some new favorites, and have written directions to make each recipe easy to follow.”⁷⁰ Their decision to use readily available ingredients and to simplify their directions helped make this cookbook very popular, so much so that it is now in its fourteenth printing.

Favorite New Orleans Recipes was written in three different languages, which is significant because it is demonstrative of the cultural exchange that had always influenced the cuisine of New Orleans, and also because it illustrates the level of accomplishment of the authors. Suzanne Ormond handled the English version of the cookbook. Denyse Cantin was a native of Canada and lived in New Orleans with her husband, who was the Consul General of Canada. She was responsible for the French translation of the cookbook. Mary Irvine was responsible for the Spanish translation, a task that she took very seriously. She corresponded with friends who were living in Mexico and South America and would ask them what translation would work best for particular ingredients. This process must have taken a great deal of effort as several of her notes for the cookbook have numerous translations listed and illustrate how difficult it was to translate ingredients exactly. Her friends would tell her that one ingredient could be called by several different names in Mexico alone, not to mention all the different names throughout Latin America. In addition to their multilingual approach, the authors made use of multiple measurements and temperatures. They included temperatures in Fahrenheit and Celsius to make the recipes more usable to people who might be using the translated editions outside of the United States. Their intention was to create a cookbook about New Orleans cuisine that could be used by a variety of people and would not require any exotic ingredients or difficult instructions.

Favorite New Orleans Recipes is the most modern cookbook of those presented here and employs a standardized structure throughout the book. All of the recipes begin with a list of ingredients that require exact measurements. They claim that “the recipes require no special, hard-to-obtain ingredients, and can be followed easily by the neophyte cook as well as the gourmet chef.”⁷¹ These recipes are a collection of typical foods that are staples of New Orleans

home cooking. Examples include recipes for Shrimp Remoulade, Oyster Stew, Seafood Gumbo, Gumbo aux Herbes, Grillades and Grits, Redfish Courtbouillon, Bananas Foster, and Shrimp and Ham Jambalaya.

The authors included a recipe for Molded Daube Glacé that is the most modernized of all the daube glacé recipes discussed in this study. This particular recipe calls for five cups of canned beef consommé and powdered gelatin.⁷² Their recipe updates daube glacé for the busy modern housewife and shows the considerable change in cooking techniques through time. Daube glacé was something that would have taken a woman reading Florence Roberts's *Dixie Meals* several hours to make and would have required numerous cooking vessels and considerable effort. Lena Richard updated the recipe with powdered gelatin but still provided directions for the old-fashioned way with pigs feet and veal knuckles. Mary Land's version included game to suit her personal taste and put daube glacé on the holiday table. Its inclusion in Mary Irvine's *Favorite New Orleans Recipes* demonstrates that this dish is indeed something unique to New Orleans that must be included in a cookbook claiming to be for the home cook. However, its updated ingredients and reliance on canned consommé make this dish something that has been adapted to suit modern cooks in modern kitchens with new expectations that include reduced hours spent in the kitchen.

Canned soup, bouillon cubes and dried herbs are incorporated into *Favorite New Orleans Recipes*, but recipes for several essential New Orleans dishes remain unchanged. Recipes for Basic Brown Roux and Creole Cream Cheese take just as long to make as they did fifty years before, and they have not been altered for modern convenience. Despite their modernizing of certain recipes, Irvine and her co-authors clearly intended to preserve New Orleans home cooking by making these dishes available to as many cooks as possible.

