

A large group of people, mostly women in long dresses and some men in period clothing, are posed for a group portrait in a grassy field. They are sitting on a long wooden bench. In the background, there is a large, leafy tree and a clear blue sky. The overall scene suggests a historical or cultural gathering.

# BACKSTORIES

The Kitchen Table Talk Cookbook

Edited by  
**Cynthia C. Prescott and Maureen S. Thompson**

*Backstories: The Kitchen Table Talk Cookbook*

Unless otherwise indicated,  
all material in this book appears under a

Creative Commons  
By Attribution  
4.0 International License.



2021 The Digital Press @ The University of North Dakota

Book Design: William Caraher  
Cover Design:

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021937519  
The Digital Press at the University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, North  
Dakota

ISBN-13 (paperback): 978-1-7364986-2-0  
ISBN-13 (PDF): 978-1-7364986-3-7

# Backstories

## The Kitchen Table Talk Cookbook

Edited by  
Cynthia C. Prescott  
and  
Maureen S. Thompson



The Digital Press at the University of North Dakota  
Grand Forks, ND



# —Contents—

Introduction: Kitchen Table Talk	
Cynthia C. Prescott & Maureen S. Thompson.....	xv

## **Part I: Studying Rural Women through Cookbooks**

1. Introduction	
<i>Cynthia C. Prescott</i> .....	3
2. A Little History of the Rural Women's Studies Association (RWSA)	
<i>Joan Jensen, Katherine Jellison, Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, and</i>	
<i>Cynthia C. Prescott</i> .....	5
3. Rural Women, Rural Words: Recipes and History	
<i>Rebecca Sharpless</i> .....	11
4. Quantity Cooking: Cabbage Salad for Sixty	
<i>Catharine Wilson</i> .....	19
5. Three Centuries of Scottish Cookery	
<i>Kathryn Harvey</i> .....	21
6. Mustard Plaster	
<i>Catharine Wilson</i> .....	37
7. Curry Powder	
<i>Catharine Wilson</i> .....	39
8. Cookbooks: Exploring Economic(s) Themes	
<i>Erna van Duren</i> .....	43
9. Buckaroo Stew and Before: Four Generations of Kurtz Family Recipes	
<i>Mazie Hough</i> .....	61
10. Let Them Eat [Pound] Cake	
<i>Maureen S. Thompson</i> .....	65

**Part II: Community Cookbooks**

11. Introduction  
*Cynthia C. Prescott*..... 69

12. Banana Bread, Pineapple Pudding, Cocoanut Dainties, and Date Bars:  
Favorite Recipes as a Window into Women’s Lives in Early-Twentieth  
Century Downeast Maine  
*Rachel Snell* ..... 71

13. Kitchen Joy  
*Cherisse Jones-Branch* ..... 83

14. “Hospitality was their byword”: Food, Tradition, and Creativity in  
Borderlands Kitchens  
*Mary Murphy* ..... 87

