

**UNUSUAL ARCHIVES AND UNCONVENTIONAL
AUTOBIOGRAPHIES:
INTERPRETING THE EXPERIENCE OF RURAL IOWA WOMEN,
1940-1985**

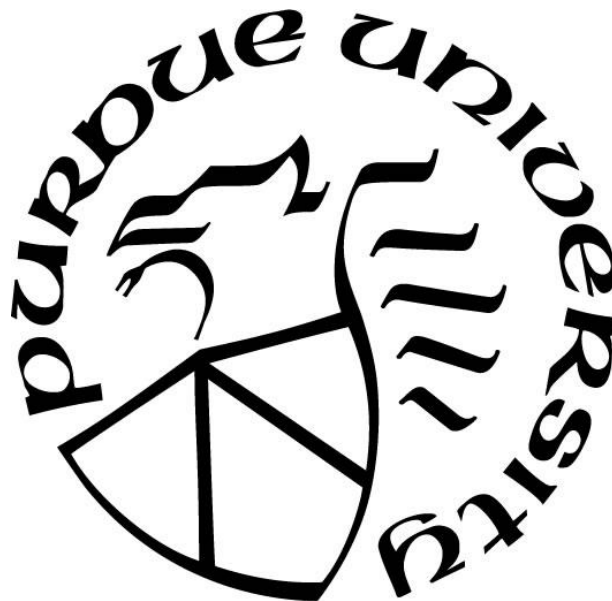
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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of Purdue University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy



Department of American Studies

West Lafayette, Indiana

December 2018

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The teachers and advisors I have had are the dream of any scholar. Without Dr. Janice Brandon-Falcone from Northwest Missouri State University I would never have applied for a Ph.D. My committee members, Dr. Kristina Bross and Dr. Nancy Gabin taught the first courses I took at Purdue, those and subsequent courses drew me to questions of archives and memory and twentieth-century social and women's history, and Dr. Bill Mullen led me on a trip to China that expanded my understanding of the experience of women in entirely new ways. Dr. Susan Curtis is absolutely the finest teacher, advisor, committee chair, and Iowa girl and this paper would not exist without her insight and encouragement.

I need to thank the "Stephens 15" for sharing their materials, stories, and the encouragement one can only receive from beloved aunts and uncles. My desire to understand the experience of their mother, my grandmother, Maxine Beymer Stephens drove every inch of this work: from Maquoketa to Iowa City, Des Moines, Fairfield, Red Oak, Sidney, Shenandoah, Coburg, Ames, Story City, and finally home to Diagonal.

I must thank all of the museum volunteers and families whose "saving" made this work possible, especially Mark Shafer at the Carnegie Historical Museum in Fairfield, Iowa and Judy Herzog for the loan of her mother's diary, David McFarland from the Montgomery County Historical Society and Museum in Red Oak, Arlene Sobotka and Carol Lee Bentley from the Diagonal Printer's Museum, and Dennis Wendell from the Ames Historical Center. Very few of these people receive any compensation for their work- they save papers, accession collections, and reply to phone calls and emails from people like me because of their desire to preserve and share the history of their ancestors and communities.

In the end, I discovered exactly what I knew all along: every woman has a story, although most are unaware of the manner of their own authorship. In the stories of these everyday women and their contemporaries, lay the foundations of twentieth-century Iowa history.

In building their families and communities each day, women wove the fabric of rural Iowa life, making a mark on the times in which they lived in subtle yet powerful ways.

Investigating the nontraditional ways women documented and preserved their experiences is an exercise with immense potential.

As this study demonstrates, nothing in life is sustained without meals and childcare and the research and writing of this paper is further proof. My deepest gratitude to Dick and Donna Elliott and John and Karleen Stephens for caring for my children, Alice and John, and to my husband, Brad for caring for me- your love increases the meaning and joy of my life exponentially.

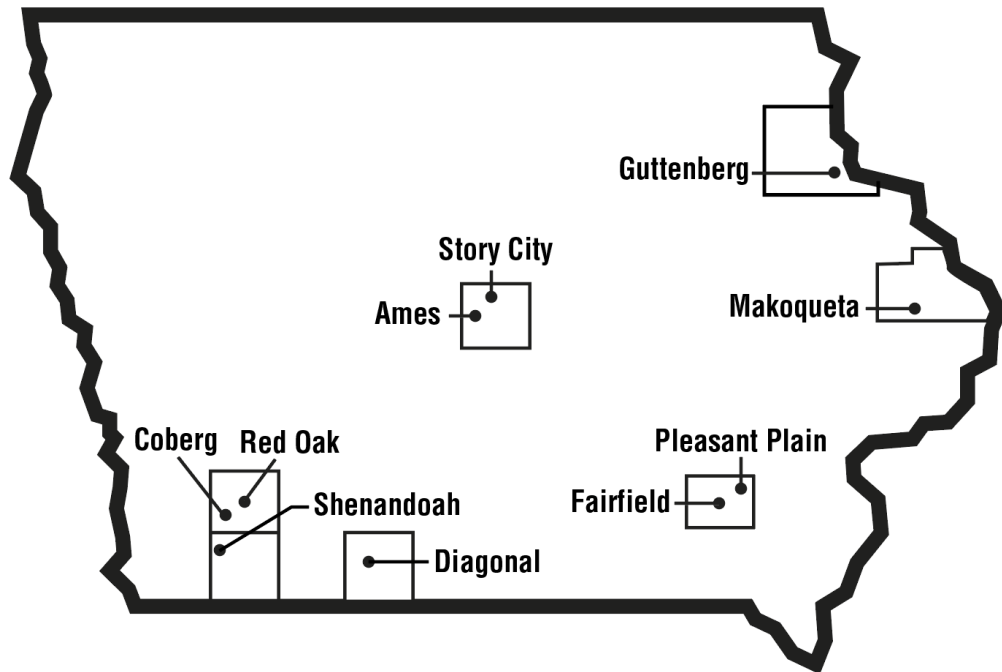


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ABSTRACT

Author: Elliott, Abby, Stephens. Doctor of Philosophy
 Institution: Purdue University
 Degree Received: December 2018
 Title: Unusual Archives and Unconventional Autobiographies: Interpreting the Experience of Rural Iowa Women, 1940-1985
 Committee Chair: Susan Curtis

This study analyzes eleven collections created, saved, and preserved by rural Iowa women, during the middle of the twentieth-century to interpret change in the experience of rural American women, and consider their role in the preservation of historical evidence. Analysis of privately-held and institutional collections of calendars, journals, scrapbooks, notebooks, and club meeting records provides details of farm life, rural communities in transition, and the way collection creators conceptualized and enacted the identity of rural womanhood. In making decisions about which events to write down in a journal or clip-and-save from the local newspaper, these women “performed archivalness” in preserving their experience for family and community members and scholars.

The women who created the collections considered in this study experienced a rural landscape altered by the continuation and aftermath of agricultural specialization, mechanization, and capital consolidation. These changes altered rural community systems, economies, and institutions reshaping the experience of rural womanhood, as women upheld and adjusted the norms and values that defined the rural way of life. This study takes a three-part approach to considering the eleven collections as case studies. Chapter two analyzes five of the collections as unconventional forms of autobiographical writing, finding that nowhere else were women truer to themselves and their experiences

than in their daily writing. In journals or on calendars, these women wrote their life stories by recording the daily details of work, motherhood, and marriage, and occasionally providing subtle commentary on local and national events. Changes in women's work, education, responsibilities in marriage and motherhood, and involvement in public life and civic affairs happened in gradual and rapid ways during the middle of the twentieth-century. The third chapter in this study analyzes the collections of three women who used their writing to document, prescribe, and promote notions of rural womanhood during this time of change. Chapter four provides a meditation on the relationship between evidence and history by examining the ways in which three women performed archivalness in creating their collections. Consideration of the means by which the collections have been saved, provides insight into the importance of everyday individuals in the preservation of historical evidence.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Nearly every day from 1957 to 1975 Maxine Beymer Stephens recorded the activity of her family and farm on the calendars that hung in her farmhouse kitchen. She chronicled the weather, family illnesses, the purchase and sale of livestock and implement, community events, visits with friends, and the many school and extra-curricular activities of her fifteen children in the south-central Iowa town of Diagonal. It seems that no event was too trivial to miss the register of the calendar.

Stephens's biography is not the material of anthologies on remarkable American women; it includes her Presbyterian baptism, high school graduation, marriage, the births of her fifteen children, and her death in 1975 at the age of fifty-four. To researchers however, the musty paper sack of crumbling calendars saved by her son, document the life of a Midwestern farmwoman in the middle of the twentieth-century when the meanings of agriculture, family, community, and rural womanhood were undergoing tremendous redefinition.

This study investigates change in the twentieth-century rural Midwestern woman's experience by considering eleven collections created, saved, and preserved by rural Iowa women. Using collections of calendar entries, like Stephens's, as well as diaries, letters, recipe cards, club meeting notes, cut-and-pasted newspaper clippings, and other "scraps" of history, this study provides glimpses into the daily lives of the everyday women who created the collections, helping reconstruct the rural Iowa women's experience from the Second World War to the 1980s, through the voices of the women themselves. When read in the context of women's, rural, and agricultural history the

records reveal the meanings and nature of “rural womanhood” from the perspective of the women who lived and defined its boundaries.

Using privately-held as well as institutional archival collections increases understanding of the way mid-twentieth-century Iowa women perceived and performed rural womanhood. The everyday collections created by the women considered in this study offer a type of autobiographical testimony of their lived experiences. Through the homemade archives they created we can uncover how women who did not author memoirs or reflect upon their experiences to any significant degree, made self-conscious choices about how to interpret and represent their experiences, in choosing which newspaper clippings or recipes to save or which events to record in diaries or on calendars.¹ The collections also contain the stories of how assortments of material, largely ephemeral in nature, have been spared destruction and the significant role played by both private and institutional savers, as well as that of researchers and scholars in saving and interpreting history.

Analysis of these collections challenges previously held assumptions about the lives of twentieth-century rural Midwestern women, by considering the way they experienced, interpreted, and documented their lives- in their own words. The collections considered in this study offer more than the details of farm life or rural communities in transition, they uncover the way everyday women conceptualized and enacted the identity of rural womanhood.

¹ Janet Theophano, *Eat My Words: Reading Women's Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 122. This study takes much from Theophano's approach, which focuses on how women's cookbooks are forms of autobiographical writing and can greatly expand our understanding of women's lives.

The methodological questions at the heart of this study are first: in what ways did these women record their daily experiences and what is the meaning of their records as life histories? Second, what must be considered in using the collections to better understand their creators, the other women whose experiences they might represent, and more broadly, the times in which they lived? And finally, what can be understood about the nature of historical saving and interpretation by analyzing the role of collection creators, keepers, and researchers in the archival process?²

This study takes a three-part approach to considering the collections created by rural Iowa women as case studies. First is consideration of the collections as unconventional forms of autobiographical writing. Each collection offers evidence of the experience of rural Iowa women, in her own words, documented in often-overlooked places and forms. Through succinct notes made in diaries, family calendars, club meeting notes, ordinary rural women recorded their life stories. The collections are not deliberately autobiographical because the creators did not author their collections as intended life histories, however, chapter two analyzes the performances of women as they created the collections as “autobiographical acts” meeting the standard of autobiographical writing.³ A daily diary, annotated kitchen calendar, homespun recipe book, letter requesting advice in a rural homemaking magazine, or materials selected and pasted into a scrapbook, each require an act of self-construction.⁴ The autobiographical act of self-construction is the same for the woman who keeps a diary or handcrafted

² Suzanne L. Bunkers, “‘Faithful Friend’: Nineteenth-Century Midwestern American Women’s Unpublished Diaries,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 10 (1987), 9. Bunkers’ approach to studying diaries is useful in approaching the range of collection forms considered in this study.

³ Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women’s Diaries* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), vii.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

cookbook as it is for those acknowledged as authors of “autobiography proper:” they each refuse their own anonymity by documenting their experience; they define themselves, interpret their interactions with others, view their life and work as important by creating a forum for commentary on relationships and events, and record what might otherwise go unexpressed in daily life.⁵

The second arm of the approach in this study is consideration of the unconventional autobiographical collections in the context of their contribution to the fields of twentieth-century women’s history and rural and agricultural history. Chapter three sheds light on the tidal wave of changes experienced by rural American women during the twentieth-century. Dramatic changes in women’s work, education, responsibilities in marriage and motherhood, and involvement in public life and civic affairs happened in gradual and rapid ways.⁶ At the same time, all of rural America experienced vast change resulting from the mechanization and corporatization of agriculture, which had immense consequences not only for the economies of rural communities, but also for the social and cultural ways of rural American life. Evidence created by the women considered in this study demonstrates how meanings of “rural womanhood” evolved during this time of immense change to life in rural America.

More than considering the way these collections give voice to the life stories of women experiencing rural life at a critical juncture in American history, the final approach of this study considers the way these women, and people who have subsequently exercised authority over their collections “performed archivalness” by

⁵ Bunkers, “Faithful Friend,” 8; Theophano, 121-122.

⁶ Authors chronicling twentieth-century social and cultural changes in the woman’s experience include, among others: Nancy Cott, Ruth Schwartz Cowan, Susan Hartmann, Eugenia Kaledin, Linda Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, Gerda Lerner, Elaine Tyler May, and Joanne Meyerowitz.

creating, preserving, and interpreting their experiences, for the historical record.⁷ Chapter four includes a meditation on the relationship between evidence and history through an examination of the collections as “performances of archivalness” in everyday ways by historical actors, often unnoticed as they created their own “unusual archives.” As the women in this study created, maintained, and preserved their collections they made choices about which historical records would endure for their family members, communities, and scholars.⁸ By performing archivalness in making decisions regarding which events to write down or clip-and-save from the local newspaper, they created records demonstrating change in rural womanhood during the twentieth-century. Also considered is the significant role and authority exercised by individuals, institutions, and scholars in saving, interpreting, and understanding historical evidence through archival collections.

Historians like to study the extraordinary efforts of humans: large-scale change, progress that reshapes civilization for all time, or individuals with remarkable creations or ideas. Throughout history, the work of women has run contrary to these themes. As a whole, the daily work of women has been ephemeral and tangential to the events often considered as markers of historical change. Meals cooked, gardens weeded, and clothes sewn are the actions that keep life stable for everyone else. To decipher what was on the minds of everyday women, everyday sources have to be analyzed, where women can be heard speaking for themselves. Nowhere else were women truer to themselves and their experiences than in their daily, personal writing. Even inaccuracies are valuable because

⁷ Ellen Gruber Garvey, *Writing with Scissors: American Scrapbooks from the Civil War to the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 20.

⁸ Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry J. Katz, and Mary Elizabeth Perry, *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

they were not intended as inaccuracies, but nonetheless represent the intricacies of the private lives of women.⁹

The “unusual archives” in this study were most likely never intended for historical research, just as their creators never intended the collections to serve as their own autobiographies; but by reading the individual compilation as autobiographical writing and its own “unusual” archive, the collections in this study provide evidence of the changing experience of rural womanhood from in the words and actions of the rural women themselves: their voices can be heard in the silences, if we can understand how to listen for them.

For a long time scholars viewed women’s journaling or letter writing as private writing dedicated largely, if not entirely, to trivial or mundane daily events. But in working to understand the social experiences of everyday Americans, especially women, historians broadened their lens to the arena of domestic life and have come to depend on the types of private writings that house the details of women’s personal, family, and household experiences. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich reconstructed the life of an eighteenth-century American midwife by close-reading a diary previously dismissed by scholars for its trivial domestic detail. Ulrich found that within the very “daily-ness” of the writing lay the diary’s authority in answering questions of women’s social history.¹⁰

Without the records considered in this study we would know more about the lives of twentieth-century rural women than the eighteenth-century midwife of Ulrich’s study, but we would still be limited largely to vital events and documented interactions within

⁹ Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 2, 14-15.

¹⁰ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 9.

their communities, and as Ulrich demonstrated, this is not enough. To understand the broader composition of their lives, historians need to seek records that provide insight into the commonplace experiences of individual women.¹¹ The dramas constituting private life: marriage, pregnancy, birth, illness, desire, self-sacrifice, and beyond, are the dramas of women's lives.¹² Intimate and seemingly trivial accounts capture the experiences of women and give voice to their stories, their perspectives on society or culture, and the experiences of their families and communities. The intimate records of women's lives provide scholars with an avenue for interpreting the experiences of everyday women as they experienced change.¹³

This study does not present the lives of women as biography but applies an up-close lens to the histories of women in rural Iowa during the middle of the twentieth-century. Rather than considering these historical actors through demographic data or theoretical models, the study starts with the voices of everyday women, recorded by their own hands.

Because there is no such thing as a "typical" or "ordinary" woman, no single woman's collection is meant to be typical or to represent all rural Iowa women. Every collection creator in this study has an individual experience that must be placed in geographic, ethnic, or socio-economic context and considered in light of the historical and cultural events of the period in which she lived. But however particular an individual experience might be, each collection can provide insight into the experiences of other women. The individual collections created by rural women open the conversation and

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Theophano, 7.

¹³ Ulrich, 9; Theophano, 3.

provide opportunities to analyze how rural women as a whole might have identified with similar themes regardless of the particulars of their lived experiences.¹⁴

The women whose collections are considered in this study are similar in geography and race and somewhat in class, but they are by no means a homogenous group; each woman experienced and responded to the times in which she lived differently. The value of each collection is not merely in the details and events that can be mined from closely analyzing the sparse writings and assorted “scraps” of history these women left behind, but also in interpreting their personalities and self-perceptions, in light of their experience of particular historical moments.¹⁵

As evidence of the unique experiences of different rural Iowa women during the middle of the twentieth-century, the collections in this study are valuable records of social history because they are nearly all privately-created writings, often the only documents their creators left behind, and they primarily present their creator’s lives in their own words. Each collection provides a unique position from which to consider changing notions of rural womanhood.¹⁶

By looking within and beyond collections held by institutional archives to collections held privately by families, organizations, or by volunteer-run historical societies and museums, this study illuminates the lives of women whose experiences are can be typical, but also often also quite exceptional to common narratives about midwestern rural womanhood.

¹⁴ For discussion of “typical” women see: Bunkers, “Faithful Friend,” 8, 15; where used in this study the term is meant to mean women who achieved little notoriety.

¹⁵ Ibid., 15.

¹⁶ Ibid., 7.

In addition to the Stephens calendars, discussed previously as an illustration of the questions raised in this analysis, this study investigates ten other collections that demonstrate the value of interpreting unconventional autobiographical writing, investigating the themes governing changing notions of rural womanhood, and examining the range of archival “performances” at work in uncovering the stories of these women.

In rural Ames, Iowa, one hundred and twenty miles to the north of Stephens’s farm, Ruth Ringgenberg Matson also used the ephemeral space of the calendar in her farmhouse kitchen to record the daily events of her family. Matson’s calendars are very similar in form to Stephens’s; most were complimentary gifts from seed corn companies, farm industry organizations, and local businesses. Both collections were maintained during the same time period. Matson’s collection begins in 1947 and runs through 1999, but the composition of the calendars changes drastically after 1982- the year in which Matson and her husband sold their farm and moved “to town.”¹⁷

Comparison of the Stephens and Matson calendar collections reveals similar daily experiences that reflect a mid-century rural womanhood centered on motherhood, marriage, labor, and community participation. Both sets of calendars include entries about the birth, butchering, and sale of beef, poultry, and swine; attending basketball games at the local high school for Stephens or in Matson’s case, at Iowa State College, doctor’s appointments for children, weather conditions, church events, and more.

Across the state at the Jackson County Historical Society in northeast Iowa, Madge Lotspeich’s scrapbook of recipes is on display in the historical society museum’s

¹⁷ Ruth Ringgenberg Matson, “Calendar Collection,” Ames Historical Society, Ames, Iowa.

“farmhouse kitchen” exhibit.¹⁸ An initial survey of the book indicates Lotspeich’s leadership in local Homemaker Extension efforts.¹⁹ Like handwritten notes on the farm calendars, a scrapbook of handwritten recipes and how-to advice cut from *Farm Journal* magazine or Iowa State College Extension publications is a rather commonplace piece of historical evidence. But within the handwritten recipe cards and “scraps” cut from publications is evidence of the redefinition of twentieth-century rural womanhood experienced by an unmarried, home demonstration club leader in the years following World War II, when demonstration work was not only about “making neater button holes” but improving democracy by making female citizens well-informed in world affairs.²⁰ Lotspeich’s handmade cookbook is maintained on exhibit, in the museum’s model of a twentieth-century farm kitchen, demonstrating how public historians, archivists, or volunteers not only preserve historical evidence for scholars or descendants, but also how they use it to interpret and share history with the broader public.