Conclusion

The cookbooks examined in this often reveal the authors' attitudes regarding class, race, and gender, but they also contain an element of fantasy. Florence Roberts, for instance, filled the pages of her cookbook with domestic advice because she wanted an audience for her particular fantasy of what life should be like. Sarah A. Leavitt addresses this theme in her book, *From Catharine Beecher to Martha Stewart: A Cultural History of Domestic Advice* (2002). Leavitt writes that "like advertisements, domestic advice works as a kind of funhouse mirror, distorting reality to show a society as some people wish it could be. But most of the advice was never followed. The writings of domestic advisors demonstrate cultural ideals, not cultural realities."⁷³ Indeed, most of Roberts's domestic advice would have seemed far beyond the reach of a general reader in southern Louisiana during the Great Depression. The daily reality for most people would have kept them from enjoying many of her elegant menus and certainly would have kept them from employing several servants. However, the element of fantasy does not mean that cookbooks and domestic advice manuals are not important as historical documents. Leavitt claims that "[t]heir historical value lies in uncovering the way certain women understood the connections between their homes and the larger world."⁷⁴ Roberts, for example, constantly emphasized the joys of domesticity while also insisting that the home was a woman's place of business. Cookbooks, like diaries and correspondence, are a valuable source for historians seeking to understand all the dimensions of women's lives, from the practical to the fanciful and the real to the ideal.

In Laura Shapiro's *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (2001), the author insists that "for people who really love it, food is a lens through which to view the world. For us, the way that people cook and eat, how they set their tables, and the utensils

that they use all tell a story. If you choose to pay attention, cooking is an important cultural artifact, an expression of time, place, and personality.”⁷⁵ Cookbooks are unique historical documents because they contain elements of personal desire and fantasy and the reality of work, and because they record attitudes regarding class, race and gender from the time and place where they were written. While the cookbooks examined here are quite different from each other and were written by a diverse group of women, the information they contain is essential to understanding the history of women in mid-twentieth-century Louisiana.

Florence Roberts devoted significant portions of the domestic advice sections of *Dixie Meals* to discussions of class divisions. Her own status anxiety was revealed through her insistence that the maid not be allowed to wear jewelry and that only a male butler be employed for formal dinners. She seems to demand that clear boundaries are needed to distinguish her upper-middle-class status from those in her employ. The poem that she wrote for her granddaughters in the Dedication to *Dixie Meals* indicated that she felt compelled to inform her heirs about how they should behave as heads of their households. Perhaps Roberts was uneasy about the change and modernization that she must have experienced in her lifetime, and she was writing down her ideas regarding class structure to try to preserve a way of life that she believed was disappearing. By writing down her particular fantasies about life, Roberts provided a record of one woman’s attitudes about class and respectability in Louisiana in the early twentieth century.

Unlike Roberts, Mary Land saw cuisine as something that united people and did not discriminate along class lines. She enthusiastically urged her readers to eat foods that many would consider inappropriate for a middle-class table such as raccoon and various small birds. To her, food was something anyone could enjoy and was not an indicator of class. However,

Land wrote extensively about the fine restaurants of New Orleans, which would have been financially out of reach for some readers. Perhaps her notoriously unconventional lifestyle made her less apt to worry about class and status, and instead led her to focus on the unifying power of food. Like Land, Lena Richard seems to have moved fairly freely through class barriers, and she seems to have been just as comfortable cooking in her neighborhood restaurant as she was cooking for the Rockefellers in New York. Mary Irvine, too, seemed more at ease with class divisions, as she was well known as a skilled hostess in New Orleans, yet she wanted to preserve home cooking for the average middle-class housewife. In this way we can see how cookbooks show change over time. Class and status were most important to Florence Roberts in the 1930s, but as the decades passed it is clear that class became less of a concern for women in the 1970s.

Attitudes toward race and ethnicity are also preserved in the pages of the cookbooks. Florence Roberts makes no mention of race, and it is perhaps her silence that is telling. Racial tension plagued rural Louisiana in the 1930s, so perhaps she felt it was a taboo subject and decided to avoid the subject entirely. She does not, for example, mention what ethnicity her servants were. Lena Richard enjoyed remarkable success as an African-American entrepreneur during the Jim Crow era. Her restaurants were popular with both white and African-American customers at a time when segregation was still enforced in the South. If patrons of different races were willing to come to her restaurant, ignoring the laws that prevailed, then her cooking was clearly something special. Richard was not only successful in New Orleans; she also reached a national audience. Surely her success must have influenced other African-American women to have the confidence to invest in themselves and try their luck in the business world. Richard defied many of the barriers that racial segregation had put in her way. She inverted the practice of white authors thanking their African-American cooks in their books when she

thanked her former employer, Alice Vairin, in hers. Richard was also praised for openly thanking the members of her community for influencing her cooking and offering their distinct African-American recipes.