15. Kent Family Recipes  
*Sarah Kesterson* ..... 97

16. The Montana Rural Home: A Community Cookbook  
*Amy McKinney*..... 103

17. Tamales in the UTSA Mexican Cookbook  
*Steph Noell* ..... 123

18. Brains, Skill, and Butter: Sample a Feast of  
History in Century-Old Cookbooks  
*Katie Mayer*..... 135

**Part III: Nostalgia and Foodways**

19. Introduction  
*Cynthia C. Prescott with contributions by Maureen S. Thompson*..... 145

20. The Bradley Women and The Delmarva Farmer  
*Sara E. Morris*..... 151

21. Lady Baltimore Cake  
*Sara E. Morris*..... 159

22. Morris Family Recipes  
*Elizabeth H. Morris*..... 163

23. Bischoff Family Coffee Cake  
*Katherine Jellison*..... 167

24. Grandmama’s Cooking Traditions  
*Joseph Cates* ..... 169

25. Chicken and Noodles	
<i>Pamela Riney-Kehrberg</i> .....	175
26. Sauerbraten mit Oscar, Gerhardt, Fredrich und Freunde	
<i>Joan Speyer</i> .....	177
27. At Mam-Maw's Table	
<i>Tracey Hanshew</i> .....	181
28. Hanshew Family Recipes	
<i>Tracey Hanshew</i> .....	193
29. Sour Cream Pie and Nana's Buns	
<i>Diane McKenzie</i> .....	201
30. Spanish Buns	
<i>Catharine Wilson</i> .....	205
31. Zucchini Bread	
<i>Cynthia C. Prescott</i> .....	209
32. Blackberry and Apple Jelly	
<i>Margaret Thomas-Evans</i> .....	213
33. Harvest Photographs	
<i>Pamela Riney-Kehrberg</i> .....	215
34. Mom's Rhubarb Relish	
<i>Marie Kenny</i> .....	217
35. November Mincemeat	
<i>Pamela J. Snow Sweetser</i> .....	219
36. Two Cakes and Three Generations	
<i>Sara Egge</i> .....	225
37. Grammie Botsford's Molasses Cookies	
<i>Rachel Snell</i> .....	229
38. Chocolate Pudding	
<i>Eli Bosler</i> .....	231

**Part IV: Politics and Authority**

39. Introduction  
*Cynthia C. Prescott*..... 233

40. Cake and Politics  
*Sara Egge*..... 239

41. Domecon Cake  
*Lynne Byall Benson* ..... 249

42. Photographic Essay: Hunger During the Great Depression and  
World War II  
*Cynthia C. Prescott*..... 251

43. Soup for Dessert? My Mother’s “Secret” Cake Recipe  
*Linda M. Ambrose*..... 259

44. 3,000 Tons to Lose: Farm Women and Weight Control  
*Jenny Barker Devine* ..... 263

45. Teaching Food History  
*Pamela Riney-Kehrberg* ..... 275

46. Federal Writers’ Project Slave Narratives  
*Pamela Riney-Kehrberg and Cynthia C. Prescott*..... 283

47. Pavlova  
*Cynthia C. Prescott*..... 287

**Part V: Twenty-First-Century Foodways**

48. Introduction  
*Cynthia C. Prescott*..... 293

49. Putting the Little Town on the Prairie on Culinary Maps  
*Cynthia C. Prescott*..... 299

50. Convenience Cooking: Seven-Layer Casserole  
*Catharine Wilson* ..... 311

51. Kalua Pork  
*Cynthia C. Prescott*..... 313

52. Breadfruit Stew  
*Diana Chen*..... 317

53. Doing the Heavy Lifting: Gender Roles and Consumption in the  
Age of COVID-19  
*Virginia Scharff*..... 319

54. North Fareway Visit, March 23, 2020 <i>Pamela Riney-Kehrberg</i> .....	331
55. Pam's Pandemic Soup <i>Pamela Riney-Kehrberg</i> .....	333
56. COVID Reflection <i>Sara Egge</i> .....	335
57. Life Amid a Pandemic <i>Cynthia C. Prescott</i> .....	337
58. Clay, COVID, and Matzah Balls: An [Im]Perfect Passover in a New Home <i>Rebecca Stoil</i> .....	345
59. Quarantine Baking <i>Nikki Berg Burin</i> .....	353
60. “. . . Time enough for that”: A Recipe for Comfort in the Pandemic <i>Pamela J. Snow Sweetser</i> .....	355
61. Recipes for the Pandemic <i>Dee Garceau</i> .....	359
62. Labor, Loss, and Joy: COVID-19 and Food among Faculty Parents <i>Samantha K. Ammons and Krista Lynn Minnotte</i> .....	363
Conclusion: Community Potlucks and Global Markets <i>Cynthia C. Prescott</i> .....	367
Contributors .....	379



# —Recipes—

## Part I: Studying Rural Women through Cookbooks

Mrs. Chiswel's Receipt for a Cake, very good.....	12
To Prepare Rennet.....	13
English Curd Pie.....	13
Raspberry Peek-a-Boos .....	14
Cabbage Salad for Sixty .....	20
Mustard Plaster.....	38
Curry Powder.....	40
Buckaroo Stew Waquoit.....	62
Chocolate sauce .....	62
Gamma's Orange Cakes .....	63
Egg Nog.....	64
Pound Cake .....	66