While Lotspeich appeared in the local society pages for her club activities, Nola Simpson cut-and-pasted such stories into the 20” x 24” scrapbooks of newspaper clippings she maintained from 1909 until her death in 1984, after which, the scrapbooks were donated to a local museum in the small southern Iowa farming town of Diagonal.²¹ Simpson’s own activities appear only occasionally in her scrapbook pages; overwhelmingly the newspaper clippings record the lives of other community members

¹⁸ Madge Lotspeich, “Scrapbook of Recipes,” Jackson County Historical Society, Maquoketa, Iowa.

¹⁹ Historical interpretation of Homemaker Extension agents, experts, and local leaders is complicated, see Sarah Sage and Virginia B. Vincenti, eds., *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

²⁰ Jane Adams, “The *Farm Journal*’s Discourse of Farm Women’s Femininity,” *Anthropology and Humanism* 29 (2004), 51.

²¹ Arlene Sobotka, interview by author 10 July 2015, Diagonal, Iowa.

as they married, raised children, purchased and managed farms and businesses- all life events that Simpson herself never experienced.²²

Mildred Wiley Turnbull, like Stephens and Simpson, spent most of her life in the rural southern Iowa farming town of Diagonal. Turnbull experienced nearly the entire twentieth-century, born in 1905 and dying sixth months before her one-hundredth birthday in 2005. The events of her life paralleled the dramatic changes in American rural life: she finished eighth grade in country school before completing high school “in town” and taught in a one-room country school for a few years after her high school graduation. After attending college, she became a high school teacher and quitting upon her marriage to become her husband’s partner in running the local newspaper for thirty-five years. When her husband’s health failed, they followed their son’s migration from the Midwest to the state of Washington.²³ Through the observations she shared in her newspaper column, “Bird Notes” Turnbull articulated the rural way of life and values for her readers. Containing the stories of residents from the community of less than six hundred, the newspaper is a record of small-town Iowa life; it chronicles the comings and goings and burdens and pleasures that made up the mid-twentieth-century rural way of life. ²⁴

It is possible that Stephens, Lotspeich, Simpson, and Turnbull were all connected through their “radio friend” Leanna Field Driftmier. Driftmier was a pioneering female presence in rural American radio as host of the program “Kitchen-Klatter” and editor of the companion magazine from 1926 until her death in 1976. In the pages of the monthly magazine Driftmier responded to letters from readers and radio program listeners

²² Nola Simpson, “Scrapbook Collection: Books 1-15,” Diagonal Printing Museum, Diagonal, Iowa.

²³ “Mildred Wiley Turnbull Obituary,” *Creston News Advertiser*, Creston, Iowa, 17 May 2005.

²⁴ Liz Wiley and Judy Newton eds., *Diagonal Centennial History, 1888-1988*.

providing advice on everything from personal appearance to baking pies, raising children to raising poultry, working outside the home and getting along with neighbors.²⁵

Grounding her advice in the social and cultural values of rural womanhood, Driftmier's collection reflects mid-century changes to idealized notions of marriage and motherhood.

Falling at the beginning of the time period under consideration, Dorothy Orr Kainz's daily diary from 1941 documents her family's experience on a farm in northeast Iowa. Wisconsin-born Kainz followed her second-generation immigrant husband across the Mississippi river to a farm near the town of Guttenberg where she died in childbirth in 1952 leaving ten surviving children.²⁶ The details of her daily experience of farm life, documented in her 1941 diary, contribute to understandings of rural life and changing notions of rural womanhood before the end of the Second World War.

In the secondary section of the library at the Montgomery County History Center in Red Oak, Iowa are "The Personal Journals of Mrs. Sidney Beam" maintained by Hazel Beam, town clerk of the southwest Iowa town of Coburg from 1945 to 1967.²⁷ Beam's collection documents her experience of life in a small farming village that recorded a population of fifty-four in 1962. Coburg changed little after the loss of the railroad for which the town had been platted and settled.²⁸ As town clerk the two decades of Beam's journals document the activities of town citizens and relatives and detail the intricacies of rural community and life. While the journals serve as a detailed record of Beam's own

²⁵ Leanna Driftmier, ed., *Kitchen-Klatter* (Shenandoah, IA: Driftmier Publishing Company: 1926-1976); *Kitchen-Klatter* Magazine was issued to 90,000 women during the 1950s, at the height of circulation.

²⁶ "Last Rites Held Friday at Elkader: 10 Children Survive Well Known Resident," *Garnaville Tribune*, Guttenberg, Iowa, 10 April 1952.

²⁷ Hazel Beam, "Personal Journals of Mrs. Sidney (Hazel) Beam 1957-1986," Montgomery County History Center, Red Oak, Iowa.

²⁸ *History of Montgomery County: Containing a History of the County, Its Cities, Towns, etc.*, (Des Moines: Iowa Historical and Biographical Company, 1881), 484.

life, they are also the sole historical record of one of many railroad “ghost towns” that vanished throughout the rural Midwest during the twentieth-century.

The involvement of rural Iowa women in public life is evident in many of the collections, although most participation is limited to one’s nearby community. The collections of Dorothy Houghton and Teresa Mottet however, document the involvement of rural women in public life beyond Iowa’s borders.

As the national president of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs from 1950 to 1952, Dorothy Houghton of the southwest Iowa town of Red Oak believed that enacting rural womanhood themes was crucial to winning the Cold War.²⁹ Houghton’s scrapbook is an account of her activism through newspaper clippings, correspondence, and photographs. Houghton was known nationally for her position as the president of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, and the Montgomery County Historical Center in Red Oak has saved her collection, as a person of local remark. Much can be understood about Houghton’s conceptualization of rural womanhood from the items Houghton chose to include in her scrapbook.³⁰

For Houghton in the 1950s political activism was centered on spreading American conservative values abroad in the name of fighting the Cold War, but rural women have acted politically for a range of causes. The collection of Teresa Mottet, a farmwife from the southeast Iowa farming community of Pleasant Plain represents women’s activism on the liberal end of the political spectrum and includes materials gathered during a trip to Washington, DC in 1985 for a peace march commemorating the fortieth anniversary of

²⁹ Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982).

³⁰ “Dorothy Deemer Houghton Collection,” Montgomery County History Center, Red Oak, Iowa.

the atomic bomb.³¹ Mottet's activism was a joint effort with her husband Francis and stemmed from their involvement in the Catholic Church, Democratic Party, and National Farmer's Organization.³²

Identifying the voices of everyday women through the records they left behind is expanded when sources like calendars, hand-made cookbooks, and scrapbooks are considered, but the voices of many historical actors are sometimes not available in even the most unconventional forms of individual records. Collective records, such as those maintained by community clubs, provide a source for analyzing the experiences of historical actors who left no other traces. While these records focus on group endeavors, they are created by individuals and offer a lead to follow in understanding more about the lives of everyday rural women in Iowa.

The meeting minutes and related materials in the Owl Country Club contribute to this study as a source for women's collective voices and evidence of the role of community networks in mid-twentieth-century rural life. For nearly eighty years residents of rural Story County Iowa met with the purpose of "gathering knowledge as the wise Owl" through evening club meetings of the Owl Country Club. Founded in 1919, and limited to twenty-two families, the club was intended to educate young people and develop community agriculture through lectures and demonstrations. The record books and meeting notes are archives of community activity and reflect the function of community participation in notions of rural womanhood. While only male names can be found on the president and vice president officer lists, club members always elected a woman to the combined secretary/treasurer role. In keeping meeting notes, making the

³¹ "MottetPeaceCollection," Carnegie Historical Museum, Fairfield, Iowa.

³² Ibid.

club calendar, and serving on the club's card committee the female secretary/treasurers of Owl Country Club engaged in autobiographical acts and performed archivalness for themselves and their communities. The club record books they created provide a window for analyzing the function of community affairs in rural life and the role community involvement played in the identity of rural womanhood.³³

Outline of Chapters

Chapter 2: The Unique Experience of Rural Women Documented in Unconventional Autobiographical Collections

The eleven women's collections considered in this study were not chosen because they represent the whole of the rural midwestern, or even the Iowa woman's experience during the middle of the twentieth-century, but because of the way they reveal particular experiences and changes to important aspects of rural womanhood: from work to motherhood, marriage, rural culture, and social life. This study analyzes evidence of these changes in the words of the rural women themselves, through the collections they created and saved.³⁴ Exploring the way women shared their experiences in forms not often considered autobiographical writing, such as daily calendars, diaries, or scrapbooks, chapter two analyzes the collections of five rural women as autobiographical writing, in order to bring the stories of rural women out of the silences and allow the women to author their own accounting of their lived experience.

³³ "Owl County Club Collection: Record Books: 1955-1965, 1965-1975, 1975-1984," Story City Historical Society, Story City, Iowa. In record books spanning the eighty-year history of the club a woman is always listed as club secretary with male members listed as the other two club officers of president and vice president.

³⁴ Antoinette Burton, ed., *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 1.

Scholars of women's autobiography have long argued for an expanded definition of the genre to include diaries, letters, memoirs and forms of a similar nature. These examples of a broadened definition of autobiography correspond better with the fragmented nature of women's lives and daily work centered on domestic life. These forms have also been more socially acceptable for women to create than traditional autobiographical writing.³⁵ Estelle Jelinek argues that both the genre forms considered autobiography "proper" and the more personal, unconventional writings of women are foundationally the same: etymologically and in practice, they each tell the story of a person's life. Women who were unable, uninterested, or unempowered to write anything more extensive than an event on a calendar, a line in a diary, a note in the margin of a cookbook, nevertheless recorded their life stories in forms that were compatible with their lives.³⁶ In her study of the autobiographical nature of cookbooks, Janet Theophano argues that the moment a woman wrote her name in the cover of a cookbook she committed an act of autobiographical writing by refusing her anonymity.³⁷ The collections considered in this study were often the only methods for women to, self-consciously or not, make themselves visible to the historical record.

Most sources of women's writing do not follow the conventions of traditional autobiography: they are not often intentionally reflective, rarely take narrative form, they were not meant to relate the events of their lives to important events of the time, or carry to a consistent "sense of self" throughout. Nevertheless, women's writing in forms like diaries or letters contain "autobiographical acts" or spaces where the creators provided a

³⁵ Bunkers, "Faithful Friend," 8.

³⁶ Estelle Jelinek, *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1980), 6.

³⁷ Theophano, 121-122.

first-hand accounting of the times in which they lived, including brief moments of reflection or self-portrayal.³⁸

Considering the collections in this study as autobiographical writing uncovers evidence of the mid-twentieth-century rural Midwestern woman's experience in her own words, found in often overlooked places. In reading these collections we can interpret how women understood their own identities: devoted mother and wife, expert homemaker, thoughtful friend, community leader, citizen, and beyond. The collections are full of details of their creator's everyday reality documenting the tasks in which they took pride and the social and cultural ideals they upheld.³⁹

As sources of social history these collections are valuable because they contain the daily and often mundane details of rural women's experiences. The self-reflection often characteristic to autobiography "proper" is not present in these unconventional forms; they are instead presented without censorship or selection. The special events of the author's life are not prioritized over what would be found trivial upon a second reading. The remarkable and the trivial are both documented, side-by-side.⁴⁰

Although collections in this study are often compilations of idiosyncratic or irregular writing, when studying their creators as authors of their own life stories, narrative can be found. Stephens's calendars contain configurations of lines and numbers that originally operated to signify the passing of time, but now provide chronological form to the narrative of Stephens's "autobiography." Stephens is her own editor: recording notes in haste or perfected penmanship or switching from pen ink to pencil

³⁸ Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 1960); Bunkers, "Faithful Friend," 18. Bunkers and Jelinek both used Pascal's definition of autobiography.

³⁹ Theophano, 122-123.

⁴⁰ Bunkers and Huff, *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*, 6.

graphite, and a strike-through or erasure provides evidence that Stephens found it worthwhile to give this chronicle of her life an accurate accounting.

Comparison of the Stephens and Matson calendars lends to analysis of the collections as “folk autobiographies” and the rhetorical connection of autobiographical writing and mnemonic activity and practice.⁴¹ The sets of calendars offer much evidence in the way of the economic, social, and cultural experience of mid-twentieth-century rural womanhood. Notes on poultry, dairy, gardening, butchering, preserving, making, and mending demonstrates their role if these two farmwives as laborers and producers. Notes ranging from the birth of a new child to the labor of a teenage son on a neighbor’s farm demonstrate the farmwoman’s position as labor producer and manager on and beyond the family farm. Calendar entries document the centrality of motherhood and marriage to rural womanhood: illnesses, medical treatments, educational activities, travel, and social visits recorded on the calendars demonstrate the farmwoman’s role in ensuring the well-being and happiness of household members. Labor, wifely duties, and mothering would seem to leave little room for rural women to engage in civic life, but the Matson and Stephens calendars note events of national significance, religious club meetings, and visits with friends. Comparison of the two calendar collections document similarities in their performances of the rural womanhood identity as both women placed mothering and marriage at the center of their lives and sharing their protestant religiosity with their families was a primary avenues to community life. More can be understood about the identity of rural womanhood by looking at the dissimilarities and the ways they characterize a the fluidity in notions of rural womanhood that characterize the twentieth-

⁴¹ Liz Rohan, “I Remember Mamma: Material Rhetoric, Mnemonic Activity, and Once Woman’s Turn of the Century Quilt,” 23 *Rhetoric Review* 23 (2004): 368-387.

century: Stephens rarely left her farm, likely because of her large family size and lack of a driver's license, while Matson's daily experiences included social outings at the college in Ames, just miles from their home, and civic involvement in service to the county and state Farm Bureau organization.⁴²

Looking at Lotspeich's collection through the autobiographical lens reveals an unconventional form of life-writing. The hand-made cookbook composed of clippings of household hints, recipes from newspapers, homemaker's extension publications, as well as Lotspeich's hand-copied recipes, provides opportunity to consider the centrality of foodways to the lives of rural women. Many women probably created hand-made cookbooks like Lotspeich's, which upon later evaluation by creators or their descendants were deemed unremarkable and discarded.⁴³

The fact that Lotspeich never married provides another angle for analyzing the experience of rural life in mid-twentieth-century Iowa and demonstrates the importance of avoiding the homogenous treatment of rural Iowa women. Lotspeich did not have family members directly under her care and did not herself, enact the themes of marriage and motherhood so central to rural womanhood. Lotspeich's life as a single woman afforded her the free time to engage in an active public life. Rather than in her own home much of Lotspeich's performance of rural womanhood took place in her community through her involvement in local homemaker's extension, employment as a librarian, and service as secretary of the local chapter of the Business and Professional Women's club. Each

⁴² Interviews with Maxine Beymer Stephens family, conducted by Author 2011-2012; "Maxine Beymer Stephens Calendars, 1955-1976," Author's possession, Mount Ayr, Iowa; Ruth Ringgenberg Matson, "Ringgenberg Family Collection," Ames Historical Society, Ames, Iowa.

⁴³ Theophano, 5. Theophano's analysis of a range of cookbooks created by American women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is critical to understanding various forms of unconventional women's autobiography, particularly Lotspeich's handmade cookbook.

experience provided Lotspeich the opportunity to serve as an authority in preserving and enacting rural culture and social life as well as domestic ideology. Though not a farmwoman, Lotspeich's involvement in the area homemaker's extension council demonstrates the reach of the organization beyond the farmwomen it was originally organized to serve under the federal Smith-Lever Act passed in 1914.⁴⁴ Lotspeich's homemaker extension work reveals the scope of domestic science work and interest in middle-class standards of modernity and consumerism throughout the rural Midwest.⁴⁵

Chapter 3: Forces of Community: Midcentury Rural Womanhood in Iowa

Chapter three focuses on the way the collections build upon, and contribute to, the historiographies of twentieth-century women's history and rural and agricultural history. Each collection reveals something about the way these women negotiated, sometimes challenging and sometimes affirming, the boundaries of mid-twentieth-century rural womanhood, improving our understanding of the evolution of the rural woman's experience in America's heartland, during the middle of the twentieth-century.

Benefitting from the rural history methodology that emerged from the work of the new social historians, this study interprets the way women were affected by changes in the meaning and significance of agricultural and rural life. Building upon the historiography of rural women's history, which has burgeoned since the 1990s, this analysis considers the position of rural women within the broader context of the experience of American women in the twentieth-century.

⁴⁴ Eleanor Arnold ed., *Voices of American Homemakers: An Oral History Project of the National Extension Homemakers Council* (Bloomington, IN: Metropolitan Printing Services, Inc., 1985).

⁴⁵ Lotspeich, "Scrapbook of Recipes."

Prior to the shift inspired by the new social history agricultural historians focused on traditional topics of farming practices and shifts in the agricultural economy, largely ignoring social aspects of rural life, including women. While more Americans had lived in urban areas since the 1920s, the new social historians were the first to recognize the significance of this shift to modern American history, identifying traditional aspects of rural life that were largely disappearing by the 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁶ These shift breathed life into the fields of agricultural and rural history, broadening the umbrella to welcome historians studying urban and rural relations, economics, consumerism, foodways, material culture, and gender.⁴⁷

While the parameters for agricultural and rural history had been broadened by the approaches of new social history, which focused on family, women, work, community, education, religion, and ethnicity- finding evidence with which to interpret the lives of rural women proved difficult. Some scholars blamed rural women themselves for being too busy or uneducated to leave records, while other scholars concluded that rural women had simply been ignored.⁴⁸ As a whole, the experience of rural women remained on the margins of rural and agricultural history until female scholars stepped-up and worked to fill the gap in the 1980s and 1990s.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Robert P. Swierenga, "Theoretical Perspectives on the New Rural History: From Environmentalism to Modernization," *Agricultural History* 56 (July 1982): 495-502; David Danbom in "Reflections: Whither Agricultural History" delivered to the Agricultural History Society in 2010, published in *Agricultural History* (Spring 2010): 166-175

⁴⁷ Danbom "Reflections," 166-175; Danbom specifically acknowledges the contributions of rural women's historians: Joan M. Jensen, Ulrich, Nancy Grey Osterud, Jane Adams, Deborah Fink, Mary Neth, Melissa Walker, Rebecca Sharpless and Katherine Jellison.

⁴⁸ John Mack Faragher: "History From the Inside-Out: Writing the History of Women in Rural America," *American Quarterly* 33:5 (Winter, 1981): 537-557; Lucy Eldersveld Murphy and Wendy Hamand Venet, eds., *Midwestern Women: Work, Community, and Leadership at the Crossroads* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

⁴⁹ Danbom in "Reflections" noted the Agricultural History Society's devotion of its 1992 conference and journal issue from 1999 to the topic of women in rural life and agriculture.

The changing experience of being a wife, mother, daughter, and homemaker in rural Iowa during the middle of the twentieth-century is at the heart of this study and studying the “scraps” of evidence that women generated in the midst of these changes helps paint the larger picture of the rural woman’s experience. The changing nature of women’s work, education, and responsibilities in marriage and motherhood comprising notions of rural womanhood are enveloped in the details of the daily concerns and tasks they documented. The details of maintaining homes, preparing and providing for necessities, and managing problems with family, friends, and neighbors provides evidence in answering questions concerning the rural woman’s role in maintaining rural culture and social life, and enacting or challenging dominant notions of domesticity and femininity.⁵⁰

In the years following World War II American agriculture underwent dramatic change resulting from advancements in chemical, industrial, and mechanical technology. These changes caused a decrease in the number and increase in the size of farms. The people changed, the work changed, and even the backdrop of rural life changed as the landscape was altered to accommodate large-scale agricultural production.⁵¹ While change was written all over the countryside, modifications to rural cultural and social life were subtler, especially in the eyes of those who experienced the transformation firsthand. Rural historians can identify the watersheds of agricultural change for rural people

⁵⁰ Norton Juster, *A Woman’s Place: Yesterday’s Women in Rural America* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1996), 5.