These cookbooks also show that as time passed some of the racial tension that burdened America started to change. Mary Land devoted a great deal of her first book, *Louisiana Cookery*, to praising the folklore of the Native Americans and how they influenced the cuisine of Louisiana. She mentions the sharing of knowledge of wild foodstuffs that occurred between Native Americans and African slaves on plantations. Land gives this cultural exchange full credit for making Louisiana a culinary treasure. When Mary Irvine was writing her cookbook in the 1970s there was a new emphasis on preserving and celebrating ethnic diversity. Her work, *Favorite New Orleans Recipes*, was created to champion the cultural diversity of New Orleans. Irvine and her co-authors wrote a book that highlighted the influence of the French, Spanish and English on New Orleans cuisine, and they published the cookbook in all three languages as a tribute to this rich cultural heritage.

Gender is another subject that these cookbooks discuss, to varying degrees. Florence Roberts wrote domestic advice that was strictly gendered. She insists that male butlers should be in service for formal occasions and that women should be employed as general maids and servers at informal affairs. Roberts also wrote lengthy instructions for the appearance of a maid including what clothing and shoes she should wear, when she should change her apron, and how her hair should be styled. The maid should not be too large nor too old. She should be able to predict the needs of her employers. No such instructions are given for male butlers, perhaps because they are allowed more agency due to their gender and therefore have higher status. Lean Richard did not place nearly so much emphasis on gender in her cookbook, but in her

business endeavors she must have encountered difficulties breaking through gender barriers. Her one business partner seems to have been her daughter, not her husband, and she sent her daughter to Xavier University so that she could have more opportunity for advancement.

Mary Land's career broke through many of the gender barriers that prevailed during the mid-twentieth century. As a journalist, she wrote about the wilderness of Louisiana and hunting and fishing at a time when those topics were thought to be the domain of men. Her first cookbook was unusual because she wrote numerous recipes for game, and she also gave lengthy directions for killing and dressing a variety of animals. This is unique because most game cookbooks are written by men for a male audience. Land did not let gender barriers or gender expectations stop her from creating a successful career for herself in a male-dominated field. Mary Irvine championed home cooking at a time when famous restaurants and their chefs had flooded the cookbook market. Executive chefs in the 1970s were typically male, and home cooks were still thought to be typically female. In her own way she was attempting to bring recognition to housewives and elevate their status as fine cooks.

This study shows that cookbooks record change over time. Recipes for daube glacé changed to suit more modern cooks with less time to cook tedious dishes. The appearance of alcoholic beverages is another indicator of time. Florence Roberts's *Dixie Meals* was published the year after prohibition was repealed, and she does not offer any recipes for alcoholic drinks, but she does list numerous recipes for coffee. Lena Richard includes a few recipes for alcohol, like a watermelon filled with champagne, but they are reserved for special occasions. However, Mary Land insisted in both of her cookbooks that alcoholic beverages are a staple in Louisiana cooking and that Louisiana was the premier wine-drinking region of America. Land declares that alcohol is one of the five most important aspects of Louisiana cooking and she devotes large

sections of her cookbooks to spirits. When Mary Irvine was writing her cookbook in the 1970s, alcoholic beverages were simply a common part of entertaining, and she lists several easy recipes for drinks to serve at home.

Cookbooks, then, are beneficial to studying a variety of cultural attitudes and how they change over time. When these changes gradually occur in private homes, cookbooks are among the best sources of information on how lives are affected, particularly those of women who implemented and often innovate these changes. This study demonstrates that cookbooks provide unique and valuable insights, especially concerning women's history, and they should be more fully incorporated into historical investigation.