## Part II: Community Cookbooks

Swiss Lettuce Roll Salad – Mrs. Martha Richardson .....	74
Cocoanut [sic] Dainties .....	78
Blueberry Muffins – Margaret Richardson .....	78
Blueberry Cake – Mrs. Heath .....	78
Date Bars.....	79
Pineapple Fluff – Mrs. L.P. Somes .....	81
Crab Cakes .....	84
Spoon Bread.....	84
Okra Soup.....	84
Wild Rice Fried Shrimp.....	85
Frogmore Stew.....	85
Hard Times Pudding.....	88
Fattigmand No.1 .....	89
Ginger Cordial.....	90
Raw Oysters on Ice.....	92
An Apple Sea Serpent .....	92
Coffee Mousse.....	93
Dream Sandwiches.....	94
Huckleberry Pudding .....	97
Pickled Peaches .....	99
Brown Bread .....	100
Mince Meat.....	102

Strawberry Jam .....	107
Canned Cherry Pie.....	108
Cousin Mabel's Good Crabapple Pickles.....	108
Chocolate Pixie.....	110
Pow Wow Buns.....	110
Ribbon Icebox Dessert.....	111
Rhubarb Custard Pie.....	112
Rhubarb Marlow.....	112
Baked Pheasant.....	112
Braised Venison .....	113
Boiled Tongue .....	113
Pavatica .....	113
Salmon Casserole with Parsley Biscuits.....	114
Parsley Biscuits .....	114
Baked Eggs in Macaroni Nests .....	114
Fish Pie.....	116
Brownie Mix.....	117
Biscuit Mix .....	118
Spaghetti Casserole .....	119
Rosy Red Cookies.....	119
Tamales .....	125
Curd Tamales .....	128
Coconut Tamales.....	128
Minced Tamales.....	129
Chicken Tamales.....	129
Tamal Casserole .....	131
Rice Tamales (Version 1).....	134
Rice Tamales (Version 2).....	134
Milk to Fill the Tamales .....	134
Common Tamales .....	134
Never-Fail Sponge Cake .....	136
Pork Cake (Original).....	138
Scripture Cake.....	138
Devil Cake .....	139
White Mountain Cake .....	139
Bran Gems.....	139
Brains on Toast .....	139
Macaroni and Cheese.....	140
Corn mustard.....	140
Mayanoise [sic] .....	140
Pigeons in Casserole.....	140
Peanut Sandwiches .....	141
Beef Steak Balls.....	141
Scrambled Eggs.....	141

### Part III: Nostalgia and Foodways

Squash Casserole .....	155
Company Beef Steak .....	156
Pop-Pop's Raisin Cookies .....	157
Lady Baltimore Cake.....	160
Quick Caramel Frosting .....	161
Easy Apple Cake .....	163
Easy Crab Soup.....	164
Harvestore Bars.....	164
Granny's Lemon Snowflake Sugar Cookies.....	165
Applesauce Deluxe .....	165
Bischoff Family Coffee Cake .....	167
Chicken and Noodles.....	176
Sauerbraten mit Kartoffelkloesse und Rotkohl.....	178
Kartoffelkloesse (Potato Dumplings).....	179
Rotkohl (Red Cabbage) .....	179
Chess Cake .....	193
Mam-maw Weathers' Buttermilk Pie.....	194
Tea Cakes.....	195
Lemon Meringue Pie.....	196
Peanut Patties.....	198
French Cream Pie (Sour Cream Pie) .....	202
Nana's Buns.....	202
Cinnamon Rolls.....	203
Spanish Buns .....	207
Culver Family Zucchini Bread.....	210
Hayes Family Zucchini Bread.....	211
Blackberry and Apple Jelly .....	214
Mom's Rhubarb Relish .....	217
November Mincemeat .....	222
Applesauce Cake.....	227
Brown Sugar Frosting .....	227
Sour Cream Scratch Cake.....	228
Grammie Botsford's Molasses Cookies .....	229
Chocolate Pudding.....	231