⁵¹ According to J.L. Anderson, *Industrializing the Corn Belt: Agriculture, Technology, and the Environment, 1945-1972* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 5: between the end of World War II and 1970 the number of Iowa farms decreased by 70,000, while the amount of corn produced increased by 396 million bushels; Amy Mattson Lauters, *More than a Farmer’s Wife: Voices of American Farm Women 1910-1960* (Columbia University Press, 2009), 1, points out that while 50% of Americans lived in rural areas in 1910 by 1960, 69% of Americans lived in urban areas.

and communities, but it is often only through retrospection and attention to seemingly insignificant evidence, that the social and cultural changes to the rural way of life are discerned.

The fact that American women's education, work, responsibilities in marriage and motherhood, and involvement in public life and civic affairs underwent immense change following World War II is undeniable, but evidence of this experience for rural women is less understood and examining the details of their daily lives provides an analysis of the undercurrents of these shifts for women and rural Americans. These changes are illuminated by examination of the collections of Mildred Wiley Turnbull, Leanna Field Driftmier, and Dorothy Deemer Houghton as they observed, upheld, and articulated notions of rural womanhood.

Writing for the *Diagonal Reporter* in the middle half of the twentieth-century, Mildred Wiley Turnbull documented the mid-twentieth-century social history of a rural farming community in southwest Iowa. Turnbull used her column, *Bird Notes* to share observations gleaned from her bird watching hobby but also as a space for discussing the daily activities of her life, family, and community.⁵² Through her observations she articulated the social and cultural ways of rural life for her readers. Sharing her insights about landscape, the centrality of community institutions, and generational ties, Turnbull's performance of rural womanhood was grounded in the same strong sense of place that anchored the lives of her rural readers.⁵³

Shenandoah, Iowa radio homemaker, Leanna Field Driftmier edited the homemaker's magazine, *Kitchen-Klatter* for the better part of the twentieth-century. In

⁵² "*Diagonal Reporter* Collection," Diagonal Printing Museum, Diagonal, Iowa.

⁵³ Wiley and Newton, 469-471.

publishing letters from readers, she documented rural womanhood as experienced by her many subscribers throughout the Midwest.⁵⁴ The forum of *Kitchen-Klatter* afforded ordinary women the space to detail their experiences of work, education, marriage, motherhood, and public life during a time of change. Letters published in *Kitchen-Klatter* document the way rural women enacted or contested idealized gender roles as they encountered change in farm and household technology, evolving gender roles in marriage, heightened emphasis on idealized domesticity and motherhood, and more.⁵⁵

For Red Oak, Iowa woman Dorothy Deemer Houghton the role of rural womanhood went beyond domestic concerns and local engagement in community life to national politics and foreign affairs. As national president of the General Federation of Women's Clubs from 1950-1952, Houghton represented rural womanhood to national and international audiences. Houghton's scrapbook collection and writings demonstrate that notions of mutual aid and community- long-held tenets of rural life and community, could be channeled to aid in the cause of winning the Cold War.⁵⁶ Houghton centered her clubwoman leadership on the premise of rural women as stabilizing forces in their families and communities.⁵⁷

Chapter 4: Unusual Archives and the Archival Performance of Creators, Savers, and Researchers

Each collection in this study uncovers a rural woman who saved and documented her story with a purpose and intent that is often unclear, but nevertheless present for

⁵⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), useful in interpreting the way scrapbook newspaper clippings and *Kitchen-Klatter* columns informed readers about their "imagined worlds" of national identity and reinforced concepts of community for groups of rural people and women.

⁵⁵ Leanna Driftmier, ed., *Kitchen-Klatter*.

⁵⁶ Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*.

⁵⁷ "Houghton Collection," Montgomery County History Center.

outsiders to consider and assign with meaning and significance. They serve as case studies of the nature of saving, sharing, and interpreting historical evidence, encouraging a considered journey through the territory of studying the past. The collections are windows into human practices of saving and remembering, providing insight into the way individuals, families, organizations, and governments remember and save: privately and publicly, in homes and libraries, basements, attics, and exhibits, in acid-free boxes and crumbling paper sacks. It raises questions of what those who are charged with applying meaning and method to historical materials should make of the creators and savers of historical collections.

Maxine Beymer Stephens's collection of calendars documenting a mid-twentieth-century rural Iowa woman's social experience is not in an institutional archives, but was discovered in a musty paper sack in a cabinet inherited by my uncle on the site where much of the collection's contents were recorded by Stephens, my grandmother.⁵⁸ While archival theorist Richard J. Cox contends that this collection should be researched, to the surprise of many archivists and researchers he argues that unless it is to remain in a musty paper sack forever, it belongs with me and my family: those who can offer oral histories, add letters as they are discovered, provide photographs and artifacts related to the collection's contents, and perhaps most importantly, maintain an emotional investment in the collection, one that is too often lost during the process of institutional archival accessioning.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ The State Historical Society of Iowa has made a "concerted effort" to document women's activities since the beginning of the twentieth-century, see: "Women's Organizations in Iowa: Selected Holdings in Major Repositories," *The Annals of Iowa* 56 (Winter/Spring 1997), 128.

⁵⁹ Richard J. Cox in *Personal Archives and the New Archival Calling: Readings, Reflection and Ruminations* (Duluth, MN: Litwin Books, 2008), Cox argues that archives cannot possibly save the amount of information maintained and generated and as a result, should use society's interest in personal and family papers as a resource for encouraging individual preservation of historical evidence.

By considering the collections themselves, including their original significance and use, how they have been maintained, and the value they offer historians, we can evaluate methods of researching and writing history and uncover new evidence forms located in overlooked places, and bring to light historical experiences about which evidence has long been faint.

To analyze questions of evidence and research and the act of archiving, chapter four focuses on the role of the evidence creators themselves as they made their collections, in an act of what Ellen Gruber Garvey calls “performing archivalness.” Garvey uses the term to refer to the “gestures of preservation” made by creators of homemade archives to safeguard the transmission of knowledge.⁶⁰ The creators of collections in this study often used unconventional methods to tell their life-stories and performed archivalness in saving and protecting these records. Considering the way they acted as archivists of their own histories by recording, saving, and preserving their personal, family, and community histories is a valuable addition to our understanding of the historical experience of rural women, but also the methods used in interpreting the past.⁶¹

Chapter four also considers the subsequent role of individuals in exercising authority over collections. Jacques Derrida used the term “archon” in discussing the individuals who succeed the creator or creators in controlling archives.⁶² Acting on behalf of institutional archives, private families and organizations, or as historians interpreting

⁶⁰ For discussion of “performing archivalness” see Garvey, *Writing with Scissors*, 20; for discussion of “archons” as document authorities see Jacques Derrida, Trans. Eric Prenowitz, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 2.

⁶¹ Chapter two of this study focuses on women’s collections as unconventional autobiographies and the discussion in chapter four centers on discussion of archives and archival work.

⁶² Derrida, 2; Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 3.

evidence, the individuals who maintain control of the collections following the creators exercise authority in both their preservation and the interpretation.⁶³

In considering Stephens's calendars and the way she "performed archivalness" to exemplify this method, emphasis is placed on the events she selected to record on the calendar and their manner of representation, including which calendars are missing or what additions and edits were made by other family members. Many experiences Stephens documented might have seemed trivial at the time they were recorded, but through their preservation by family members and ensuing historical interpretation, they are a lasting document of the daily life of a farm family.⁶⁴ Stephens's family members have maintained and controlled her records and as Cox contends, this has merit. As a privately-held archives, the addition of oral histories from family members, photographs, letters, and newspaper clippings, creates an "unusual archive" of evidence. The authority families can exercise over collections is powerful in its capacity to enhance the historical record with biographical detail and additional knowledge transmissions from the collection creator. As is the case with all who exercise control over historical evidence, the authority to evaluate, re-order, and in the process sometimes alter the archival collection exists as well.⁶⁵

The approach chapter four takes to considering archival collections in the study finds agreement with Cox's argument that to widen the authority of historical evidence and expand the larger historical narrative, those who discover and maintain personal archives must be recognized, empowered, and developed as curators, archivists, and

⁶³ Derrida, 2.

⁶⁴ Garvey, 20.

⁶⁵ Cox, 26.

researchers.⁶⁶ Researchers and historians also perform archivalness in their appraisal and use of collections for data in their research. In this process, researchers have been accused of “archive fever,” or the act of being seduced by the stories contained in the records and an overzealous desire to locate origins and beginnings in archives.⁶⁷ As researchers analyze evidence with historical and cultural context they must also consider the archival context, including the evidence creator’s influence on collections as well as all subsequent authorities including themselves.

Both calendar collections are revealing for the choices Matson and Stephens, as archivists made about what to record in the small space of the daily entry; ultimately choosing what evidence would be recorded in these artifacts of the social histories of rural Iowa families, farms, and communities. The differences in how the two calendar collections have been maintained and preserved also informs the archival lens of this study. Stephens’s family maintained her archival collection almost by accident; after years of keeping Matson’s calendars, her son gave them to the Ames Historical Society where they sit accessioned, but not cataloged and archived due to the lack of resources.⁶⁸ Many other collections in this study are not privately-held, but due to insufficient resources or interest on the part of the authorities holding the collections, they have been subjected to very few established archival protocols for ordering, listing, descriptions, or access. As an archival collection, Nola Simpson’s scrapbooks are unremarkable because they are composed of newspapers: an ephemeral document meant to be cast-off and discarded once used. Comparison to the papers from which Simpson cut her scraps of

⁶⁶ Ibid., 26.

⁶⁷ Steedman, 3.

⁶⁸ As of June 2014, the boxes of Matson’s collection remained unaccessioned.

local news and events reveals that her choices were by no means comprehensive.

Simpson carefully selected which information about community members in the “local” or “personal” columns of papers was worth saving and pasting into her book. As a result, her performance of archivalness dictated what was later accessioned and indexed by museum volunteers to serve as a record of community life central to the small museum’s collection, used by school children or genealogists interested in the histories of their families and community.⁶⁹

Teresa Mottet’s collection includes extensive autobiographical notes written from her own thoughts and conversations with the Iowans she met on the bus to Washington, DC and for an anti-nuclear peace march. The march included the linking of individual banners to form one ribbon to surround the White House, Capitol Building, and Pentagon. Included with her collection is the banner Mottet made and added to the ribbon, a commemorative t-shirt, newspaper articles, and ephemera collected during the march for example, Mark Twain’s “War Prayer.” Mottet “curated” her collection before donating it to the Carnegie Historical Museum in Fairfield, Iowa making her collection a case study of an institutional collection with a unique relationship between donor, museum official, and researcher.⁷⁰

The Owl Country Community Club collection provides an example of anonymous performances of archivalness as the club’s female members maintained a collection of meeting minutes, membership rolls, programming and activity records and calendars over the course of the club’s eighty-year history. The choices women made, reflected in the records they created, represent their experience of twentieth-century, open-country rural

⁶⁹ Simpson, “Scrapbook Collection.”

⁷⁰ “MottetPeaceCollection,” Carnegie Historical Museum.

community life. The experience of rural life they represented in their records was one built on the social relationships that defined life in open-country rural communities often founded in geographic, religious, ethnic, or educational connections. Formal and informal open-country rural community networks existed largely to support the mutual aid of neighbors, and to support community betterment, cultural enrichment, and the education of youth. The records of Owl Country Club demonstrate how recording and preserving community life operated as an extension the rural womanhood identify itself. When the Owl Country Club disbanded, the records were donated to the Story City Historical Society, an organization that largely operates to provide museum experiences to visitors, but also maintains some organizational records that “promote the historical richness of Story City.”⁷¹

Considering the performances of archivalness enacted by collection creators, in addition to that of individuals who save and maintain collections, whether family members and descendants, historical society volunteers, or paid professionals, is not only possible, it is crucial to improving the interpretation of the past. There is insight to be gained from further attention to the role of record “savers” as they perform archivalness in applying order, pursuing details and origins, and attributing meaning to evidence.

The twentieth-century brought a tidal wave of change for American women and rural women were no exception. By closely listening for the voices of everyday rural women, often overlooked or misunderstood, historical silences can be unlocked. In expanding the range of evidence consulted and methods of interpretation to listen for the

⁷¹ “Story City Historical Society,” *Museums of Story City*, www.storycityhistory.org/story-city-historical-society.html.

voices of the women who experienced historical change firsthand, we are more often presented with faint whispers than blatant opinions of the way they experienced the world; but as sources of their authentic voices, the unconventional autobiographical acts and unusual archival collections of mid-twentieth-century rural Iowa women, are immensely valuable to interpreting their particular historical experience.⁷²

⁷² Adams, "The Farm Journal's Discourse," 45-62.

CHAPTER 2. THE UNIQUE EXPERIENCE OF RURAL WOMEN DOCUMENTED IN UNCONVENTIONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL COLLECTIONS

Madge Lotspeich sits at her kitchen table, scissors in hand, pencil and legal pad nearby. After reading a recent publication from the Iowa State College Extension Service while drinking her morning coffee, she decides part of it is worth saving for her handmade recipe book and, opening a kitchen cupboard, she removes the tattered book that once belonged to her father. She keeps the book because everything about it, right down to the smell of the pages, reminds her of her childhood in Steady Run Township near Martinsburg, Iowa and the parents, sister, and brothers with whom she shared her home. Lotspeich has decided that today is the day she will finally organize her book so it is more usable. Tired of thumbing through pages to find what she is looking for, she sits down to develop an ordering system and notices that there is a stack of recipe cards that she must have inserted without organizing she remembers now that she copied these from her friend Helen Stoddard over a month ago and reasons it is time she finds space to make them part of her collection. Now there will not be time to work on the index. She needs to get to her job at the Maquoketa Library early today; she has not yet typed the minutes for the most recent meeting of the Business and Professional Women's Club and the *Jackson Sentinel* only takes submissions until noon. Lotspeich haphazardly pastes the recipe cards where she can find room on the pages of the book, jotting down titles and a few instructions she originally left off the cards, but now realizes she will need if she plans to use the recipes. When she finishes, she closes the book and looks at the title: *Memorial Addresses on the Life and Character of James H. Kyle* and wonders why her

parents started their homemade cookbook by pasting over the pages of this book. Like James H. Kyle, Lotspeich's mother had been from Ohio, but her parents never mentioned their connection to the locally famous politician or the speeches that are printed in the book. The speeches were obviously not significant to them in the long term, since they started pasting scraps of recipes over them ages ago. Their motivation doesn't matter now, her parents are long departed from this earth, but it feels good to Lotspeich to remember them by maintaining her own recipe record in the book that was once theirs.¹

This imagined scene of Madge Lotspeich working on her handmade recipe book, based on the biographical details of her life, demonstrates the nature of Lotspeich's handmade cookbook as an autobiographical account of her personal history. Even without narrative structure or an intended audience, Lotspeich's book is a record of a rural Iowa woman's life during the middle of the twentieth-century, written in her own hand. Through historical analysis the record reveals how themes of domesticity and food, intergenerational and social networks, and matters of gender intersect in the daily performance of rural womanhood.²

This chapter uses Lotspeich's handmade recipe book, and similar unconventional autobiographical collections in the form of diaries and farmhouse calendars, to reconstruct the experience of five women living in rural Iowa between the 1940s and 1980s.³ In the autobiographical act of creating her scrapbook Lotspeich, and the other

¹ Theophano, 132, this imagined scene is inspired by Theophano's method of imagining the creator engaged in the autobiographical act.

² Ibid., 133-145.

³ Jelinek.

women whose collections are considered, used their own writing to create personal, idiosyncratic texts to document their world and experience of rural womanhood.⁴

The collections are not autobiography “proper” but contain traces of autobiographical writing, and analyzing them as unconventional autobiographical writing provides a necessary and useful lens for understanding the unique experience of women who, because they experienced it differently, wrote differently about the world than men. Analyzing this particular set of collections also shows how the twentieth-century rural and agricultural experience was tempered by gender.

Cut-and-pasted clippings of recipes and other “scraps” of history and entries in calendars and diaries offer glimpses into the daily lives of rural Midwestern women. Through these records their creators recorded the details of their lives, providing evidence of the way they interpreted their position in the world. When viewed as autobiographical sources these records help deepen understandings of the experience of rural women by giving voice to those who have been often overlooked.⁵

Literature Review and Method

Considering collections of women’s writing, in everyday spaces like handmade cookbooks, diaries, or daily calendar entries as autobiographical aligns with scholarly methods aimed at broadening the field of autobiography to include different forms of writing like women’s memoirs and letters, and more recently: diaries and cookbooks.⁶

⁴ Theophano, 154.

⁵ Suzanne L. Bunkers, “Diaries: Public and Private Records of Women’s Lives,” *Legacy* 7 (1990), 23; Jellison, “Sunshine and Rain,” 594.

⁶ Theophano, 1.

As literary criticism of all genres began to flourish after World War II, the standard for distinguishing autobiography in feature and style was outlined and applied in critiques of work authored by history's famous thinkers and writers. The first wave of criticism in autobiography did not include the life stories of women, partly because of a more general absence of interest in women's history, but also because critics believed the style and substance of women's autobiography did not fit within the traditions of the male-dominated genre. Critics found the writing of women too personal, fragmented, and not objective enough to offer evidence and insight about the individual creator or the times in which she lived. With the introduction of postmodernist challenges to claims of objectivity however, this view began to unravel and increasing interest in the historical experience of women, along with the challenges of feminist scholars to the boundaries separating public and private life, encouraged scholars like Estelle Jelinek, Suzanne L. Bunkers, Cynthia Huff, Shari Benstock, and Janet Theophano to argue for the admission of expanded examples of women's autobiography like diaries and cookbooks, in addition to more traditional forms of women's writing that had been passed over for not conforming to established norms.⁷

Estelle Jelinek argued that women's autobiography was distinct from men's in several ways: first, women's writing focused more on personal than political content. Male autobiographies were largely structured around the author and his connection to the times in which he lived, while women writers were more apt to focus on domestic details

⁷ Shari Benstocked., *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Bunkers and Huff; Jelinek, 1-2; Theophano; Pascal argued that the fragmentation and inconsistency of diaries prevented them from conforming to the norms of the autobiography genre.

and difficulties experienced in private life.⁸ A second distinguishing characteristic was that female writers projected a different self-image than men. Men were more likely to write in an aggrandizing fashion affirming their self-worth, while women writers presented information in a more straightforward manner, using humor or other tactics to understate their accomplishments.⁹ A third distinction was that the writing style followed a less coherent, more fragmented form than male authors of traditional autobiography. Usually avoiding a chronological structure, female authors more often interrupted their writing with anecdotes or sidebar discussions or made less effort to condense their entire life story into a coherent whole.¹⁰ Jelinek found that diaries and journals were more common sources of women's autobiographical writing because their fragmented and interrupted format better corresponded to the nature of women's daily life.¹¹

Two other scholars considering this issue, Margo Cullen and Suzanne Bunkers support expanding the autobiography genre with a redefinition or subgenre for the work of women and argue that diaries and letters are predisposed to women's autobiographical writing because the forms have long been socially acceptable for women.¹²

The greatest strength of an expanded field of women's autobiography, argues Shari Benstock, is that it is resistant to a set of permanent definitions. Benstock found that women's letters, diaries, and memoirs were difficult to analyze through application of traditional theory and practice used to consider autobiography, because both the form

⁸ Jelinek, 6-8. Early critics in the field cast aside women's autobiographies as soon as they saw markers of domestic details, which they did not consider the "province of autobiography."

⁹ Ibid., 15. Jelinek finds that women authors are more objective and straightforward while male writers self-confidently try to tell a heroic narrative.

¹⁰ Ibid., 17.

¹¹ Jelinek, 3-5.

¹² Margo Culley ed., *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1794 to the Present* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1985); Bunkers, "Faithful Friend," 7-17.

and the writers themselves as women, occupy the boundaries of the genre. Benstock found that as sources like diaries are brought into the fold, the methods of the traditional genre are strengthened with additional analyses emphasizing issues of race, class, gender, religion, sexuality, and historical and cultural context.¹³ Expanded notions of autobiography revealed similar themes found by Benstock: women constrained by the intersection of their role as wife, mother, sister, and daughter, who used their writing to endure and document the day-to-day trials of birth, illness, aging, death, success, and failure for themselves and their families, and used their own “voice” to craft an image of themselves through the limited writing forms at their disposal.¹⁴

In the larger sense, traditional autobiography “proper” and the expanded definition supported by scholars like Jelinek, Cullen, Bunkers, and Benstock are the same: “autobiography is etymologically and in practice the story of a person’s life.”¹⁵ For women that were unable, uninterested, or underpowered to write anything more extensive than notes on a calendar or in a diary, or who appropriated the writing of others into their recipe or scrapbooks, these collections are the closest thing to a story of their lives that remains.¹⁶ Their actions in writing and saving are similar to that of authors granted the status of autobiography “proper” because in their performance, they too sought a space for “self-reflection.” By celebrating their successes, marking failures and frustrations, and accounting for daily tasks, they wrote themselves into being and documented the wisdom and knowledge acquired in their lives as daughters, mothers,

¹³ Benstock ed., 4-5, fixed categories include reader response, deconstruction, new historicism, and psychoanalysis for example.