Endnotes

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- ¹ Mary Land, *Louisiana Cookery* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1954), xviii.
- ² Suggested general works on cooking and women's history include Barbara Haber, *From Hardtack to Home Fries: An Uncommon History of American Cooks and Meals* (New York: Penguin Group, 2002); Sherrie A. Inness, *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001); Sarah A. Leavitt, *From Catharine Beecher to Martha Stewart: A Cultural History of Domestic Advice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Mary Drake McFeely, *Can She Bake a Cherry Pie? American Women and the Kitchen in the Twentieth Century* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Laura Shapiro, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Random House Inc., 2001); and Janet Theophano, *Eat My Words: Reading Women's Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).
- ³ Florence Roberts, "Dedication," *Dixie Meals* (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1934).
- ⁴ Roberts, "Dedication."
- ⁵ Interview by the Family of Florence McMahon Roberts, *The Story of Florence McMahon Roberts: A Woman in No Man's Land*, no date. Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA.
- ⁶ The Family of Florence McMahon Roberts, *The Story of Florence McMahon Roberts*, 6.
- ⁷ For more on Catharine Beecher, see Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).
- ⁸ Catharine E. Beecher, *Miss Beecher's Domestic Receipt-Book* (1858; repr., Mineola: Dover Publications, 2001), 217.
- ⁹ The Family of Florence McMahon Roberts, *The Story of Florence McMahon Roberts*, 8.
- ¹⁰ Florence Roberts, *Dixie Meals* (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1934), 11, 12.
- ¹¹ Roberts, 12, 15.
- ¹² Roberts, "Preface."
- ¹³ For more on the domestic science movement, see Laura Shapiro, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Random House, 2001).
- ¹⁴ Roberts, 22.
- ¹⁵ Roberts, 123.
- ¹⁶ For more on the theme of gentility, see Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1993).
- ¹⁷ Lena Richard, *New Orleans Cook Book* (1940; repr., Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1998), Preface.
- ¹⁸ Karen Trahan Leathem, *Two Women and Their Cookbooks: Lena Richard and Mary Land*, ed. Susan Tucker (New Orleans: Newcomb College for Research on Women, 2001), 2.
- ¹⁹ Clementine Paddleford, "Demonstrates Scaled Fish Served at Famous Parties; Watermelon Ice Cream and Okra Gumbo are Other Favorites," *New York Herald Tribune*, circa 1943. From Lena Richard's scrapbook located at Newcomb College Center for Research on Women, Tulane University, Box 46.
- ²⁰ Paddleford, "Demonstrates Scaled Fish," *New York Herald Tribune*, circa 1943.
- ²¹ Richard, *New Orleans Cook Book*, 2.
- ²² Karen Trahan Leathem, *Two Women and Their Cookbooks*, 2.
- ²³ Richard, *New Orleans Cook Book*, 121.
- ²⁴ Richard, *New Orleans Cook Book*, 8.
- ²⁵ There are several spellings for this dish. The most common spellings seem to be "daube glace" and "glacé," but "glacée" is also used. Susan Tucker refers to this dish as "daube glacée." Susan Tucker, ed., *New Orleans Cuisine: Fourteen Signature Dishes and Their Histories* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2009).
- ²⁶ Tucker, *New Orleans Cuisine*, 76.
- ²⁷ Richard, *New Orleans Cook Book*, 58.
- ²⁸ Tucker, *New Orleans Cuisine*, 81.
- ²⁹ Karen Trahan Leathem, *Two Women and Their Cookbooks*, 3.
- ³⁰ Karen Trahan Leathem, *Two Women and Their Cookbooks*, 5.
- ³¹ Advertisement, Newspaper Unknown, circa November 1942. From Lena Richard's scrapbook located at Newcomb College Center for Research on Women, Tulane University, Box 46. Possibly from the *New Orleans Times Picayune*.
- ³² Frances Bryson, "Lena Richard to Unveil More Cooking Secrets," Newspaper Unknown, circa 1948. From a scrapbook located at Newcomb College Center for Research on Women, Tulane University, Box 46.