### Part IV: Politics and Authority

War Cake .....	246
Domecon Cake .....	249
White Mountain Frosting for Domecon Cake (7-Minute Frosting) .....	250
Tomato Soup Cake .....	261
Pavlova .....	290
Chocolate Sheath Cake (Texas Sheet Cake) .....	291
Chocolate Frosting .....	291

**Part V: Twenty-First Century Foodways**

Seven-Layer Casserole ..... 312

“Kalua” Pork..... 315

Hawaiian Fried Rice..... 316

Breadfruit Stew ..... 317

Pam’s Pandemic Soup..... 333

Maztah Ball (Kneidlach) Soup..... 350

Tzimmes (Slow-Baked Fruit Compote)..... 351

Parker House Rolls ..... 357

Banana-Chocolate-Chip Muffins ..... 361

Vegetable Mayhem ..... 361

Pandemic Safety Sandwich..... 361

# —Introduction—

## Introduction: Kitchen Table Talk

Like rural women around the world, members of the Rural Women's Studies Association (RWSA) rise early in the morning and squeeze tasks into already busy schedules to plan our upcoming conferences. Also like our rural sisters worldwide, we often accomplish RWSA business by gathering together around a shared meal. Bleary-eyed at early morning business meetings held in a campus dining hall at our 2018 conference and over exorbitant continental breakfasts in hotel meetings rooms at other academic conferences, we crafted a theme for our 14th Triennial Conference in Guelph, Ontario, Canada, in 2021 that captures that sense of gathering. "Kitchen Table Talk to Global Forum" emphasizes how conversations, relationships, and food shape rural communities, and how local interactions influence global processes.

In keeping with that theme, one of our members suggested that RWSA produce a cookbook to accompany our 2021 conference. Members assembled at an RWSA breakfast meeting held in conjunction with the 2019 centennial meeting of the Agricultural History Society in Washington, DC, endorsed the idea, and volunteers gathered for lunch at a nearby French bistro to explore what that might look like. Over quiche, exquisite pastries, and lots of coffee, a vision took hold that we could produce a community cookbook in the tradition of those published by many rural women over the past two centuries for women's church- and auxiliary-group fundraising. Like those cookbooks, we imagined a volume that would bring together members' cherished recipes. But while most community cookbooks simply collect tried-and-true or aspirational recipes, we wanted to capture the food culture that those recipes represent. We therefore chose to collect not only member-contributed heirloom recipes, but also the family histories, cultural heritages, and personal memories that make those heirloom recipes meaningful.

Just as we gathered over shared meals to dream about this collection, we seek to gather recipes and stories in this volume that contribute to virtual gathering centered around food. According to Priya Parker, author of *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why it Matters*, "Gathering—the conscious bringing together of people for a reason—shapes the way we think, feel, and make sense of our world."<sup>1</sup> Because eating is an essential act of wellbeing, activities have been de-

---

<sup>1</sup> Priya Parker, *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why it Matters* (New York: Penguin Books, 2018), 4.

veloped around mealtimes. Food brings people to the table and dialogue ensues. While sharing food we exchange information and ideas, but also elements of our personal lives. We nourish each other with sustenance and knowledge.

Sharing recipes that produce our favorite dishes is a form of intimate conversation. Recipes are more than a list of ingredients and accompanying directions. They are often handed down through generations and include backstories of the people—typically women—who produced them through countless hours of trial and error. In fact, Yale professor Maria Trumpler, who teaches a “Women Food and Culture” course considers cookbooks “female literary genre.”<sup>2</sup> *Backstories: The Kitchen Table Talk Cookbook* seeks to honor female tradition while producing a volume that engages cookbooks on a scholarly level, reflecting the themes associated with the 2021 RWSA conference including food production, preparation, rituals, hospitality, etiquette, and display. By telling the stories behind the recipes, we seek to uncover rural people’s gatherings around kitchen tables. It considers how recipes transmit significance, meaning, and culture, appealing to an audience that craves a serving of knowledge alongside their food.