¹⁴ Ibid., 7.

¹⁵ Jelinek, 6.

¹⁶ Ibid.

friends, and individuals.¹⁷ While the authors did not create their collections to serve as autobiographies, viewing them as autobiographical writing and reading for the “autobiographical traces” their creators used to document their experience, provides evidence of what these “ordinary” historical actors valued, how they understood and projected their self-image, and what these perceptions meant in relation to the world they inhabited.

Understanding the collections considered in this study as autobiography creates a lens for considering the particular experience of Iowa’s women in the middle of the twentieth-century. As rural women’s historian Katherine Jellison has noted: it is important to consider “women’s historical experience through the words of its unexceptional participants.” Jellison advocates seeking the records of women who did not publish or record traditional autobiographies, but nevertheless documented their experience in forms scholars often find unconventional. In nontraditional forms, women often wrote only for themselves or their closest family and friends and rarely focused on events of national significance; their writing focused on themes less-often considered by historians: the personal experiences of housekeeping, child-rearing, relationships with family and friends, and routine maintenance of social networks and community.¹⁸

In reading women’s diaries, calendars, and handmade cookbooks as autobiographical collections, we can analyze how women understood their identities in their own terms, through themes inherent in the texts they created: farmwife, homemaker, devoted mother and wife, thoughtful friend, community leader and more.¹⁹

¹⁷ Theophano, 154.

¹⁸ Jellison, “Sunshine and Rain,” 594.

¹⁹ Theophano, 122.

The handmade recipe book of Madge Lotspeich, diaries of Hazel Beam and Dorothy Kainz, and farmhouse kitchen calendars of Ruth Matson and Maxine Stephens each stretch the boundaries of women's autobiography in new and interesting ways. If the endeavor is to discover the ways in which women understood their place in the world through their own voices, then each of these unconventional autobiographical records serves as the only "book" these women, who represent so much about the times and places in which they lived, ever authored.

The collections in this study are not the only writing women used to document their lives, but most of the records of rural women's daily lives have been erased by time and circumstance. These collections constitute a range of examples demonstrating the importance of considering unconventional forms of autobiographical writing and while the creators did not see themselves or their experience as unique or remarkable, they are representative of the larger experience of rural women.²⁰

In addition to Lotspeich's handmade recipe book discussed in the introduction of this chapter, Jelinek's expanded definition of autobiography can be applied to the diaries maintained by Beam and Kainz and calendars annotated by Matson and Stephens. Each collection meets the criteria by having no statement to the audience, little editing, and rather than offering commentary on past experiences, they document their lives as they were being lived. What was created for daily use in the management of households now serves as memoir. Although it sometimes requires reading between the lines, the creators inscribed their personal experiences and embodiment of themes central to rural womanhood in the autobiographical traces of these personal records.²¹

²⁰ Hampsten, x.

²¹ Theophano, 121.

In addition to theory and practice from the fields and subfields of autobiography, seeking insight into the experiences of rural women by considering how issues of gender, class, and age intersect in the lives and experiences of women is important.²² Through examination of unique forms of self-inscription that document the way ordinary women experienced boundaries of identity, evolving experiences of gender relations can be reconstructed. What the women did not choose to inscribe is sometimes as important as what is written.²³

More than supporting the expansion of the traditional autobiography genre, methods with which to analyze the untraditional autobiography forms of diaries, scrapbooks, or cookbooks must be considered. As Ellen Gruber Garvey has noted with consideration of scrapbooks and Lynn Bloom with regard to diaries, readers must “crack the code” unknowingly left by the author.²⁴ The methods of Bloom, Theophano, Bunkers, and Hampsten are all useful, and a combination of their work is applied to the collections in this study. Bloom focuses on the role of the researcher and their responsibility as they interpret and provide narrative to the original text; she argues that the relationship between the scholar and the original text creator is collaborative and that they act as translator as they apply narrative to the creator’s text.²⁵ In a related argument, Bunkers adds that the researcher must reflect on the relationship between the creator, text, and their own position as reader, recognizing that no two scholars will reach identical conclusions from reading the same text.²⁶ Theophano and Bunkers are in agreement that

²² Bunkers and Huff, *Inscribing the Daily*, 7.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1-3.

²⁴ Garvey, 18; Lynn Z. Bloom, “Auto/Bio/History: Modern Midwifery” in Shirley Neuman ed., *Autobiography and Questions of Gender* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1991): 12-13.

²⁵ Lynn Z. Bloom, “Auto/Bio/History: Modern Midwifery,” 12-13.

²⁶ Bunkers, “Faithful Friend,” 10.

the primary task of the scholar is to provide as much context as possible and to this end, Theophano believes it is useful for researchers to sometimes take an “imaginative leap” to the time and setting of the text’s creation.²⁷ Finally, Hampsten argues that it is important not to overlook the intended audience when analyzing the texts that expand the definition of autobiography.²⁸

Each of these approaches has merit and none can be dismissed when considering a range of unconventional forms of autobiographical writing. A hybrid of methods considering both the intentional and actual audience is useful. All the collections in this study have come into the hands of a researcher, so the relationship between creator, text, and scholar must be considered, and in instances where the scholar has taken liberties in providing narrative to a text void of such features, it is necessary to see this relationship as interpretive. Finally, all collections must be “built up” with social and historical context and sometimes taking an “imaginative leap” to the time and setting of the text creation is a useful application of context.

The diary was once viewed as a repository for data to be mined by historians, but through interest from psychologists, literary scholars, and sociologists, the diary has come to be understood as having so much more to offer scholars. To better understand diaries, scholars have considered the choices made by authors about which events to record or ignore, how diarists’ sense and address an imagined audience. Scholars look for patterns in structure and form for insight regarding relationships, values, projections and

²⁷ Ibid.; Theophano, 118.

²⁸ Hampsten, 8.

considerations of self-image, as well as documentation of historical events and experiences.²⁹

Hazel Beam and Dorothy Kainz both recorded their daily experiences as rural Iowa women in a diary. Although the records were created in differing times and places: Kainz in 1941 northeast Iowa and Beam in 1960s southwest Iowa, the similarity in their focus on housekeeping, child-rearing, and relationships with family and friends reveals a similar understanding of rural womanhood that was wrapped-up in their identities as homemakers, mothers, and wives.

That both Beam and Kainz preferred the daily diary for self-expression, demonstrates the way the form fit the fragmented nature of women's lives; allowing authors to record their experiences in real-time using simple lines of text to project an understated self-image focused on personal experience.

Both diaries are in the possession of the creator's children, who have shared them with local historical institutions; thus ultimately, both Beam and Kainz wrote for their descendants. Under scholarly consideration, the records when built-up with historical and social context reveal much about the way two rural Iowa women interpreted and enacted their identities as rural women.

Although she maintained a diary in other years, only Kainz's 1941 diary is on loan to the Carnegie Museum in Fairfield, Iowa. With only a single year of entries to consider, Kainz's account still provides much insight into her life as a farmwife in pre-

²⁹ Bunkers and Huff, *Inscribing the Daily*, 2, 6-8.

World War II Iowa. For example, Kainz recorded household labor she and her hired help completed, and the labor relief provided by indoor plumbing.³⁰

An extensive record of Beam's transcribed diary entries, ranging from 1957 to 1977, is available at the Montgomery County History Center in Red Oak, Iowa. There is more material to consider when analyzing Beam's two decades of entries from the 1960s and 1970s, than Kainz's single diary, but they each document the daily experience of motherhood and marriage.

Hazel W. Dickerson Beam

On or about the seventh of January 1960, Hazel Dickerson Beam took a moment to account for her day with a brief diary entry:

Washed today. Mrs. Davis came over for a little while. Carlsons (sic) got a telephone. Marian called. Worked on town report this afternoon.³¹

From 1957 to 1986 Beam told her life-story through short, daily notes recorded in her diary, much like the one excerpted above. Like much of women's autobiography, Beam's entries, written in her sixties and seventies, focused on personal difficulties and success and kept her comments on world or national affairs to a minimum. Beam's entries project a self-image of modesty and reflect her embrace of middle-class, mid-twentieth-century gender norms and social values. While she kept her journals in sequence, like much of women's autobiography, they lack explicit narrative form and are somewhat fragmented. A person or topic is sometimes mentioned with great frequency for a period of time, and then altogether excluded for months or even years.

³⁰ Interview with Judy (Kainz) Herzog, 16 April 2013, Fairfield, Iowa.

³¹ "January 1960," *Personal Journals of Mrs. Sidney (Hazel) Beam 1957-1986*, Montgomery County History Center, Red Oak, Iowa.

The journal entry excerpted above is representative of a typical entry from Beam because it comments on completed housework, social relations, and banal accomplishments. While the entry might seem to serve as merely a way to account for the repetitiousness of life as a housewife in mid-twentieth-century rural Iowa, when placed in context of the entire diary collection and connected with biographical detail of Beam and her Coburg, Iowa neighbors, the narrative of Beam's life comes into focus.

Marriage and Housework

Washing is a central part of women's work so Beam's note: "*Washed today*" is only informative with a complete reading of the collection. Beam commented on some aspect of washing in nearly a third of her entries: preparing water for washing, hanging washing, ironing, putting clean laundry away, and preparing laundry to take to the Laundromat. Stringing together the fragmented comments, a few things can be learned from Beam's story; while washing is part of her housekeeping record, Beam often noted her husband Sidney's involvement, particularly as the couple aged and especially when it involved going out to a Laundromat. Thus the commonplace laundering record provides insight into the experience of marriage and aging and the gendered balance of housework. Beam's notes documenting her husband's housework are frequent, and do not seem to be an effort to point to contradictions in gender roles or express a relief of her frustrations; they are matter-of-fact comments that show that in this rural household the laundry, dishes, and gardening were shared duties. Beam's account of the marital sharing of housework is unlike the accounts of the other women considered in this study; who either did not record their husband's participation or what is more likely: it did not take place.

Social Relationships

Social relationships underpin nearly all of Beam's entries and constitute the heart of the life story she authored. The notes: "*Mrs. Davis came over for a little while*" and "*Marian called*" refer to two main characters in Beam's autobiography: her next door neighbor, Ruth Davis and Marian Carlson, the daughter of Carl & Minnie Carlson, Beam's neighbors across Commercial Drive. In Coburg, Iowa, a town with a population of fifty-four in 1960, Beam's neighbors were more than fellow residents, they were friends, confidants, a surrogate family of support and ultimately those bearing closest witness to Beam's existence. Ruth Davis, whose phone call is mentioned in the excerpt, is referenced with such frequency in Beam's journals that it is clear that she is a main character and Carl and Minnie Carlson's youngest daughter, Marian must have been excited to try her family's new phone, and Beam shared the excitement as she recorded it in her diary.³² Combined with references to the hand-washing of laundry, Beam's comment that the "*Carlsons got a telephone*" also indicates the delay of modernity in the countryside in the form of household technology.³³

Other journal entries frame the role of the Carlson and Davis neighbors in Beam's life. In an entry from 1970, just before Sidney and Hazel Beam moved from their home in Coburg to an apartment in the larger nearby town of Red Oak, Beam discussed how much she enjoyed attending an open house held for the Carlsons' wedding anniversary:

We all enjoyed very much being with them and visiting with all their family especially the ones from a distance who we hadn't seen only once or twice since they left here.³⁴

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., "June 1970."

Entries about Marian Carlson from throughout the two decades provide evidence of Beam's role as a friend and maternal figure to Marian as she grew into adulthood in Coburg. The Beams had three daughters and one son, but the youngest child graduated from Coburg High School in 1946, a decade before Beam's collection begins. Beam's journals note visits from the youthful Marian to the Beam home or chats in the street show the pleasure of an aging woman in spending time with a young person still in need of adult guidance and support. Marian reappears with regularity in Beam's journal entries from 1966, with a note from now seventy-year-old Beam, that Marian had returned to Coburg to live with her parents after her husband Roger deployed to Vietnam. Shortly after Marian's arrival, Beam noted a visit from Marian to share her "*wedding record book and pictures*" and later a "*big bug which Roger had sent to her in a jar in alcohol...from Vietnam*" which, Beam stated: "*no one knew what it was.*" In her January 3, 1967 entry Beam wrote:

Marian called this evening and said that her husband Roger who is in Viet Nam would be on TV tonight and she wanted us to stay up and watch the program. We watched it and it was a real good picture of Roger and he was smiling. We were glad we watched the program.

Marian's husband Roger had been sent for over two years by that time and Beam's note demonstrates her pleasure in her young friend's chance to see her husband away at war.³⁵ Beam's care for Marian is reflected again in an entry from three years later in May 1970, which notes that Marian had come down with the German measles; her concern becomes clear in an entry from twenty-five days later where Beam reports that Marian had delivered a healthy baby.³⁶ Beam's concern for Marian was due to the serious risk

³⁵ Ibid., "December 1965, January 1966, January 1967."

³⁶ Ibid., "May-June 1970."

contracting rubella poses to pregnant women and their unborn babies. Beam's notations demonstrate how women's life writing in forms like journals is often centered by events of illness or childbirth. Beam's relationship with the young neighbor, Marian documents the community networks women cultivate and the value they ascribed to social relations beyond their own households.³⁷

Community Maintenance

The final note from the excerpted entry: "*Worked on town report this afternoon*" points to another major theme of Beam's autobiographical collection: community maintenance. Beam served as the Coburg Town Clerk from 1945-1967 and with her husband, Sidney serving as mayor for nearly all of that time, and her entries document the couple's leadership role within the community. Details of elections, council meetings held in their home, Beam's repeated notes of working on "*town books*" and "*balancing the reports*" and documenting the role she and her husband had in maintaining streets, caring for vacant lots, repairing street lights and carrying out other public service, make the record a story not only of Beam's personal experience, but the day-to-day maintenance of a fading rural railroad town.

Washed today. Mrs. Davis came over for a little while. Carlsons got a telephone. Marian called. Worked on town report this afternoon.³⁸

One twenty-two-word entry can reveal much about the way Hazel Dickerson Beam experienced life, when framed by more than two decades of journal entries and treated as the autobiography she authored.

³⁷ Benstock.

³⁸ "January 1960," *Personal Journals of Mrs. Sidney (Hazel) Beam*.

Lynn Bloom's method of considering the reader's role in contributing information and ascribing narrative to the text is useful in analyzing Beam's collection. According to Bloom, an excellent work of collaborative authorship is: *A Midwife's Tale*, where Laurel Thatcher Ulrich use skillful historical interpretation to find narrative in the life story Martha Ballard recorded in her diary.³⁹ Bloom argues that because untraditional forms of autobiography are usually written without any concept of an external audience and were so often solely intended for private use, readers unfamiliar with the author often have a nearly impossible task in deciphering the author's meaning. Bloom argues that methods for analyzing the cryptic texts create an independent autobiography subgenre where the scholar "collaborates" with the author to add narrative by interpreting selections of entries and presenting them with historical and personal context.⁴⁰ The methods of this subgenre involve the authoring of two texts: the first time by the original author and the second by the scholar as a collaborator.⁴¹

In the case of Beam's journals, which were transcribed and typed after her death by her son, Leo, the "second author" discussed by Bloom would be her son, as he added interpretive notes to the collection before donating to the Montgomery County Historical Society. The "third author" discussed by Bloom would be me, the scholar; or other persons interested enough in Coburg or its inhabitants to visit the reading room at county history museum.⁴² As Beam's son Leo transcribed every entry, adding the occasional annotation for clarification, complementary resources such as a Coburg town map, and

³⁹ Lynn Z. Bloom, "Auto/Bio/History," 18-19.

⁴⁰ Shirley Neuman ed., *Autobiography and Questions of Gender* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1991), 7.

⁴¹ Bloom, 12-13.

⁴² Ibid.

included clippings of local newspaper stories written about his parents, he was a collaborative author to Beam's account. The Montgomery County Historical Society does not have a record of Leo Beam's donation, but it does list him as editor when describing the collection. Leo Beam wrote a brief "Introduction" for readers of the volume after transcribing the entries where he speculated that his mother began the record to document daily weather reports received from radio station KMA of nearby Shenandoah and it grew into a much more complete record of, according to Leo Beam: "things that needed to be remembered" over time. In his introduction, Leo Beam noted the usefulness of the record as a history of the town of Coburg, to which he added a hand-drawn map with a key of the locations of residents and businesses from 1941 to 1945, the years he attended high school. Beam also informed readers that he added newspaper articles that could be "helpful in remembering the town's past history as well as persons involved in it."⁴³

There is an anomaly among the clippings Leo added from local papers: a "Dear Abby" column titled, "Journals will be the Gift of a Lifetime" with a republished letter in which "Blocked Writer in Oklahoma" requested advice on when to give her son the journals she maintained during his childhood. The column includes a range of opinions on the topic submitted from readers, but the opinion of "Jo Ellen from Utah" stands out as the one that connected with Leo Beam and explains his motivation to transcribe the journals and submit them as a town history; the letter states: "*Dear Abby: This journal is priceless, not only to her son and his posterity, but eventually to historians.*" The author goes on to suggest that the journal will provide a "glimpse" of family life and urges the author to make copies of the journal and find a historical society to accept them as part of

⁴³ Leo Beam, "Introduction" to *Mrs. Sidney (Hazel) Beam Collection: Coburg, Iowa*, Montgomery County History Center, Red Oak, Iowa.

its collection.⁴⁴ Leo Beam's "Introduction" is only a few short paragraphs but with the addition of the "Dear Abby" column he presents his motivation in transcribing his mother's journals and, in his words, "respectfully submitting" them to the Montgomery County History Center.⁴⁵

Context is everything. As the first author of her life story, Hazel Beam provided the "who, what, when, and where" but it falls to the secondary authors: her son Leo with his town map and newspaper clippings, and the scholar to provide readers with the "how and why" to more fully reveal Beam's chronicle. While her son Leo's role as "collaborative" author reframed Hazel Beam's collection as a town history of Coburg, Iowa, a scholarly interpretation returns to the way an expanded notion of women's autobiography is present in the entries and how Beam "wrote herself into being" when accounting for the events of her daily life.⁴⁶

Reading page upon page of Beam's diaries can mentally and physically exhaust a reader. The day-to-day activities are monotonous with repeated entries pertaining to washing, ironing, dishes, baking, canning, cleaning and Beam's standby entry: "regular work." In accounting for the banal activities of her days, the entries report letters written and received, phone calls, visits with neighbors and children, trips "to town," payment of bills and mentions of issues related to aging that increased over time including the detailing of trips to the doctor, vision loss, arthritis pain experienced by her husband, Sidney, and many entries where Beam noted that she "didn't do much today" because she "didn't feel good."⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Theophano, 9.

⁴⁷ Hazel Beam.

There is a definite “seasonality” to the record, discernable through Beam’s entries about weather, work, and holidays. The summer months contain frequent mentions of rain and the rise in the very nearby East Nishnabotna river, lightning storms, “fixing” corn for freezing, digging potatoes and the sale of garden produce during July and August to buyers coming from nearby towns or as far away as Omaha.⁴⁸

Beam’s narrative style changed as she aged, indicating that as her experience grew, she progressively discovered her writer’s “voice.” But even the banal entries are revealing when strung together to uncover the way they document a woman’s life being lived. Beam’s relationship with young neighbor Marian Carlson documents her fulfillment of expectations regarding friendship and motherhood. Even the seemingly mundane laundry records reveal more than her daily preoccupation, but also a bit of her personality and marital life. Beam’s documentation of her experience as Coburg Town Clerk created a record of a declining rural community and documents how the public involvement of rural women was integral to community maintenance. But as autobiographical writing, however, it really demonstrates that Beam’s sense of success and accomplishment stemmed from her public involvement.

In the case of Beam’s journals, considering how they have been maintained since her death provides evidence of intended audience. Elizabeth Hampsten notes that diaries are often written for the creator’s descendants and because of the role of her youngest and only son, Leo in saving, annotating, and sharing her journals this is likely true for Beam’s journals.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Hampsten, 8.