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- ³³ Kenneth Chorley, letter to Lena Richard, April 30, 1943.
- ³⁴ Karen Trahan Leathem, *Two Women and Their Cookbooks*, 6.
- ³⁵ Frances Bryson, "Lena Richard to Unveil More Cooking Secrets," circa 1948.
- ³⁶ Karen Trahan Leathem, *Two Women and Their Cookbooks*, 6.
- ³⁷ Karen Trahan Leathem, *Two Women and Their Cookbooks*, 5.
- ³⁸ Susan Tucker, *New Orleans Cuisine*, 82.
- ³⁹ Pat Stevens, interview by Susan Tucker, January 17, 2000.
- ⁴⁰ Mary Land, *Louisiana Cookery* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1954), Forward.
- ⁴¹ Mary Land, Biographical Data, no date. Newcomb College Center for Research on Women, Tulane University.
- ⁴² Karen Trahan Leathem, *Two Women and Their Cookbooks*, 9.
- ⁴³ Pat Stevens, interview by Susan Tucker, January 17, 2000.
- ⁴⁴ Pat Stevens, interview by Susan Tucker, January 17, 2000.
- ⁴⁵ Mary Land, Biographical Data.
- ⁴⁶ Karen Trahan Leathem, *Two Women and Their Cookbooks*, 13.
- ⁴⁷ Pat Stevens, interview by Susan Tucker, January 17, 2000, 8.
- ⁴⁸ Mary Land, *Louisiana Cookery*, 12, 332.
- ⁴⁹ Mary Land, *Louisiana Cookery*, 73, 77, 88-94.
- ⁵⁰ Mary Land, *Louisiana Cookery*, 3.
- ⁵¹ Mary Land, *Louisiana Cookery*, 61.
- ⁵² Pat Stevens, interview by Susan Tucker, January 17, 2000, 3.
- ⁵³ Mary Land, *New Orleans Cuisine* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1969), 24-25.
- ⁵⁴ Mary Land, Press Release, circa 1969. Newcomb College Center for Research on Women, Tulane University.
- ⁵⁵ Mary Land, *New Orleans Cuisine*, 9, 23.
- ⁵⁶ Mary Land, *New Orleans Cuisine*, 36.
- ⁵⁷ Mary Land, *New Orleans Cuisine*, 35-56.
- ⁵⁸ This copy of *New Orleans Cuisine*, once owned by AmyBess Miller, is located at the Newcomb College Center for Research on Women, Nadine Vorhoff Library, Tulane University.
- ⁵⁹ AmyBess Miller, handwritten marginalia, circa 1975.
- ⁶⁰ AmyBess Miller, handwritten marginalia, circa 1975.
- ⁶¹ Caroline Dorman correspondence to Mary Land, circa 1970. Historic New Orleans Collection.
- ⁶² Caroline Dorman correspondence to Mary Land, February 19, 1970. Historic New Orleans Collection.
- ⁶³ Mary Land, *New Orleans Cuisine*, 258.
- ⁶⁴ Mary Land, *New Orleans Cuisine*, 262-263.
- ⁶⁵ Absinthe is a green liqueur which is flavored with wormwood, anise, and other aromatic herbs that was illegal in the United States until recently because of its addictive nature and the intoxicating properties of wormwood.
- ⁶⁶ Mary Land, *New Orleans Cuisine*, 272.
- ⁶⁷ Karen Trahan Leathem, *Two Women and Their Cookbooks*, 14.
- ⁶⁸ Mary Ellen Hunter Irvine Collection, Finding Aid, no date, Newcomb College Center for Research on Women, Tulane University.
- ⁶⁹ Suzanne Ormond, Mary Irvine, and Denyse Cantin, *Favorite New Orleans Recipes* (Gretna, La: Pelican Publishing Company, 1979), Preface.
- ⁷⁰ Suzanne Ormond, *Favorite New Orleans Recipes*, Preface.
- ⁷¹ Press Release, Pelican Publishing Company, circa 1979. Mary Irvine Collection, Newcomb College Center for Research on Women, Tulane University.
- ⁷² Ormond, *Favorite New Orleans Recipes*, 23.
- ⁸³ Sarah A. Leavitt, *From Catharine Beecher to Martha Stewart*, 5.
- ⁸⁴ Sarah A. Leavitt, *From Catharine Beecher to Martha Stewart*, 5.
- ⁸⁵ Laura Shapiro, *Perfection Salad*, ix.

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