This cookbook furthers RWSA’s efforts to honor and preserve rural traditions. But as our small group of cookbook creators returned from Washington, DC, to our daily lives as academics and activists, we began to ponder ways that this nascent cookbook project might also further RWSA’s efforts to promote scholarship about rural women in diverse settings, and to build bridges to bring together academics, activists, and rural residents. We looked for ways to integrate storytelling and recipes with more scholarly content. Rather than adhering to long-standing divisions between (often male-dominated) formal academic publishing and more personal writing, what if we united research with storytelling, and memory with analysis?

What emerged is so much more than a cookbook. It contains beloved recipes and records oral traditions about how and when those recipes should be enjoyed, and how they have been passed down through generations. Many of these stories are steeped in nostalgia, celebrating family traditions. But because many of these stories have been recorded by feminist scholars, the accompanying narratives also uncover diverse themes such as the daily realities of farm labor and ethnic and social class differences. The more academic essays teach us many lessons about changing foodways over the past three centuries, all presented in an approachable style that is accessible to general audiences. Thus, this volume recovers the stories of rural women, and others, as women’s historians have sought to do for the past half century. But the narratives included in *Backstories* are not just stories. These backstories are crucial because understanding these conversations and memories centered around food changes the way we understand women’s lived experiences, and reveals crucial community dynamics. Unearthing these memories highlights

---

<sup>2</sup> Maria Trumpler, “Women Food and Culture” syllabus, <https://summer.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Syllabi/2018/WGSS%20S120%20-%20Women%2C%20Food%20and%20Culture.pdf> Accessed 09/10/2019.

rural women's central roles in their families and communities. It also uncovers their crucial economic and cultural contributions to the larger societies in which they lived.

Women are often tasked with food preparation. We nostalgically remember our mothers and grandmothers preparing food on a daily basis or creating special dishes for holiday meals, especially the kitchen's aromas. Olfactory memory is authentic and plays a substantial role in how information is processed. The reason odors trigger strong reminiscences is because the olfactory bulb relays messages to the hippocampus and amygdala, which are regions of the brain associated with memory and emotion. Food odors can transport us to childhood and beyond, as we associate scents with people, feelings, locations, and occasions.

Eating is often associated with emotion and memory, while scholarly research is typically associated with very different parts of the mind. Uniting the two can produce powerful results. In his interpretation of Claude Levi-Strauss's *The Raw and the Cooked*, Dr. Ouzi Elyada surmises, "While nature is perceived as emotional–instinctual, culture is perceived as intellectual." Furthermore, "the evolution of cooking techniques and rules, and the transformation of cooking [is] a cultural process ...". Based on Elyada's reasoning, the process of cooking can be regarded as an intellectual activity that humans developed over the course of millennia.<sup>3</sup> Similar to Levi-Strauss's anthropological study, this project was predicated upon seemingly binary oppositions, in this case scholarly analysis and nostalgia. *Backstories: Kitchen Table Talk to Global Forum* seeks to bridge that divide. This volume reflects a form of collaboration that is traditionally associated with cookbooks produced by women's organizations including personal anecdotes shared alongside recipes. Additionally, it also features peer-reviewed articles examining the transformation of cooking manuals over the course of centuries, food history and culture, and how both the government and the processed food industry educated rural women about food preparation and nutrition.

Scholars tend to question *everything*. Social scientists study people to understand why they behave in particular ways. Often, customs, religious ideology, and geography play a role in the foods we eat or reject. Historians typically rely on primary sources to analyze notable trends. While cookbooks might initially appear as a list of ingredients with instructions describing how to prepare them, cookbooks offer evidence of the past including what types of food were available in a certain geographic location, traditional cuisines immigrants brought to America, and how indigenous foods were substituted for customary ingredients in recipes. Within these pages, we share heart-felt memories associated with family recipes and local foodways. Yet we also apply a scholar's perspective on those memories, mining those nostalgic anecdotes for perspectives on the place of food within culture and society.

As we gathered these recipes, stories, and essays in spring 2020, a pandemic swept through our homes, communities, and nations. COVID-19, a highly infectious and too-often deadly respiratory virus, transformed our lives overnight.

---

<sup>3</sup> Ouzi Elyada, "The Raw and the Cooked: Claude Levi-Strauss and the Hidden Structures of Myth," art-gallery.nalpa.ac.il. n.d.