Dorothy Orr Kainz

The other diary considered in this study, written by Dorothy Orr Kainz of rural Guttenberg in northeast Iowa, supports Hampsten's argument because it has been maintained by Kainz's daughter, Judy Herzog. Recognizing the diary's significance as a record of twentieth-century rural Iowa life, Herzog loaned her mother's 1941 diary to the Carnegie Museum in Fairfield, Iowa for scholarly research.⁵⁰ The Carnegie Museum is a local historical institution supported by Jefferson County with limited resources devoted to research, but the museum's curator shared information about the record in a response to an email request for personal records of mid-century rural Iowa women and even set up an interview with Judy Herzog to support scholarly analysis of the record.

On the surface, the August nineteenth entry in Kainz's 1941 diary excerpted below is typical of the women's diary entries often passed over by scholars for their ordinariness; through analysis as an autobiographical record, the entry offers insight into the experience of a farm wife in 1940s Iowa:

They sawed our lumber. Buckman was here for dinner. Violet and I had to change a tire when we started with lunch. Our bread was slow. Vic an (sic) Josephine were here an (sic) got some plums. Judith was born at 8:15 P.M.⁵¹

The final line of Kainz's entry documents the birth of the daughter, Judy Herzog who has maintained and loaned the diary to the Carnegie Museum. Herzog was the fifth daughter born to Kainz in seven years. The succinctness of the entry documenting Judy's birth was atypical of Kainz's entries, which could be quite descriptive; even the making of bread on that day was documented with some analysis that it "was slow." The lack of description might reflect Kainz's inability to reflect amidst exhaustion or that the details of

⁵⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁵¹ Dorothy Orr Kainz, "1941 Diary," on loan to Carnegie Historical Museum, Fairfield, Iowa.

something like a child's birth, even the fifth in seven years, would not be easily forgotten and did not require notation.

Kainz's tire-changing partner, Violet offers a glimpse of the mid-century farmwife's experience where part-time employment of domestic workers was quite common.⁵² Violet was hired to assist with housekeeping and childcare during Kainz's transition from pregnancy through childbirth and newborn care. Diary entries from subsequent weeks document Violet's work in laundering, cooking, and cleaning. Reading the diary for autobiographical traces however, makes it clear that Kainz counted on the company as much as the labor of the hired help. Almost exactly twelve weeks after Kainz noted Judith's birth, she wrote:

Violet ironed curtains an (sic) all. We finished the house cleaning. I made Iola & Erma's pajamas & got Marjorie and Janet's cut out. Violet went home. Rudy sawed Ben's wood. Witheral got the old hens 81 and 46 roosters.⁵³

Kainz's note is straightforward in observing the work Violet completed before departing, while she herself constructed clothing for her four oldest daughters and noted her husband Rudy's lumber and poultry production activities on their farm. It is impossible to observe sentiment in the individual entry but Kainz's note from the following day reveals more about the companionship she found in her hired help:

Boy what a lonesome day. I completely finished all the P.J.'s an (sic) the aprons. Covered my flowers and dug the carrots. Rudy finished his sheep shed. Got the corn stocks (sic) and straw on the roof.⁵⁴

Kainz's meditative note: "boy what a lonesome day" is atypical of entries, which primarily account for daily activities of the household and farm. If the line is read as a

⁵² Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 119.

⁵³ Kainz, "1941 Diary: 7 November 1941."

⁵⁴ Ibid., "8 November 1941."

response to Violet's departure after months of companionship, it is evidence of Kainz's autobiographical documentation of the social interactions that defined her life.

Another entry demonstrating Kainz's use of her diary as a space for self-reflection is one from the earlier in the year on January 31st:

Rudy got his engine going I crocheted some on a dish towel in yellow. I had kind of a headache most all day so wasn't very ambitious. Rudy went and had Ben cut his hair in the eve. I washed all the girls snow suits after supper.⁵⁵

This entry from January 1941 demonstrates Kainz's understanding of her role as housewife and mother with a hint of self-reflection when mentioning her health. Perhaps no one in her life would care that she had a headache or challenges, so she confided in her diary; or she used the space of her diary to document her frustration with her responsibilities as a wife and mother of four young children; Kainz also could have been referencing the side effects of an early pregnancy since, as noted earlier, her daughter Judy was born the following August.

By themselves, the details of women's diaries are usually not enough to provide a narrative to their creator's life; they need to be placed in context.⁵⁶ Kainz's entries have repeated markers of her fulfillment of the gendered expectations of a housewife and farmwife: she regularly documents the completion of stages of the laundering process, and baking, preserving, sewing and mending, and differing responsibilities of what many farm wives referred to as "chicken chores."

I cleaned out my hen house Rudy brought clean straw. We had a crazy cold wind from the West with a fine snow. Rudy went to the Community Sale. He got a second hand washing machine from the Coast to Coast store. I washed an (sic) ironed the girls doll clothes. In the P.M. I finished "The Three Musketeers" Leo split and ranked wood on the backyard.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid., "31 January 1941."

⁵⁶ Bunkers and Huff, 13.

⁵⁷ Kainz, "1 January 1941."

Through the assertion that the hen house was her possession, Kainz documents her role as an agricultural producer while acknowledging support received from her husband in maintaining the hen house and easing her housework burden with the purchase of a second-hand washing machine. The entry also shows the nature of the family-farm network with the mention of Kainz's brother-in-law, Leo who lived and farmed with Rudy and Dorothy. Her note on finishing "The Three Musketeers" is an autobiographical trace reflecting on her hobbies, as several other books are mentioned in the 1941 diary. Evidence of reading, combined with the letters she mentions writing, and the nature of her diary inscriptions show that Kainz was a well-read woman and, despite her workload as an expectant mother of five young children, she set aside personal time for reading. An interview with her daughter, Judy, confirms that Kainz read ardently, evidenced by her memory that one wall in their home was dedicated: "floor to ceiling" with Kainz's books.⁵⁸

Continuing to demonstrate the centrality of social relationships to Kainz's experience as a farmwife is a February entry reads:

Clara came down to help brought her wash and did it with the machine an (sic) did a little of mine too. We canned 60 qts. of beef an (sic) got the others in the jars. Rudy and Edmund ground the beef and pork for sausage. Edmund mixed the bologna meat.⁵⁹

The event of sharing her washing machine with her husband's sister, Clara is evidence of the social nature of work for farmwomen as well as men. Kainz gained labor and

⁵⁸ Interview with Judy (Kainz) Herzog, 16 April 2013, Fairfield, Iowa.

⁵⁹ Kainz, "1941 Diary: 4 February 1941."

company from sharing her machine with her sister-in-law. The note about canning meat reveals a similar exchange between her husband, Rudy and their neighbor, Edmund.⁶⁰

As unconventional forms of autobiography, diaries depend upon biographical detail about the author, for a deepened understanding of her life, and women with a similar lived experience.⁶¹ Census records and notice of Kainz's sudden death in 1952 from the *Garnaville Tribune* published in Guttenberg reveal aspects of Kainz's life, not evidenced in her 1941 diary.⁶² The following diary entry from January 19 details Kainz's visit to her parents, Augustus and Emma who lived across the Mississippi River about thirty miles away in Wyalusing, Wisconsin:

The folks 31st Wedding Anniversary today we braved the ice and cold an (sic) went over an (sic) had dinner with them. Got our Xmas presents from Sis. I got a little pink pig with flowers in it.⁶³

The visit documents Kainz's interaction with her parents and sister, Isis and appears to have served as a dual opportunity to celebrate Christmas and her parent's anniversary. In scholarly analysis of unconventional autobiographical collections, it is also important to consider what is not written and this entry provides an opportunity for doing so. Building up Kainz's record through biographical detail from census records and death announcement reveals that the diary entry detailing the visit to her parents and sister fails to mention Kainz's twelve-year-old son, Donald who was born of her first marriage and was living with Kainz's parents at the time of the visit.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Interview with Judy (Kainz) Herzog.

⁶¹ Bunkers, "Faithful Friend," 10.

⁶² 1940 Federal Census; Wyalusing, Grant, Wisconsin; Roll: T627_4481; Page: 7A; "Kainz Rites Held Friday at Elkader: Ten Children Survive Well Known Resident," 10 April 1952, *Garnaville Tribune*.

⁶³ Kainz, "1941 Diary: 19 January 1941.

⁶⁴ Federal Census, 1940.

There is no mention of Kainz's first marriage or first born son in her 1941 diary, but according to state marriage records Dorothy Orr married Claude Troxell in Dubuque, Iowa on 17 August 1928, about seven months before the birth of her son Donald on 24 March 1929.⁶⁵ According to federal census records, Claude, Dorothy, and Donald Troxell were living in rented a home in Muscoda, Wisconsin in 1930 with Claude employed as a woodworker in a table factory.⁶⁶ However, State of Iowa marriage records from three years later document Dorothy Orr's second marriage to Rudy Kainz and her residence listed as Elkader, Iowa.⁶⁷

The brevity of a first marriage ending in divorce and the changing of Donald's surname from his father's: Troxell to Kainz's maiden name: Orr, raises speculation that she regretted the union. There was no deception surrounding the maternity of Kainz's oldest son who lived with her parents, however evidenced the fact that the 1940 census lists Donald Orr as the grandson of Gus and Emma Orr with his surname changed, and in Kainz's death notice from 1952 the oldest of her ten surviving children is listed as: "Donald, of Bagley, Wis."⁶⁸

With the proximity between Kainz and her parent's home, and the close relationship between Kainz and her mother evident in frequent diary references to letters exchanged, Kainz must have maintained a relationship with her oldest child; but the question regarding why Donald did not live with Kainz, her second husband and, by 1941, five half-sisters, is not answered in Kainz's diary.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Federal Census, 1930.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ "Kainz Rites Held Friday at Elkader: Ten Children Survive Well Known Resident," 10 April 1952, *Garnavillo Tribune*.

Kainz died on her fortieth birthday, immediately following the birth and death of her eleventh child. Her obituary listed her as a “well known resident” of her community and the daughter, Judy, who lost her at age eleven, has an image of her mother influenced by the remarks of others: Kainz was noted for being easy-going, having lots of friends, an avid reader who considered herself well-educated, holding a high school diploma; she was involved in her church, started a girls 4-H club named the Pepperettes, and loved to play the piano. Without the diary, Judy Kainz Herzog’s knowledge of her mother would be mostly limited to the stories of others, but with the autobiographical record Dorothy Orr Kainz kept, Herzog can seek to understand her mother through her own words: in the brief moments of self-reflection and wisdom carried through life experiences, documented by the mother she lost. Through her mother’s unconventional autobiography in the form of a daily diary, Judy can journey with her mother through her daily life as she carried out farm and household chores, mothered and cared for others, found time to escape into literature, or experience companionship from a domestic worker employed by her family.⁶⁹

According to Suzanne Bunkers diaries are good sources of life-writing because they challenge the traditional definition of autobiography to include writing that is done “day by day” with no editor, statement to audience, retrospective analysis of a life lived, or predetermination about the shape of the final text. To quote Bunkers, diaries are commentary “on life in process rather than as product” and as commentary about life as it is lived, the unpublished diary is the “most authentic” form of autobiography because events are recorded when they are fresh in the author’s mind with heightened accuracy of

⁶⁹ Interview with Judy (Kainz) Herzog.

dates, events, places, and people. In the moment that the author is writing she is unaware of what might later seem trivial, embarrassing, or even not worth recalling.⁷⁰

The diaries of Beam and Kainz are “authentically autobiographical” records because their creators wrote when events were fresh to their minds. With similar characteristics of no intended audience and freshness of mind, the annotated farm family calendars of Ruth Ringgenberg Matson and Maxine Beymer Stephens have the same characteristics of diaries and further expand the insight provided in spaces of unintentional life-writing. Calendars, by their very nature, are ephemeral and meant to serve their owners as mnemonic devices. While Matson and Stephens undoubtedly annotated their calendars with reminders and cues to support their management of farm and household, through historical analysis, the annotations serve as a type of folk autobiography demonstrating much about the larger experience of rural womanhood in mid-twentieth-century Iowa.⁷¹

The calendars as a form offer scholars a daily record of women’s work and experiences. They document the activities that passed through their author’s mind each day: tasks of the household or farm, family, and community events. Seemingly trivial notes about weather or illness often discounted by scholars as unremarkable, are worth taking note of when treated as autobiographical writing because they are the details of their author’s existence: their life story told as it unfolds.⁷²

⁷⁰ Bunkers, “Faithful Friend,” 8-9.

⁷¹ Liz Rohan, “I Remember Mamma: Material Rhetoric, Mnemonic Activity, and Once Woman’s Turn of the Century Quilt,” 23 *Rhetoric Review* 23 (2004): 368-387; Garvey; Jelinek.

⁷² See Theophano, 122-123 for method of understanding an author’s reality through her everyday records.

The entries give insight into the knowledge a person gains from their experience, serving to symbolize domestic success or familial devotion, for example. Their creators unselfconsciously recorded the events of their lives, while constructing an image and record of rural womanhood. Treated as autobiographical writing, the everyday, unnoticed, and unappreciated work and concerns of ordinary women is witnessed.

Farm Calendar Collections

The Matson and Stephens collections are each family calendars, maintained by farmwives. Matson, her husband and two sons lived outside of Ames in central Iowa, while Stephens's household included her husband, father-in-law, seven daughters, and eight sons. While their household sizes were dissimilar, the calendars are very similar in their actual form, both used calendars that were complimentary gifts from seed corn companies, local businesses, or farm industry organizations. The collections are also unexpectedly similar in content, in particular their documentation of the economic activity of the farm and caretaking experience of mothering. Matson's collection runs from 1947 to 1999 and Stephens's from 1955 to 1976. Stephens recorded many more events, but Matson's entries provide greater narrative. Comparison of the two collections shows similar daily experiences, demonstrating how both women enacted mid-century notions of rural womanhood defined by motherhood, marriage, agricultural labor, and community participation. The calendar entries mark achievements, document social interactions, and reveal the cultural values of the families they serve. Listed among entries of daily or commonplace activities are milestones and celebrations: an event of national significance, childbirth, or outbreaks of illness are intermixed with the totals of snow and rain accumulation or quantities of vegetables canned and eggs collected. By

choice or condition, the self-esteem of mid-twentieth-century rural women was wrapped in their domestic success fulfilled through the gendered role of daughter, sister, wife and mother and this is reflecting in their self-representation in their records.

Both sets of calendars feature the handwriting of other family members: notes from their husbands about fields planted with crops or children's scrawls marking baseball practices or birthdays. In this way, the Matson and Stephens calendars are life records different from diaries because they are built from the collective thoughts of family members. Their calendars include entries about the birth, butchering, and sale of beef, poultry, and swine, crops planted, hay mowed, machinery purchased, weather conditions, and more making each set a valuable record of farm life through a gendered lens.⁷³ The concerns that are unique to these women reveal the autobiographical traces: focusing on what is personal and the events of their family's private lives provides insight into the daily narrative of their lives and experiences.

In choosing which events to record in their family calendars, Stephens and Matson both presented their identities: constructing and projecting their own self-image through selections made regarding what memories and events to document and preserve, and whether or not to keep or discard the calendars at year's end, when they no longer had practical value. In keeping the calendars, both authors took on the additional role of family archivists: collecting and preserving the family's history by placing the records aside, and at next year's end, adding another calendar to the growing assemblage of a family archives.

⁷³ Abby Stephens, "Charting the border of farm and community: An examination of mid-twentieth-century Iowa farmwomen's calendar entries," presented at the Berkshire Conference of Women's Historians, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 25 May 2014.

Ruth Ringgenberg Matson

On December 31, 1947, Ruth Matson of rural Ames, Iowa reflected upon her day with a one-line calendar annotation: “373. Lee 11th and 12th tooth double lower and left.”⁷⁴ With just a few characters the entry captures the essence of Matson’s accounting for the day-to-day experience of life in 1947. When the calendar is read as more than a mnemonic device for keeping appointments and details, but also as a life-narrative authored by the creator, the entry demonstrates two primary lenses of self-definition: mother and economic partner.

Matson’s brief “373” notes egg production on their farm which, according to previous calendar entries, began around the beginning of November 1947.⁷⁵ The second part of Matson’s entry, which reads: “Lee 11th & 12th tooth...” documents the conclusion of a year’s worth of calendar notations documenting the growth of Matson’s first-born son. When read as autobiography, the entries about her son’s growth celebrate Matson’s success during her first full year of motherhood and reflect the dominance of mothering in the self-image Matson presented in her calendar notes. The seamless combination of the egg total with her toddler’s cutting of teeth in the entry reveals the ways in which responsibilities in agricultural production and child rearing were intertwined in the farmwife’s identity.

Matson accounted for her experience as a young mother throughout her 1947 calendar entries. On the 7th of January she noted a visit to the doctor with: “Lee’s first shot...18# 2 oz,” the following week: “Lee put his toe in his mouth,” and on the last day

⁷⁴ Ruth Matson, “December 1947 Calendar,” Ringgenberg Family Collection, Ames Historical Society, Ames, Iowa.

⁷⁵ Ibid., “September and November 1947 Calendars.”

of January she wrote: “Lee spanked by Papa.”⁷⁶ Although brief, these entries represent the way Matson accounted for her life and experience. Each reflects effort to preserve memories of her son’s first year. The last entry of her husband spanking her son might note the affirmation of gendered child rearing or it could represent an unexpressed negative view from Matson regarding her husband’s intervention. The earlier entries documenting infant milestones could represent Matson’s reflection on her success as a care provider. Calendar notes from the summer of 1947 continue this narrative thread with the notes: “Lee sat self up & got into Crayola’s; Crawl on knees”⁷⁷ followed by: “Lee’s 7th tooth” and “Lees’ 1st step to chair” and “Lee walked across room.”⁷⁸ Even notes on the calendars Matson maintained over a decade later continue to document her responsibilities as a mother: an illness plaguing her son in January 1959 is marked with a reminder to “Watch Lee fever” and five days later “Watch Lee Rash.”⁷⁹ The prevalence of her entries demonstrate regarding mothering reflect the primary role it played in her life.

An entry from 11 September 1947: “Hen house settled” marks a shift in Matson’s notations from almost exclusively concentrated on mothering, to a new focus on her role as economic partner in egg production on her family’s farm.⁸⁰ With her 14-month-old son walking, Matson made frequent calendar entries of eggs production beginning in late 1947; entries read: “Nov. 1- 30, 2-35, 3-40, 4-60, 28- 325, Dec. 1- 322.”⁸¹ While mothering is an economic activity in itself, the switch in focus in Matson’s annotation to

⁷⁶ Ibid., “January 1947 Calendar.”

⁷⁷ Ibid., “July 1947 Calendar.”

⁷⁸ Ibid., “August and September 1947 Calendars.”

⁷⁹ Ibid., “January 1959 Calendar.”

⁸⁰ Ibid., September 11, 1947 Calendar Entry.

⁸¹ Ibid., November and December 1947 Calendars.

egg production might indicate that Matson, like most women, did not understand herself as an economic producer when caring for her son, but did when participating in agricultural production.

The egg production entries are brief, but they nevertheless tell the story of Matson's economic role and raise questions about what they did with the large number of eggs. Building up the record with biographical detail from local newspaper articles published in 1950 and 1953 demonstrates how the Matsons tried their best to make small-scale commercial egg production a success for their farm. According to the *Ames Tribune* the Matsons sought a "low capital investment" to supplement grain production and believing there was a "local need for farm fresh eggs" and that housewives would pay for premium eggs, they set-up a washing, candling, and grading operation in their basement.⁸² From the calendar entries we could guess that the numbers of eggs produced indicated commercial endeavors, but we would not know that the Matsons established a trade name, made contracts with Ames grocers, and by 1953 were selling every egg they produced.⁸³ In another article ran by the *Ames Tribune* in 1954, the Matsons touted a "triple-labor return" on their poultry flock.⁸⁴ The articles in the *Ames Tribune* reference the farm work of both spouses: referring to Mrs. Matson or the Matson farm and attributing labor and success to both Ruth and husband, Randall; but it takes looking at her own writing, in her calendar entries to see the details of Matson's role as farm record keeper: maintaining the egg count.

⁸² Newspaper clippings: *Ames Tribune* 15 August 1950 and 15 September 1953, *Ringgenberg Family Collection*, Ames Historical Society, Ames, Iowa.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., *Ames Tribune*, 12 December 1954.

Despite the Matsons' work to upgrade their equipment and make poultry production a profitable enterprise, it was over in 1961. While this failure did not receive the notice of the *Ames Tribune* as their success had, Matson marked it with a bit of ceremony in her calendar entry from 11 January 1961 writing: "Today marked the end of poultry as a major enterprise on this farm all but about 200 hens were sold (8 ½ c. per lb.)."⁸⁵ It is possible that the Matsons could no longer secure grocers to buy their eggs and Iowans had joined most states in demanding certification of premium-graded eggs. The Matsons were probably one of the last holdouts in the replacement of Iowa's farmwomen's egg production with that of larger commercial farms in California and the South.

All of Matson's entries are a comment on her life in process, not as product; and some are quite reflective, with her personal experience as a mother and farmwife at the center. After the death and funeral of a friend in January 1963 the Matsons joined their neighbors in a trip to Des Moines. Matson's entry reflects a need to leave behind farm responsibilities to be with friends: "Left our cares at home and with Stalls moved to D.M."⁸⁶ But the reality of farm life made their relief short-lived; Matson's entry from three days later details their return to their work on the farm and in the household, and also their leadership of the county Farm Bureau, with the entry: "Back in the harness. Much time in bringing record book up to date."⁸⁷

The Matsons' interest in community events, particularly Iowa State College sports programs is evidenced throughout the calendar entries. The 12 January 1963 entry is

⁸⁵ Ruth Matson, January 1961 Calendar.

⁸⁶ Ibid., January 4, 1963 Calendar Entry.

⁸⁷ Ibid., January 7, 1963 Calendar Entry.

typical of the way many entries detail work completed, life on the farm, and college events. Matson discussed her update of the Farm Bureau account book after the state membership rally, farm work completed by her sons, and an exciting basketball game: “Turned in account book Boone office this afternoon. Boys vaccinated Nov. pigs this morning. B.B. vs. Kansas, upset, won.”⁸⁸ Zero-degree temperatures did not stop the Matsons from attending Iowa State events; the following January 19 Matson wrote: “Huddled by the fire today- did go to a gymnastics meet this afternoon and a wrestling meet tonight. Iowa State pinned Colorado State 18-6.” The following day was cold enough to stop them from attending church, however: “A devilish howling wind & blowing snow and 10 below. Did not attend SS or church. Ready for the snow of the winter.”⁸⁹ The cold snap continued, and Matson kept herself busy with volunteer work for the Farm Bureau, but she noted that the weather made it difficult for them to find work for their hired man, Max, on January 20th she writes: “Temp. hit 20 below this morning. Clouded and began snowing by noon. Teamed up with Bernice Bradshaw and worked FB [Farm Bureau] membership and Budget Committee meeting” and two days later: “Temp up to 18 last night and back to zero this morning. Today high wind and blowing snow. -10 by chore time. Boys home from school by 3. Having difficult time finding non-freezing work for Max.”⁹⁰ Matson’s calendars served as a daily companion as she labored and managed her household and helped manage the family farm and they provide an enduring record of her experience of rural life.

⁸⁸ Ibid., January 12, 1963 Calendar Entry.

⁸⁹ Ibid., January 19-20, 1963 Calendar Entry.

⁹⁰ Ibid., January 1963 Calendar.

Maxine Beymer Stephens

Maxine Stephens's calendars depict a performance similar to Matson's of a farmwife ideal wrapped up in agricultural responsibilities, homemaking expectations, familial devotion as a wife and mother, and maintenance of social relationships built through family, neighborhood, and church. Sometimes calendar annotations are brief or sparse, but without these "autobiographical traces" there would be little sense of the lives of the authors. The small notes are how they "wrote themselves into being" and reveal the images they shaped for themselves. The day-to-day accounts of these rural women, when placed within biographical and historical context amount to their life histories.⁹¹

In a very rare event, Stephens transcribed a quote about parenting on her 29 June 1955 entry, which serves to represent much about her daily life and experience: "A child makes the family ties stronger, days and nights shorter, the bank account smaller, clothes shabbier, home happier, life busier, and the future worth living for." Stephens might have received the quote over the radio or in a newspaper and jotted it down in her calendar. Even as an appropriation of someone else's writing, the act of taking time to record the quote shows self-reflection. The transcription is unique among Stephens's two decades worth of daily entries, it is a lone entry among thousands with a complete sentence structure. Although appropriated from elsewhere, it provides some of the greatest insight into Stephens's calendars as autobiographical writing reflecting upon wisdom acquired as a mother.

⁹¹ Theophano, 118; using the methods of Laurel Thatcher Ulrich and Joan M. Jensen of incorporating data from census records, atlases, and state and local histories helps elucidate the "autobiographical traces."

In rural Diagonal, Iowa, Maxine Beymer Stephens used the space of the family calendar to record the daily events of her farm and family. To read Stephens's collection, which ranged from 1955-1976 as an autobiographical record, it is useful to categorize the entries into the following descriptors: *illness & medical*, events involving household members in *school & sports, 4-H, church, community, family* and *neighborhood*, and events centered at home categorized as: *farm, garden, livestock and poultry*, and *weather*. Two categories titled: *Maxine* and *current events* had few entries but are important to understanding the calendars as an autobiographical record because they are instructive about the way Stephens experienced her world beyond her primary role as farmwife and mother.

Stephens had little time to write a reflective memoir or even maintain a personal diary. Each calendar entry served as not only a reminder of future appointments or record of the day's events, but a space for Stephens to document her identity. The calendar record was necessary to farm and household management, but in retrospect serves as an excellent record of a farmwife's work and experience. The choices Stephens made about which experiences to record, both her reminders of appointments to keep and accounting of daily events after they took occurred, allow Stephens to tell the story of her life.

While all entries document Stephens's personal life, few document events exclusive to Stephens herself. Notations typical in the classification: *Maxine* include appointments for having her hair permanent set and meetings of the Dorcas Society religious charity. Biographical detail helps explain why so little of the collection documents events exclusive to her experience: Stephens did not drive and by 1958 there were eighteen members of her farm household, which included her father-in-law,

husband, seven daughters, and eight sons. Stephens's children have few memories of their mother leaving the farm to attend *Dorcas Society* meetings, or anything social for that matter, but Stephens noted the time and hosts of the meetings on her calendar almost every month.⁹²

According to Theophano, a reader cannot passively read unconventional autobiographical collections as they would traditional forms of autobiography, they must use the sometimes very sparse details to take an "imaginative leap" into the time and setting in which the collections were created.⁹³ Perhaps the act of making the entry about the Dorcas Society meetings gave Stephens a chance to think, organize, and hope that her husband, Velmer would have the time to drive her, and that her family would carry-on without her for a couple of hours for her to break with her work and socialize with neighbors while carrying out charitable work.⁹⁴

With the calendars serving as a record of life in process rather than product, it is worth noting that Stephens treated her calendars as more than date-books with reminders of future events. Notes like: "4-H Skating Party - Jim went" noting her son's attendance at a club event, shows that she updated entries with hindsight. Stephens routinely marked the scores of children's basketball games with notes like: "Greenfield there D: 55- G: 52, overtime" or "Boys Game Kellerton here AM, K=26 D=47".⁹⁵ These entries demonstrate that Stephens treated the calendars as a retrospective chronicle, not just a date-book to keep reminders of future events. And as a mother of fifteen, it offered her a space to

⁹² Stephens Family Interviews, conducted by author, 2011-2012; Maxine Beymer Stephens, Calendar Collection: 1955-1976, Family Collection, Author's possession, Mount Ayr, Iowa.

⁹³ Theophano, 118.

⁹⁴ Maxine Stephens, Calendar Collection: 1955-1976.

⁹⁵ Ibid., October 10, 1962 calendar entry.

publicly document events and accomplishments important to her children, that she might not have been able to witness first-hand.

Like Matson's calendar collection, in some places Stephens's calendars are part "collaborative autobiography" because her husband or children also made notations. The calendars were never meant to be private, but they do consist primarily of Stephens's writing, and they document her experience; still, Stephens apparently wrote for an audience other than herself, with other family members using the calendars for reminders of their events or a place to record their accomplishments. John R. Gillis documents a long legacy of women's writing in diaries and calendars being open to the entire family. Women facilitated communication among the family and assumed the role of maintaining family schedules, and a running record of marriages, births, and deaths. Unlike men, their writing in calendars, letters, and dairies was open to the whole family and men considered it as much their own record.⁹⁶

An example of collective authorship in the Stephens calendars is evident in the October 1955 calendar. On October seventeenth Stephens wrote: "Got Ford Country Sedan" detailing the purchase of a new family car; the following day her husband wrote: "Picked Corn at Burls" and someone else, probably one of the older Stephens children, wrote: "Baby born" marking the birth of Stephens's thirteenth child whose name, Ken, Stephens herself added to the date in her own handwriting, sometime after returning home from the hospital, making an additional notation on the subject of Ken's birth: "Mom & Kenny home" on the October twenty-third calendar space.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ John R. Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual, and the Quest for Family Values*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 77.

⁹⁷ Maxine Stephens, October 1955 Calendar.

As Stephens detailed her son's growth in her entries from the following months, she documented the theme of motherhood in a similar fashion as Matson. On the twenty-second of November Stephens wrote: "Plowed...Kenny 12 lbs. 4 oz" detailing her husband's agricultural work and the baby's weight. The following week she documented a community social event and an additional three ounces gained by the baby with the note: "Mary Taylor's shower- 2:00 Presbyterian Church... Kenny 12-9." A little over two weeks later she again noted the baby's weight with the entry: "Kenny 13lbs. 12 oz."⁹⁸ The similarities of the entries to Matson's show the importance of accounting for growth to care of a newborn, whether it was a mother's first or thirteenth baby. The brief notations of Stephens's personal experience on her calendars reveal the way mothering, agricultural production, and community involvement were intertwined in her fulfillment of the farmwife identity.

Considering three classifications of entries: *weather, illness and medical*, and references to *current events*, is a valuable method for analyzing Stephens's calendars as an autobiographical record. The calendar notations are all brief, but when considered in the context of similar notes, how they tell the story of Stephens's life can be discerned. While some subjects or entries might seem insignificant as autobiographical content, they reveal what occupied Stephens's mind on a daily basis. The fragmentation of the narrative reflects Stephens's daily life as she fulfilled the multiple roles defining rural womanhood: devoted family caretaker, farmer's helpmate, and community member.

⁹⁸ Ibid., November 1955 Calendar.

Weather Entries

The entries categorized as *weather* are evidence of the primacy of seasonality and climate to the agricultural livelihoods, but when considered as part of Stephens's autobiography it represents the setting of the scene in which the story of the Stephens family unfolded each day. The entries categorized as *illness and medical* document the role of caregiving to the expectations of women in motherhood and marriage. Stephens's entries categorized as *current events* document her relationship with her husband as they attended political events and also the way a rural Iowa woman, busy with obligations to farm and family, nevertheless experienced the tumult of American politics and culture in the early 1960s.

Comments pertaining to weather are prevalent in both the Stephens and Matson calendars. Weather was not necessarily something to remember long-term, but the frequency of entries demonstrates that it occupied the minds of farmwives. Seasonality and climate are central to farming, so extreme conditions might reflect frustration; and recording the day's weather might have provided a way for these women to account for the day-to-day.⁹⁹ Stephens's weather entries note extreme conditions such as flooding, being snowed-in, and weather that was out of the ordinary like 56° temperatures in January or a week of consecutive rain in July.¹⁰⁰ The following list is a sample of Stephens's entries concerning weather from 1957-1963:

Mar 26, 1957: Sunshine-Drifts dug out- Electricity back; no school
 Feb. 16, 1958: -22°
 Jan. 11, 1958: Bridge out
 Jan. 21, 1959: Blizzard, no school
 Jan. 12, 1960: Rain 2" River full
 Dec. 11, 1961: Snow

⁹⁹ Theophano.

¹⁰⁰ Maxine Stephens, 1961 Calendar.

Dec. 13, 1961: -17° Too cold to do more than chore
 Dec. 14, 1961: Picked corn; snow
 Dec. 16, 1961: Rain- ice
 Dec. 23, 1961: Snowed in
 Dec. 24, 1961: snow plow in, no SS or Church
 Dec. 26, 1961: moved snow
 Feb. 27, 1962: -10° Road Closed
 June 24, 1962: HOT Went Swimming
 Jan 12, 1963: Snow and Blow
 Jan. 25, 1963: Water pipe froze¹⁰¹

Most entries document weather that would have frustrated the Stephens in their farm work. In recounting the weather in December 1961, Stephens's husband was likely already discouraged that they were still harvesting corn in December and the addition of below zero temperatures, ice, and snow, most likely added to the exasperation. Because family life and farming would have been intertwined, Stephens's record likely documented everyone's frustration: from the children who were expected to complete milking chores in the frigid temperatures, to daughters expected to follow dress-code by wearing skirts to school.¹⁰² The same children might have had the opposite response of pleasure on 24 June 1963 when Stephens made the notation: "HOT Went swimming" to mark the simple family enjoyment of packing-up and go swimming in a farm pond.¹⁰³

Illness and Medical Entries

The entries categorized as *illness and medical* from one year alone reveal a great deal about Stephens's experience managing a large household and the caregiving demanded of a pregnant mother of fourteen. They are worth considering because they define Stephens's interactions with her children and give a sense of the centrality of

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Stephens Family Interviews.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

illness and birth to one's performance as a mother and wife. Because she did not drive, Stephens would have had to depend upon her husband, father-in-law, or one of her older children to drive a sick family member either alone, or with Stephens to the family doctor, requiring an added degree of management on her part.

The following list of entries is entirely from the 1958 calendar:

Jan. 5: Sheryl chicken pox
 Jan. 6: Kenny chicken pox
 Jan 12: Sheryl tooth
 Feb 25: MA Hearing [MA= Mount Ayr, location of the family doctor's office]
 Mar 11: Kathy pink eye
 Mar 16: John pink eye, Jack (too)
 Mar 17: Kathy, Jack home
 Mar 18: Kathy, Jack home
 Mar 19: Kathy, Jack home
 Mar 25: TB Tests
 Mar 31: Jim and Joan have pink eye, Sue home
 April 1: Sue and Jim home
 April 2: Sue and Jim home
 April 3: Kathy home
 April 4: Good Friday- no school
 May 1: Sue measles
 May 9: Jerry measles
 May 12: Kathy measles
 May 15: Dorothy check-up [Stephens's Aunt]
 May 16: John measles
 August 18: Jack dentist, 2 PM
 August 19: Jack dentist, 3 PM
 Sept 6: Eyes tested, Judy, Jack to dentist
 Sept 13: Judy dentist
 Sept 20: Eyes- to Creston
 Oct. 7: Dorothy check up
 Oct. 14: Pauline surgery [Maxine's sister]
 Oct. 31: Dave sick
 Nov. 17: Betty Jane came [birth of Stephens' youngest child]¹⁰⁴

The experience of birth, illness, aging, and death are central themes of women's autobiographical writing because they document events that are fundamental to women's

¹⁰⁴ Maxine Stephens, 1958 Calendar.

personal experiences.¹⁰⁵ The list of entries documenting Stephens's work as caregiver, demonstrates its centrality to her experience. With such a large household, illnesses were likely to pass from one child to another and Stephens might have recorded these instances on her calendar to keep track of which children had been sick in order to provide accurate updates to the family doctor, relatives and friends, or track the number of school days missed. Perhaps the notes are more personal; maybe they provided Stephens with an opportunity to document her burden as caretaker and record frustrations with the expectations implicit in motherhood. She also might have used the notes to express her sense of accomplishment in fulfilling her duties, making a record of her devotion to her family. For many of the calendar dates, the only note is a reference to the illnesses, signifying that each experience was her priority.

The 1958 *illness and medical* calendar entries document the most basic of mothering responsibilities and without the record we could be confident that Stephens acted as caregiver. But in examining women's unconventional autobiographical records we can interpret the personal concerns of women, in their own hand, because they are fundamental features of the texts. Stephens might have only needed her notes to remember dates of children's illnesses, but as an autobiographical account it exposes the hardships of private life that women rarely shared publicly.

Current Event Entries

The final category of entries considered is *current events*. While *weather* speaks to Stephens's role as a farmwife and *illness and medical* document her role as a mother, the list of entries detailing current events reveal how the world beyond Stephens's

¹⁰⁵ Benstock, 7.

kitchen occupied her mind. Like entries in the other categories, Stephens did not add any reflection to the current events entries; the notes are fragmented and were logged among a range of other daily activities. While most writing in women's unconventional autobiography focuses on private life, the rare notes documenting the experience of major event are revealing about the women's unique experience of historical events.¹⁰⁶

Stephens's brief entry from 8 November 1960: "Kennedy wins" discloses nothing of her opinion of the presidential election of John F. Kennedy but considered in light of Stephens's infrequent remarks on current events, it suggests that the victory was something that mattered to her. The entry from three years later documenting Kennedy's assassination provides greater insight into the personal experience of a national tragedy. Stephens's 22 November 1963 entry reads: "Rain; sleet; Kennedy died; got stove; Jo home." The final note of her adult daughter, Joan's return home to spend time with family might reflect the sense of grief that overtook the nation following President Kennedy's death. The calendar entries demonstrate how the experience affected life in Stephens's small town: Stephens noted that the Diagonal community's annual gathering for a meal and auction, known as the Harvest Sale, was postponed from November twenty-third to the following week. On November twenty-fifth Stephens wrote: "No School Kennedy funeral" documenting the fact that her children remained home to observe the national day of mourning, most likely watching the funeral on television.¹⁰⁷ References to current events are so rare among Stephens's entries that their appearance signifies her interpretation of events, even if it not explicitly: Stephens's writing shows

¹⁰⁶ Jelinek, 6.

¹⁰⁷ Maxine Stephens, 1960 and 1963 Calendars.

that she and her family were affected by the national loss, as life in their home and community was altered.

Stephens's husband was active in the state Democratic party and their attendance at two party functions in 1963 not only documents an interest in politics in the household, but also rare evidence of the married couple spending time together outside of the home with no children present. On 17 January 1963 Stephens wrote an entry referring to herself in the third-person: "Velmer and Maxine with Rissers to Inauguration and Ball" on the family calendar referencing her and her husband's attendance, with friends, of the inauguration of Iowa's Governor and later Senator, Harold Hughes. The following Fall the attendance of Velmer and Maxine at a lecture from Harry Truman at Grinnell College, a few hours from their home, was evidenced in Stephens's calendar note, again referring to herself in the third-person, but this time as Mom rather than Maxine, from October twenty-third: "Mom and Dad to Grinnell to hear Truman."¹⁰⁸ Although documented without reflection, the record of the political events Stephens attended with her husband and recorded in her calendars provide rare insight into the couple's relationship by revealing details of their interaction outside of the home.

It is also interesting to briefly compare Stephens's attention to current events with the other two collections already analyzed in this chapter: Matson's similar farm calendar collection and Beam's journals documenting her daily experience of life in the town of Coburg. All three women made notations in their records documenting events from NASA's Mercury and Apollo space programs. Looking at the ways these three rural Iowa women mentioned the "Space Race" competition between the United States and the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

Soviet Union provides insight into the way everyday Americans experienced events of national and international interest.

In another notation classified on 5 May 1961, twenty-three days after the Soviet Union had successfully sent the first man to space, Matson documented the achievement of Astronaut Alan Shepard with the note: “First USA Man in Space.”¹⁰⁹ The following year, Stephens noted John Glenn’s feat as the first American to orbit the earth with the entry: “Glenn orbited 3x” on 20 February 1962.¹¹⁰ The notes of these rural women documenting events of national significance are rare among their journal or calendar entries overall and demonstrate the widespread fascination with space exploration among ordinary American families.

Stephens’s notes document her family’s captivation with the accomplishments of NASA’s Project Mercury. She noted the fourth American in space and second to orbit the Earth, Scott Carpenter’s successful mission on 24 May 1962 with the note: “Carpenter orbited 3 times.” The entry: “Schirra 6 orbits” from the following October third documented Wally Schirra’s mission; and Stephens documented the final manned mission of the Mercury program with the note “Cooper flight” on 15 May 1963.¹¹¹

Hazel Beam’s rare attention to current events beyond her home in Coburg also highlighted space exploration. Beam referenced the Apollo 12 landing on 11 November 1969 with the note: “I watched the astronauts on TV this morning” and the following day: “I defrosted the refrigerator this morning and watched the moon shot on TV some.”¹¹² The following year Beam chronicled the perilous situation of the Apollo 13

¹⁰⁹ Ruth Matson, May 1961 Calendar.