Schools and restaurants closed. Social distancing required us each to remain in our own homes. Store shelves were picked bare of hand sanitizer, toilet paper, and food staples. Many suddenly had to work from home, accompanied by children struggling to learn, while food service and grocery employees suddenly became front-line workers. We were told to stay at least 6 feet away from anyone outside our immediate household unit, and to don a mask whenever venturing outside our homes (which had to be homemade to save surgical masks for front-line health workers). Many of us responded to shortages and social barriers by embracing baking, celebrating our triumphs with sourdough bread and elaborate desserts on social media and bemoaning homemade hamburger buns that failed to rise like those picture-perfect buns displayed on recipe websites.

In these unprecedented times, our contributors did what rural women have always done: they worked harder and made do. We sewed masks for ourselves and others. We snuck in a few minutes of writing between attempting to understand the new fourth-grade math and maintaining dramatically increased housework demands. (Who knew how much of our food had previously come from restaurants and the school cafeteria?) And we also sought to capture these experiences for posterity. We gathered reflections from RWSA members and friends recording how their lives—and particularly their relationships with food—had changed as a result of the pandemic. We offer these stories and reflections here as a collection of primary sources documenting a dramatic period in our lives, and as a first draft of a new history of early-twenty-first-century foodways.

*Backstories: The Kitchen Table Talk Cookbook* draws on a long tradition of women's clubs producing cookbooks as fundraisers for their organizations. As Rachel Snell ([Snell, Ch. 12, this volume](#)) and Mary Murphy ([Murphy, Ch. 14, this volume](#)) document in this volume, cookbooks were a common way for women's clubs and auxiliaries to raise funds for charitable causes; some three thousand community cookbooks were published between the US Civil War and World War I. Just as rural communities have generously shared to support one another and enrich each other's lives, so RWSA chooses to make electronic copies of this volume available free of charge. And like fundraising cookbooks of old, hard copies of *Backstories* will be sold to raise funds for RWSA's Jensen-Neth Fund, which provides scholarships for students, activists, and international scholars to attend RWSA conferences. As such, it supports and enables the kinds of global conversations that make RWSA conferences so valuable.

But *Backstories* is much more than just another fundraising cookbook. RWSA is an international association founded in 1997 to promote and advance farm and rural women's/gender studies in a historical perspective by encouraging research, promoting scholarship, and establishing and maintaining links with organizations that share these goals. As an organization that unites historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and community activists, within this volume we seek to unite those recipes and stories with interdisciplinary scholarship that explores the social, cultural, and economic relationships fostered by food production, preservation, and consumption. In so doing, we seek to elevate and promote scholarship on rural peoples and processes that are all too often overlooked. In this volume, we open windows onto the kinds of conversations that traditionally occurred over

hot stoves or in parlor circles. At the same time, we unpack scholarly analysis to make it approachable to non-specialists. We weave together recipes, memories, and analysis. We probe memories and consider popular culture.

Our cookbook presents diverse regional foodways across centuries. They range from simple eighteenth-century “receipts” to contemporary dishes. While current cookbooks often focus on one category of food, this volume reflects the RWSA’s aspiration to be a global forum. Our triennial conferences attract participants from Africa, Asia, Europe, and Oceania, but our membership still largely reflects the organization’s North American roots and origins in academic conferences. We had hoped that this volume could reflect our organization’s growing geographic and cultural diversity. Unfortunately, though perhaps not surprisingly, the recipes and scholarship that our members contributed to this volume come primarily from longtime members, most of them European-descended academics residing in North America. But that does not mean that they lack diversity. Our members’ contributions of both recipes and scholarship reflect the regional and community-level specificity that RWSA’s approach emphasizes.