¹¹⁰ Maxine Stephens, 1963 Calendar.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 1962 and 1963 Calendars.

¹¹² Hazel Beam, November 1969 dairy entry.

mission in her diary; on April fifteenth she wrote: “The astronauts had trouble today but I think they will get back alright” and two days later: “We watched the astronauts land. I went out to look around at my flowers in our gardens.” The following day she noted: “I didn’t do much today...we watched President Nixon give the astronauts their Medals of Honor. I called Mrs. Roberts tonight” and on April twenty-first: “We went to Red Oak this morning to do the washing...we listened to the report of the three astronauts at 6:30.”¹¹³

All three authors: Beam, Matson, Stephens documented the space exploration program in a similar manner, revealing the way ordinary Americans experienced events of national significance and the how events beyond their own household responsibilities occupied the minds of these rural women enough to merit notation in their unconventional autobiographical records.

Madge Lotspeich

Like Stephens and Matson’s farm calendar entries, Madge Lotspeich’s scrapbook of handwritten or cut-and-pasted recipes is also a rather commonplace piece of historical evidence. While Stephens and Matson documented their immediate experiences with marriage and children on their calendars, providing insight into the way these roles shaped their identities, Lotspeich’s records can be read for the absence of those experiences however her record is similar in the way issues of home and family dominate the recipe entries, demonstrating that the identity of rural womanhood had like features for unmarried as well as married women.

¹¹³ Hazel Beam, April 1970 dairy entries.

For women whose lives were consumed with the welfare of others, the cookbook or the calendar served as their daily companion and allowed them to “write themselves into being.” Even if they thought their lives were too ordinary to be interesting to others they might have found enough pride in a recipe or household accomplishment to record it in a private cookbook or calendar and in doing so take a moment for self-representation.¹¹⁴ Lotspeich’s cookbook, when read as an autobiographical record, is a repository of information on the importance of femininity and domesticity to her understandings of rural womanhood.¹¹⁵

Lotspeich’s handmade cookbook, referenced at the beginning of this chapter, is a hybrid of various forms of unconventional autobiographical records. It is not a diary or annotated calendar but is nevertheless a text of women’s daily writing centered on women’s experiences in work and social relationships, documenting the way they received the world they inhabited. Lotspeich’s cookbook includes letters, clippings, handwritten recipes, and notes documenting the variety of things that passed through the hands of a woman as she maintained her household.¹¹⁶

Lotspeich’s collection meets the expanded definition of autobiography because it is composed of handwritten or selected recipes that document her private life. Lotspeich had a public life in her community as a librarian, officer in the local chapter of the Business and Professional Women’s Association, and member of Eastern Star and Methodist’s women’s circle, although none of this is discussed in the pages of her handmade cookbook. Examination of the book as an autobiographical record provides

¹¹⁴ Theophano, 9.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 145.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 122.

evidence of an identity as an organized, efficient, and interested homemaker in agreement with her public persona, but it also reveals the centrality of domestic details to her personal experience.

Cookbooks have performed as journals, commonplace books, records of family history, archives of cultural heritage, guidelines for behavior, and heirlooms. Telling the personal stories of women, they reveal their ideas, concerns, and motivations, the records act as repositories of what their creators found inspiring or worth preserving. Theophano argues that cookbooks serve as both an archives of women's domestic lives and perform an autobiographical function.¹¹⁷ When women annotate published cookbooks or create their own, they leave behind traces of their autobiographical writing revealing their interests, hobbies, and personalities.¹¹⁸ Within the cookbook as autobiography, are stories from women that reveal the interworking of families and communities.¹¹⁹

Cookbooks are remarkably similar over time and if read as forms of women's expression rather than merely for practical use, we see that they have a congruency in considering themes of life, death, youth, aging, and memory.¹²⁰ Cooking is such an ordinary act for women that the records they keep surrounding the act serve as a daily guide and meditation, memoir, diary, or scrapbook. Cookbooks, especially those of the homemade variety, provided the only form for some women to tell their own stories. Like a diary or household calendar, they can be the daily companion of a woman as she labors in her home; revealing how she prepares a meal, remedies ailments, and maintains a

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 121-123.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 132.

¹¹⁹ Anne L. Bower, ed., *Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997).

¹²⁰ Theophano, 7.

social network of support. Writing down or clipping a recipe can be about more than feeding one's family, it might also symbolize an effort to uphold middle class values or "live the good life."¹²¹ The cookbook as a personal record is space for self-representation, revealing the dimensions of the creator's experience.¹²²

Lotspeich's collection is what Theophano calls a "cookery scrapbook" because it is a handmade collection of recipes, household hints, and other materials. Lotspeich's book is pasted together over the pages of the book, *Memorial Addresses on the Life and Character of James H. Kyle*. The book's title and inscription are still visible and read: "Memorial addresses on the life and character of James H. Kyle (late senator from South Dakota), delivered in the Senate and House of representatives, Fifty-seventh Congress, first session United States. Congress."¹²³ It is impossible to know whether Lotspeich started the book, or whether it was first started by someone else, most likely one of her parents. Lotspeich is documented as the book's owner and donor in the records of the Jackson County Historical Society and most of the handwritten recipes and indexing are written in the same script that almost certainly belonged to her hand.

A letter from Lotspeich's father, William postmarked 1902 is part of the record; perhaps as an effort by Lotspeich to use the cookbook as a family record, or maybe to credit her father as the book's original owner. The publication date of the *Memorial Addresses* is 1899 so the letter from William Lotspeich was probably written when the book was in its original state, before it was repurposed as a cookery scrapbook. William Lotspeich, or another family member, could have owned the book of memorial addresses

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., 5-6.

¹²³ Ibid., 125; *Memorial addresses on the life and character of James H. Kyle*.

and slid the letter into the cover where Lotspeich left it throughout her use of the book as a recipe scrapbook, or perhaps Lotspeich discovered the letter later and added it to the book as a way of identifying her father as the previous owner and maintaining the book as a family archives; an altogether different provenance of the letter is also possible.

The repurposed cookery scrapbook primarily contains pages of recipes, but also household remedies and advice, either cut from newspapers or other publications, or handwritten on notecards or paper and pasted over the pages of the book of *Memorial Addresses*. The cookery scrapbook has been indexed and divided into sections with a reference list made by Lotspeich of recipe titles and page numbers for nearly sixty recipes, ranging from macaroons, penny muffins, Scottish shortbread, and corn zephyrs to biscuits, cornbread, omelets, oatmeal cookies, and salad dressing. The clippings are from sections of newspapers and magazines with titles like: “*Meal for the Day*” or “*For the Recipe Book*.” Some recipes clippings were cut from manufacturer’s publications inserted in cooking products like *Arm & Hammer* baking soda or *Crisco* shortening¹²⁴

Lotspeich’s cookery scrapbook allowed her space for self-representation of her fulfillment of women’s domestic expectations ranging from making noodle soup to caring for chickens. The advice column clippings in the handmade cookbook include gardening tips from a “*Housewife Hints*” column written by Marion Harris Neil with advice on the subject: “What to do with sour milk” and a column titled: *Talks to Homemakers* by Mrs. Hazel Blair Dodd with an article titled: “Destroy Lice in Chickens”

¹²⁴ Madge Lotspeich, “Scrapbook of Recipes,” Jackson County Historical Society, Makoqueta, Iowa.

with instructions for making a poultry lice powder, which Lotspeich pasted alongside a handwritten remedy for chicken cholera.¹²⁵

The section of the handmade cookbook that Lotspeich titled: “Extension and Miscellaneous recipes” reveals that her fulfillment of domestic expectations was not just for herself but also in support of others, through her involvement in area homemaker’s extension work. Lotspeich saved several publications from talks and lessons issued by the Foods and Nutrition Department of Iowa State College. The first was issued at the request of the American Legion Auxiliary for use in their meetings and detailed a “talk” on the “Contribution of Corn” from Chapter 20 of the *Hand Book for Homemakers*, which was focused on uses of Iowa produce.¹²⁶

Another publication in the “Extension and Miscellaneous recipes” section of Lotspeich’s cookery scrapbook is an outline for “Lesson 2, Year 4: Cost of Adequate Meals” of the *Local Leaders’ Meetings* resource for Home Demonstration work, written and issued by the Iowa State College Extension Service. The publication details the entire agenda for leading the meeting starting with a review of the previous lesson on vegetable cooking, roll call, and distribution of the luncheon menu before dividing women into groups to practice food preparation. Lotspeich annotated the publication with her own comments and with the luncheon menu including a recipe for twelve, a quantity that makes it unlikely that Lotspeich, as an unmarried woman, would have used it for her own use, her notes show that she planned to use the record for her Home Extension work.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Lotspeich's actual annotations provide even more evidence that she intended to use the record to guide her work as an Extension meeting leader. In the margins of the recipe for *Cheese and Bacon Sandwiches* she added the notes: "open face" in the margin of the title and "tomato may be used instead" in the margin of the ingredients list, and next to the ingredient "chili sauce" she wrote: "preferable or tomato catchup (sic)." Perhaps Lotspeich made the notes to provide a script for her own use when delivering the lesson. She also added the story of the invention of sandwiches, writing in the recipe instructions margin: "100 years ago Earl of Sandwich. Played cards and chess too busy to quit." Lotspeich might not have received or recorded accurate details of the story, but the notes show how she might have planned to provide commentary when presenting the recipe at a home extension meeting.¹²⁸ It is not possible to know whether Lotspeich made the marginal notes while attending a meeting for extension leaders, or whether it was received in the mail and the notes are her own thoughts. In both cases the record as part of her homemade cookbook is still quite interesting because it provides evidence of how she used her book, and her choice to add it to her record makes it part of her life story and chronicle. A November 1954 report from the *Jackson Sentinel* notes Lotspeich speaking on the topic of antiques at a Rural Articles Women's Committee meeting.¹²⁹ So without her cookbook, we would know that Lotspeich was a local extension leader, but we would know nothing about her personal experience of the role as the notes in the margins of her cookery scrapbook reveal.

¹²⁸ Ibid., "Iowa State College of Agricultural and Mechanic Arts: Extension Service Outline for Local Leaders' Meetings: Lesson II, Year IV: Nutrition."

¹²⁹ Ibid., "Miss Lotspeich Talks at Rural Women's Committee Meeting," newspaper clipping from *Jackson Sentinel*, 5 November 1954, p. 3.

Many recipes in Lotspeich's book simply contain the list of ingredients without precise directions for preparation, showing that Lotspeich knew enough about her craft to be able to look at only the list of ingredients to successfully follow the recipe.¹³⁰

Most of Lotspeich's book is devoted to recipes so, as a single woman, it raises the question of who the audience for her cooking was. Newspaper records document her leadership and involvement in the Methodist Women's Society of Christian Service or W.S.C.S. where she entertained "evening circle" at her home in December 1955.

According to the newspaper, Mrs. Leo Lane delivered the devotion for the meeting and guests studied a lesson from the book, *Within Two Worlds*.¹³¹ Perhaps Lotspeich served her guests Coffee Bread or Cherry Cake made from recipes in her cookery scrapbook.¹³²

The local events section of the *Jackson Sentinel* noted that Lotspeich also hosted the 7 October 1959 meeting of Maquoketa's B.P.W. chapter where she might have served guests tea biscuits made from recipes on pages seven and fourteen of her book.¹³³ A *Jackson Sentinel* article from 1954 identified Lotspeich as Vice President of Maquoketa's B.P.W. and details from the article offer information regarding what meeting attendees might have discussed. The article noted that women from the sixty-member chapter, one of eighty-seven in Iowa, completed service work, fundraised, sponsored forums during National Education Week, and worked to improve the standards of business and professional women by promoting relationships among women, providing opportunities

¹³⁰ Theophano, 129.

¹³¹ "Mrs. Glee Porter, 'News and Social Items: Of Interest to Women,' *Jackson Sentinel*, 2 December 1955, p.3. Lotspeich also led the group the month before according to the *Jackson Sentinel* "Calendar of Coming Events," 25 November 1955, p. 4.

¹³² Lotspeich Cookbook Collection.

¹³³ *Jackson Sentinel*, 7 October 1959.

and education for young women, and supporting the passage of an Equal Rights Amendment for equality in pay.¹³⁴

The “locals” section of the *Jackson Sentinel* also documents gatherings for which Lotspeich might have cooked that were strictly social. Lotspeich hosted her cousin, Miss Clara Hinton of Iowa City, Mrs. Mildred Sharp, and Miss Beatrice Sharp for Christmas dinner in 1955 where she might have shared gingerbread made from the “Quick Gingerbread” recipe in her book.¹³⁵ Lotspeich was among the guests of another unmarried woman, Helen Stoddard for Thanksgiving in 1959. Here she might have shared Apple Pie made from the recipe in her cookbook for Stoddard and her guests: Mrs. Anna Ruff, Mrs. Madge Wurster, and Mrs. Minnie Hegstrom, all presumably widows, because they are listed in the newspaper without their husbands.¹³⁶

The handmade recipe book, which could have been started by her parents at the turn of the century, appears to have served Lotspeich until her death in Sarasota, Florida in 1977 at the age of eighty-six. As she aged, it is possible that Lotspeich became unable to continue indexing and maintaining her book. The book contains more than two-dozen loose notecards, greeting cards, or notes on legal paper that seem to have come from a recipe exchange. One of the recipes for pie specifying the use of Eagle Brand Milk arrived from Cynthia on 19 March 1975. While it appears that Lotspeich was no longer indexing her book, the exchange reveals that she continued building social relationships

¹³⁴ *Jackson Sentinel*, “B.P.W. Has Many Community Projects,” 18 May 1954.

¹³⁵ *Jackson Sentinel*, “Family Gatherings Highlight Local Christmas Observances,” 23 December 1955, p. 5.

¹³⁶ *Jackson Sentinel*, “Local Pencilings: About You and Your Friends,” 21 November 1959, p. 5.

around cooking and even in Lotspeich's twilight years, domestic life remained central to her identity as she chose to represent it in her unconventional autobiography.¹³⁷

In the diary, calendar, or handmade cookbook, the motivations for writing, whether brief or extended, with scissors or pen, are the same as autobiography "proper": the creators use whatever form available, to document their world and define themselves and their interactions with others. In the process of creating their records, they express what would go otherwise unexpressed in evidence of their own history and the history of the rural women they represent. In creating their unconventional "books" they acted as autobiographers: ascribing importance to their lives and work and expressing their interpretation of events and experiences.¹³⁸

For five women, living in different parts of rural Iowa from the 1940s through the 1970s, the diary, calendar, and cookbook served as their daily companion. The sometimes cryptic notations of Beam, Kainz, Matson, Stephens, and Lotspeich document the relationships they valued within household, family, or community, and the themes of rural womanhood that they received and enacted.¹³⁹ As they made notes about mundane daily experiences like cooking and cleaning, or major events like the birth of children or events of national significance, they created a record of their lives as they witnessed and lived it, in their own words.¹⁴⁰ Looking at their collections as autobiographical writing allows the voices of Beam, Kainz, Matson, Stephens, and Lotspeich, all of which were too busy or did not find their experience important enough to purposefully chronicle, to be heard.

¹³⁷ Madge Lotspeich, Cookbook Collection.

¹³⁸ Bunkers.

¹³⁹ Theophano, 145.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3. FORCES OF COMMUNITY: MIDCENTURY RURAL WOMANHOOD IN IOWA

During the middle of the twentieth-century the experience of rural womanhood was redefined by changes to women's work, responsibilities in marriage and motherhood, and involvement in public life and civic affairs.¹ As all Americans experienced the significant changes accompanying World War II, postwar prosperity, and anti-communism, rural Americans also experienced the large-scale economic transformation of agriculture resulting from continued mechanization and corporatization.² Amidst all of this change, rural women enacted and upheld traditional social and cultural ways of rural America for their families and communities.

Examining the unconventional autobiographical collections that document the experiences of three rural Iowa women, including the editorial columns of Mildred Wiley Turnbull and Leanna Field Driftmier, and the papers of Dorothy Deemer Houghton, widens the lens for interpreting the twentieth-century rural womanhood experience. The records of women who experienced these changes first-hand demonstrate that mid-twentieth-century rural women were central forces in their own homes, but they also connected their homes and families to neighbors, community institutions, and the broader world, as they preserved and upheld the values of rural life.³

¹ Authors chronicling twentieth-century social and cultural changes in the woman's experience include, among others: William Chafe, Stephanie Coontz, Nancy Cott, Ruth Schwartz Cowan, Stephanie Coontz, Carl Degler, Myra Dinnerstein, Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels, Betty Friedan, Susan Hartmann, Eugenia Kaledin, Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, Gerda Lerner, Elaine Tyler May, Julie A. Matthaei, Mary Drake McFeely Eve Merriam, Joanne Meyerowitz, Marilyn Ferris Motz and Pat Browne, Mary P. Ryan, Laura Schenone, and Janet Theophano,

² Paul K. Conkin, *Revolution Down on the Farm: Transformation of American Agriculture Since 1929* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2008): 97-98.

³ Gladys Talcott Rife, "Personal Perspectives on the 1950s: Iowa Rural Women's Newspaper Columnists," *Annals of Iowa* 49 (Spring 1989): 661.

Consulting the collections for women's opinions and voices provides evidence of the richness of rural Iowa life in the mid-twentieth-century.⁴ They offer the perspective of rural women on subjects like the physical landscape, the meaning and significance of the "rural way of life," or the rural woman's view on public matters of community, state, nation, and world at a time when the perspectives of women were undervalued.⁵⁶

The collections provide an angle from which to analyze the experience of rural Iowa women and their subtle negotiation of the boundaries of mid-twentieth-century rural womanhood. These women were earnest in their work at home and in their communities, leading lives concentrated on a world that was often intensely local, revolving around family members and neighbors. As change penetrated their lives, they responded by adapting, preserving, or shifting various aspects of their identities as they related to the rural ways of their communities.

Literature Review and Method

Looking at the opinions of "ordinary" rural women builds on the work of new social history and follows in the vein of rural historians and women's historians, to interpret the experience of rural womanhood in Iowa during the middle of twentieth-century.⁷ Twentieth-century change in the experience of American women is undeniable, but evidence of how rural American women experienced this change has been harder to discern. To understand the experience of women in America's heartland during the

⁴ Rife, 662.

⁵ Ibid., 663.

⁶ Katherine Jellison, "Comment" on Gladys Talcott Rife, "Personal Perspectives on the 1950s: Iowa Rural Women's Newspaper Columnists," *Annals of Iowa* 49 (Spring 1989), 687.

⁷ Use of the term "ordinary" is quoted because no person's life is ordinary. The term is used to denote women often overlooked in the historical record.

middle of the twentieth-century, it is necessary to consider the historiography of the new social historians, twentieth-century women's history, and the rural women's history field.

The endeavor to understand the experience of everyday historical actors who existed on the margins of intellectual or political history was initiated largely in the 1960s and 1970s. Researching those whose experiences might be lost for their ordinariness, these historians shifted the focus to notions and conceptions of community, measuring change through quantitative analysis of demographic and economic data, qualitative methods, social theory, and anthropological concepts.⁸ Thomas Bender's *Community and Social Change in America*, completed at the height of the new social history, expanded considerations of community from a concept tied to location to an expression of relationship.⁹ This scholarship brought previously ignored histories to light, but in treating historical actors as figures in data sets, numbers on census forms, or placeholders in theoretical models, the approach of this initial wave of scholarship often missed important insights regarding women.

Beginning in the 1980s, scholars attending to the specific experiences of rural women offered new insights through reframed methods, reinterpreted sources, and new and unique approaches to uncovering the historical experience of rural women.¹⁰

Prior to the interest of the new social historians, interpreting the rural American experience had fallen largely to agricultural historians. By focusing on traditional

⁸ Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years: Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1736* (New York: Norton, 1970) provides an example of the variety of social science techniques taken up in the new social history.

⁹ Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1978).