The first section of this volume, “Studying Rural Women through Cookbooks,” explores different approaches to studying rural women. RWSA co-founder Joan Jensen and other longtime RWSA members provide a brief history of the Rural Women’s Studies Association ([Jensen at al., Ch. 2, this volume](#)). We then introduce various ways that RWSA scholars and others use cookbooks as primary sources. Rebecca Sharpless ([Sharpless, Ch. 3, this volume](#)) provides a historical introduction to how North American recipe books have changed over time, and how they can be mined by scholars to learn about changing foodways and women’s work. Across the Atlantic, Kathryn Harvey ([Harvey, Ch. 5, this volume](#)) explores changes in cookbooks over three centuries in Scotland. And Erna van Duren ([van Duren, Ch. 8, this volume](#)) highlights varied economic themes revealed in those changing recipe books. Recipes submitted by RWSA members demonstrate the research value of these recipes, and amplify the economic themes explored in van Duren’s essay.

The second section of this volume, “Community Cookbooks,” applies those lessons to studying cookbooks and recipe collections in specific times and places within North America. Together, these essays explore relationships of production, consumption, and community production. Rachel Snell ([Snell, Ch. 12, this volume](#)) focuses on rural foodways in early-twentieth-century Downeast Maine, and Mary Murphy ([Murphy, Ch. 14, this volume](#)) examines foodways in the US-Canada borderlands. Amy McKinney ([McKinney, Ch. 16, this volume](#)) demonstrates that women’s columns in a rural Montana newspaper constituted their own form of community cookbook. And Steph Noell ([Noell, Ch. 17, this volume](#)) shares historic tamale recipes from an invaluable archive of cookbooks from the US-Mexico borderlands. Representative recipes appear throughout these essays, serving as illustrations of this scholarship and offering cooks an opportunity to experience a taste of these varied places and time periods.

Katie Mayer’s ([Mayer, Ch. 18, this volume](#)) exploration and revisiting of Oregon community cookbooks in her archive serves as a bridge to our more personal

third section. “Nostalgia and Foodways” takes a more intimate look at the ways that recipes operate within families. Sara Morris ([Morris, Ch. 20, this volume](#)) reflects on the women in her family and their participation in a local rural newspaper’s recipe contest. Tracey Hanshew ([Hanshew, Ch. 27, this volume](#)) reviews her family’s kitchen table as an epicenter for honing domestic skills and addressing the challenges of rural life. Joseph Cates ([Cates, Ch. 24, this volume](#)) records oral traditions of his Grandmama’s cooking. Throughout this section, RWSA members share beloved heirloom recipes, exploring many lessons that we can learn from their varied food memories.

Section Four, “Politics and Authority,” investigates the various ways that foodways have been taught and demonstrates that they are valuable window into agrarianism. Sara Egge ([Egge, Ch. 40, this volume](#)) explores wartime adaptations in foodways, and the ways that early-twentieth-century American women used food and recipes to bridge political and cultural divides. Jenny Barker Devine ([Barker Devine, Ch. 44, this volume](#)) examines the ways that government agencies sought to influence farm women’s relationships to food in the mid-twentieth century. And Pamela Riney-Kehrberg ([Riney-Kehrberg, Ch. 45, this volume](#)) suggests ways that we engage our twenty-first-century students around foodways to help them think critically about agriculture and rural life. Recipes in this section highlight the ways that cooks were introduced to new products and explored new flavors.

Our final section explores contemporary “Twenty-First-Century Foodways.” Cynthia Prescott ([Prescott, Ch. 48, this volume](#)) examines the role of the media in shaping constructions of rural womanhood in the early twenty-first century. Just as our lives changed suddenly in March 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 virus, so this volume shifts gears substantially in this section. We close this volume with both scholarship and informal reflections on how a global pandemic affected our relationships to food and domestic labor as we prepared this volume for press in Spring 2020. Through these short pieces, we seek to document a dramatic period in our daily lives and offer reflections on what COVID-19 revealed about our place within an increasingly global food chain.

Throughout this volume, we integrate formal scholarship with informal reflections, analyses of recipe books with heirloom recipes, and text with images to emphasize the ways that economics, politics, and personal meaning come together to shape our changing relationships with food. By embracing elements of history, rural studies, and women’s studies, *Backstories: The Kitchen Table Talk Cookbook* offers a unique perspective relating food history with social dynamics. It is sure to inspire eclectic dining and conversations.

Cynthia C. Prescott and Maureen S. Thompson, editors  
March 2021