¹⁰ David B. Danbom in "Reflections: Whither Agricultural History," *Agricultural History* (Spring 2010): 166-175, specifically acknowledges the contributions of rural women's historians: Joan M. Jensen, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Nancy Grey Osterud, Jane Adams, Deborah Fink, Mary Neth, Melissa Walker, Rebecca Sharpless, and Katherine Jellison.

agricultural topics like farming practices and economic change they ignored many of the social aspects of rural life such as the interwoven nature of home and business for farms, families, and communities or the influence of the “open country” social order that governing rural community and formed from the kinship and friendship networks of farm families scattered across the countryside. Because it is within the social aspects of agricultural life that women’s experiences were most significant, agricultural historians largely overlooked the experience of rural womanhood.

As the first social histories focused on small town and community studies, they came to include studies of agricultural and rural life because of both the figurative and actual association of small towns and agriculture. Rural historian David Danbom noted that the connection between community studies and agricultural history was obvious because agriculture included all the features of community studies: farms are homes as well as businesses, rural communities are close-knit, and most rural people are very ordinary.¹¹ While more Americans have lived in urban areas than rural since the 1920s, social historians first recognized the significance of this shift to modern American history in the mid-twentieth-century, as they observed the traditional aspects and social ways of rural life rapidly fading and sought to understand the consequences.¹² Founded at the intersection of community studies and agricultural history was a field of study focused solely on rural life and history.¹³ As the “country cousin” of new social history, rural history shifted agricultural history away from the dominance of government bureaucrats

¹¹ Danbom, “Reflections.”

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Robert P. Swierenga, “Theoretical Perspectives on the New Rural History: From Environmentalism to Modernization.” *Agricultural History* 56 (July 1982): 495-502.

and non-academics and toward research from professional historians.¹⁴ According to Danbom social historians encouraged the most important evolution in the study of rural and agricultural history: a focus on gender relations and the welcoming of historians who did not consider themselves agricultural historians but studied connections between rural history and life and consumerism, economics, the environment, foodways, material culture, technology, urban life, and more.¹⁵

Rural history rejuvenated the work of agricultural history with its focus on the changing social aspects of rural life and studies, but the experience of rural women remained on the margins of rural and agricultural history until female scholars stepped-up to fill in the gap in the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁶ Writing in 1981 John Mack Faragher argued that the experience of rural women had been silent to historians because “they have listened to the powerful, not the powerless.”¹⁷

Broadening the parameters of the rural and agricultural history fields encouraged attention to the experience of women, but the question of evidence remained; scholars focused on the unique experience of rural women grappled with this question. Nancy Grey Osterud argued that there were not records of many rural women because “farm women often lacked literacy, leisure, and the sense of self-importance that prompts people to record their experiences” and the few letters or diaries that were maintained,

¹⁴ Danbom, “Reflections...” notes that the interlinking of the field of agricultural history with bureaucracy dates back to the founding of the Agricultural Society in 1919, partially funded by the USDA until the 1970s. Professionalization in the historical field has pushed out “lay historians” that long influenced the field of Agricultural history, but federal agencies have also moved away from their connections to social science scholars.

¹⁵ Ibid., Emphasis on gender in the field of agriculture history was marked by the Agricultural History Conference’s devotion to the topic of rural women’s history in 1992 and two issues of the *Agricultural History Journal* focused solely on the study of rural women published in 1992 and 1999.

¹⁶ Ibid., Robert Swierenga, “Theoretical Perspectives.”

¹⁷ John Mack Faragher, “History from the Inside-Out: Writing the History of women in Rural America,” 33 *American Quarterly* (Winter 1981), 538.

were not often saved beyond the family circle because, families and even librarians did not regard these “ordinary” lives as significant.¹⁸ Other scholars argued that the lack of representation of rural women in the scholarship was not due to inarticulate women, but that their records and experiences were ignored.¹⁹ As Joan M. Jensen specified, “women and their work, whether rural or urban, have in the past not been subjects historians have valued.”²⁰

Responding to obstacles in evidence for analyzing the rural women’s experience, scholars focused on the way evidence from ordinary lives filled the gaps in the historiography.²¹ Rural women’s historians took up methods of anthropology, oral tradition, and material culture and expanded the range of document forms under consideration.²² Deborah Fink found that anthropological field methods and sources containing the narratives of the farmwomen themselves were better-suited sources than agricultural census data that did not include women in the labor force.²³ By mining archives in Washington, DC, Katherine Jellison found that materials generated by the rural women themselves, within government records holdings, provided rich source material for scholars.²⁴

¹⁸ Nancy Grey Osterud, “Introduction: American Rural and Farm Women in Historical Perspective” *Agricultural History* 67 (Spring 1992): 1-13.

¹⁹ Faragher, 537-57; Lucy Eldersveld Murphy and Wendy Hamand Venet eds., *Midwestern Women: Work, Community, and Leadership at the Crossroads* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

²⁰ Joan M. Jensen, *With These Hands: Women Working on the Land* (New York: Feminist Press/McGraw Hill, 1981): xx-xxi.

²¹ Rife, 661-682.

²² Osterud, 1-13.

²³ Deborah Fink, “‘Mom, It’s a Losing Proposition’: The Decline of Women’s Subsistence Production on Iowa Farms” *North Dakota Quarterly* 52 (Winter 1984): 26-27.

²⁴ Jellison, “Farm Women in American History: A Note on Sources Available in Washington DC,” *51 Annals of Iowa* (Fall 1991): 168-177.

The first wave of female rural women's historians investigated the influence of agriculture politics and ideology on rural women. The gendered ideal of the yeoman farmer was highly influential in government decisions during the domestic economy movement, the creation of New Deal farm policy, and the marketing of new farm and household technology and practices.²⁵ The late-nineteenth-century populist movements of the Farmer's Alliance, Grange, and other third party organizations depended on the "moral superiority" of female constituents to make reform issues principled, as well as economic. In the twentieth-century rural women had a voice in movements aimed at enhancing the quality of rural life through university extension and expertise.²⁶

Going beyond their political influence, scholars of rural women's history have found that women were primarily responsible for bringing rural communities together. Women nurtured essential components of rural life: upholding their family's religious connection to the community, building relationships with neighbors through leisure and events celebrating life milestones. Rural mothers were responsible for socializing their children in community or school activities like dances, youth groups, and sports, and rural women saw that their daughters had opportunities alongside their sons. As early as the 1920s, girls in most rural communities had the same opportunities to participate in sports as boys.²⁷ By the 1930s some communities began to restrict these opportunities but in Iowa the success of the "Six-on-Six" basketball game, an alternative to the typical five team member game played by boys, flourished in small towns throughout Iowa. The six-

²⁵ Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology 1913-1963* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1993), xxi; Marilyn Irvin Holt, *Linoleum, Better Babies, and the Modern Farm Woman, 1890-1930* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995): 3-5.

²⁶ Wava G. Haney and Jane B. Knowles, *Women and Farming: Changing Roles, Changing Structures* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988): 4-5.

²⁷ Mary Neth, "Leisure and Generational Change: Farm Youths in the Midwest, 1910-1940," *Agricultural History* 67 (Spring 1993): 163-64, 173.

on-six game divided the court in half, requiring a team's guards and forwards to remain on opposite halves of the court. The style allowed for a fast-paced, high-scoring game and Iowa in the 1950s and 1960s is considered a remarkable "golden age" of pre-Title IX girl's athletics in America. Individual young women took on local and statewide "celebrity" status among fans, and girls basketball teams from rural schools drew the largest audiences in gyms across the state and in the state tournament held each March.²⁸

One feature of the scholarship is that rural womanhood was not defined by one unifying identity. In her study of farmwomen Deborah Fink found that they understood their lives primarily through the role of wife or mother.²⁹ But Jane Adams' field study found that labor was the unifying factor, calling it the "root metaphor" of rural life both on and off the farm. Adams found that rural women were always self-conscious of their role as workers in the household, barnyard, out in the field, and off the farm.³⁰ Using oral history and kinship and community networks to analyze the experience of women in a small rural Iowa town after World War II, Deborah Fink found that the ideology of rural womanhood changed in mid-century America, as the primary labor demands of women moved off the farm.³¹

Turning the focus to the experience of the women in this study from World War II through the 1960s, sets the lens against an agricultural landscape changing by way of specialization, capital consolidation, and mechanization. As advances in machine power

²⁸ Ibid., 173; Max McElwain, *The Only Dance in Iowa: A History of Six-Player Girls' Basketball* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

²⁹ Deborah Fink, *Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880-1940*. (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1992), xv.

³⁰ Jane Adams, *The Transformation of Rural Life: Southern Illinois, 1890-1990* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994): xx-xxi.

³¹ Deborah Fink, *Open Country Iowa: Rural Women, Tradition and Change* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 5-8, 13-15.

continued to replace human and animal labor and the market economy absorbed the final vestiges of home production, community systems and institutions were altered, so were the lives of women which upheld them.³² The experience of prior generations of rural women offers little for comparison and the contemporary rural woman's experience, though highly affected by continued capital consolidation of agriculture, is not representative either. The women in this study lived through both the continuation and aftermath of this shift in American rural life: their identities were shaped as they responded to change by upholding or adjusting the established norms and values defining the rural way of life.

To uncover what is culturally distinct about the mid-twentieth-century "rural way of life" requires thinking beyond agriculture. Anne Effland has argued that if only agriculture is considered: "the full texture of the rural experience remains hidden." To make plain the markers that distinguish rural life argues Effland, agriculture must be separated from rural in order to determine what is unique about community, family, and womanhood regardless of a connection to farming.³³

Scholars have long been interested in an "American rural heritage." Writing for *American Quarterly* in 1949, Lowry Nelson focused on the range of factors that influenced the "way of life" in rural America. Congressional plans dividing up land in open-country scattered settlements and the frontier itself combined to create a unique "rural heritage" of cultural values and social institutions; immigrants and transplants

³² Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 11.

³³ Ann B. W. Effland, "When Rural Does Not Equal Agricultural," *Agricultural History* 74 (Spring 2000): 489-501; According to Joan Jensen and Ann B. W. Effland, "Introduction" *Frontiers* 22 (2001), iii, looking at population density is one way to distinguish rural people since those who live in low-density, land-based communities are either directly engaged with, or in service to, people who work in farming, ranching, mining, or timber.

created small governments built on local control and affinity, mutual aid, and little social stratification between neighbors. According to Nelson this rural heritage cultivated social identities centered on the local church and school, with citizens who placed a premium on tradition and had a sense of ownership over local institutions.³⁴ What came to be an underlying tension in this rural heritage was the issue of centralism vs. localism, or the question of how much of one's life was locally self-determined and how much was determined by the central government. Farmers and the communities that served them sought both freedom from government regulation and its protection. The contradictory philosophy made, and continues to make, the success of institutions difficult. Another element of rural heritage with political and social influence is the image of rural people as more virtuous than urban. A fixed sense of separation between rural and urban America persists despite the elimination of most actual distinctions with the rise of mass communication.³⁵

According to Christine Georgina Bye, for early generations of rural American women who survived the times of homesteading or economic depression, womanhood was often defined by hard work, maintenance of traditional, gendered power arrangements, and the necessity of a good attitude.³⁶ Women were to nurture family members, cook, clean, wash, mend, care for the sick, economize by fixing and patching, provide dairy, poultry, and garden products for the home and market, care for their family's social needs by corresponding with those far away and organizing events for those at home, and contribute to church and community. All while keeping the

³⁴ Lowry Nelson, "The American Rural Heritage," *American Quarterly* (Autumn 1949): 225-234.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Christine Georgina Bye, "'I like to Hoe My Own Row' A Saskatchewan Farm Woman's Notions about Work and Womanhood during the Great Depression" *Frontiers* 26 (2005), 140.

“household on an emotional even keel” and fostering the religious, moral, and social values of children and reinforcing “gender values.”³⁷

Rural women valued their roles in their families and also played significant roles in their communities. Competing definitions of rural womanhood persisted as women and families interpreted and enacted gendered expectations for behavior to meet their own needs.³⁸ Mid-twentieth-century rural women grappled with the remnants of these expectations combined with a decreased role as economic producer and societal expectations for all women.

Two dominating ideologies of traditional womanhood are Barbara Welter’s Victorian “cult of true womanhood” and Betty Friedan’s mid-twentieth-century “feminine mystique.” Rural women’s history raises the question of whether rural women experienced these ideologies differently based on their own experiences of isolation, separate spheres of private and public life, or perfection and complacency in marriage, motherhood, and domestic life.³⁹ Examining the experiences of rural women contributes to the larger field of women’s history by considering women’s history issues in the rural setting. Shifting attention in this way provides insight in the way the experience of rural women compares to that of the urban women, who have more often been central to understanding the American woman’s experience at large.

³⁷ Ibid., 144.

³⁸ Neth, “Leisure and Generational Change,” 163-84.

³⁹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (NY: W.W. Norton, 1963); Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18 (1996): 151-74; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Joanne Meyerowitz ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar American, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Eugenia Kaledin, *Mothers and More: American Women in the 1950s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984).

Turnbull, Driftmier, and Houghton all considered themselves rural Iowans, without personal connections to agriculture. Their writing illuminates the way they enacted the rural womanhood in sharing their observations of rural life, providing advice on how to perform as rural women and assume a public role in rural life and community. Through scholarly interpretation, each collection is a valuable resource for the study of change in American rural life by offering insight into post-World War II understandings of gender identity, through individual rather than cumulative experiences.⁴⁰ Comparison of the collections reveals a set of similar themes defining their daily experiences: labor, motherhood, marriage, and community networks, but these particular collections demonstrate who these women were, beyond their homes and families. Idealized notions of domestic life and a sense of responsibility for preserving the social and cultural ways of rural life for families and communities also dominated their identities as rural women. Records documenting the involvement of women in their communities should be read as more than a window into their private lives and opinions, but as evidence of the way women shaped and maintained their communities.

Turnbull, Driftmier, and Houghton carved out economic positions as producers while staying within the bounds of “women’s work.” Turnbull wrote a column of nature and domestic observations in the paper owned by her husband. Driftmier edited a monthly magazine written by and for women. Houghton used her work as a clubwoman to achieve political influence through volunteer and appointed leadership roles. Their community involvement was an extension of their homemaker status and reflects the

⁴⁰ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) considers the trivial experiences of a forgotten woman, recorded in her personal records to reveal how everyday occurrences give meaning to and shape identity and social relations.

richness of mid-century rural Iowa life. Whether observers, authorities, or guardians of the values of rural traditions and culture, they carved out positions that allowed them to participate in their communities, to preserve and uphold the “rural way of life” as it evolved.

For her audience within the intensely local space of her small, rural Iowa community, Mildred Wiley Turnbull observed and articulated the experience of rural life right down to details of the flora, fauna, and weather. For her regional audience Leanna Field Driftmier, like Turnbull, helped define the meanings of rural life, but as an advice columnist, she prescribed the expectations and expression of these values. Driftmier’s columns show that women were not always confident in their interpretations and identity. In the face of mid-century change, they sought help in understanding and enacting rural womanhood. For clubwomen throughout America, Dorothy Deemer Houghton defined the importance and influence of the rural life and values on a national and international scale. As an activist and organizer, Houghton believed in enacting the values of rural womanhood for the greater good of people throughout the world.

Each woman used her role to speak to their communities, supporting them in a demonstration of the “rural way of life.” Rural life was superior to urban for each of them as they filled essential roles in upholding and building community. Each preserved a rural heritage built upon the values and institutions created by immigrants and transplants, centered on local control, mutual affinity and aid, little social stratification, and esteem for tradition.⁴¹

⁴¹ Nelson, 225-234.

The collections also demonstrate how notions of an “American rural heritage” that defined rural womanhood evolved under the influence of mid-century notions of ideals for domestic life.⁴² As rural women negotiated their performance of rural womanhood they faced both the reshaping of the agriculture economy and external pressures to make the family the center of political, cultural, and social life in America. In many ways these forces meant that the experience of rural women grew in similarity to non-rural women, as concerns and experiences were reshaped.

Mildred Wiley Turnbull: Observing Rural Womanhood

Both Leanna Field Driftmier and Mildred Wiley Turnbull upheld themes of the “rural way of life” as they wrote for the imagined communities they created among their readers.⁴³ Much of Turnbull’s community was the actual, geographic community of the small southern Iowa town of Diagonal, named for the manner in which the Chicago Great Western and Humeston & Shenandoah Railroad lines crossed through the town. Running the local newspaper from 1937 to 1972, Turnbull and her husband Harold documented the comings and goings, burdens and pleasures of community members.

The *Diagonal Reporter* documents the mid-twentieth-century social history of a rural farming community. Subscribers to the *Diagonal Reporter* included former and rural residents of the community. The Turnbells covered topics pressing on the minds of readers of the small-town weekly. Beginning in World War II and continuing throughout the 1950s, they dedicated a weekly column to letters from, and news regarding, locals

⁴² May, *Homeward Bound*.

⁴³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

serving in the armed forces. Service members sent letters to the *Diagonal Reporter* detailing their travels, notes of gratitude for packages or messages received, and shared their addresses requesting letters from community residents. The paper also served as the community's public forum: publishing regular columns of local "news" marking the customs of rural social life: family gatherings, neighborly visits, club meetings, church activities, births, deaths, graduations and marriages.⁴⁴ During the 1950s information about issues facing the community like the sale of country schools, rural school consolidation, declining population, loss of agricultural jobs, the increasing size of farms, and efforts to save local businesses and amenities abound. These matters were the result of the changing rural economy driven by the increasing mechanization and corporatization of agriculture.

The *Diagonal Reporter* is an archive of local history. Finding that the "less articulate, less successful, but nevertheless important Americans" were more visible at the state and local level, women's and rural historians of the 1990s offered attention to state and local studies.⁴⁵ According to Michael Kammen, local history is akin to using a microscope rather than a telescope because historians can analyze how people experienced events at the level where the most affecting decisions of one's life are made.⁴⁶

Harold and Mildred Turnbull were not formally recognized as co-editors of the *Diagonal Reporter*. In 1950 only fifteen of Iowa's 437 newspapers were officially co-

⁴⁴ Survey of "*Diagonal Reporter* Collection," Diagonal Printing Museum, Diagonal, Iowa.

⁴⁵ Dorothy Schwieder, *Patterns and Perspectives in Iowa History* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1973), vii, discusses the necessity of looking at state and local history to both bring light to an historical blind spot and use as a window for investigating the "common man's" experience.

⁴⁶ Michael Kammen, *Selvages and Biases: The Fabric of History in American Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987): 160-161.

published by women.⁴⁷ Despite Harold being the only person formally acknowledged as publisher, it is hard to distinguish differences in the writing responsibilities or opinions of the husband and wife. Material that could be considered “editorial” in nature was often written under the “we” pronoun indicating the nature of the paper as a joint venture for the couple.

It is important to read the general content of the *Diagonal Reporter* for Mildred Turnbull’s influence with these patriarchal forces in mind. Her husband, Harold was the head of the household and head of the business and the community they served operated under the same gendered notions. While it is useful to interpret the way the duo exercised leadership in the community as they operated the paper, Mildred’s personal column “Bird Notes,” published in the *Diagonal Reporter* and periodically in other Iowa papers, is where we most clearly discern her own perspective on the rural experience and way of life.

The history of women in the middle of the twentieth-century is often characterized by their increase in seeking wage labor, however as Janet Theophano asserts: there is no time “before women worked.”⁴⁸ Women have provided domestic labor in their homes, generated essential income through a range of roles on farms, and in cases like Mildred Turnbull: provided worked in family occupations. Women possibly downplayed their economic role to uphold gender ideology. Rural women’s scholar, Gretchen Poiner has found that when external forces threatened the power of men, women worked to sustain their authority, preserving gendered boundaries as they carried

⁴⁷ Rife, 661.

⁴⁸ Theophano, 122.

out labor appropriate to their gender in order to uphold their status in their families and communities.⁴⁹

Community Development

A study of the role of the Turnbells as publishers of the *Diagonal Reporter* demonstrates the centralizing force of the paper as an institution of community identity, pride, and promotion, and how this played-out in light of changes to agricultural and rural life; specifically, external pressure to consolidate the local school in 1956. In terms of their identities as newspaper people and role the institution held in the community, the Turnbull's own reflections provide insight. The couple stopped publication because of illness in 1966, but resumed after seven months and the front page of their first issue upon returning reveals how they saw their role in the Diagonal community:

The Reporter was never a large paper, never especially profitable and to be faced with the dead- sure certainty that the coming years will be years of decline does not engender optimism...literally hundreds of persons tell us of their disappointment when the Reporter did not make its usual appearance each week. We write this not to give the impression that we consider ourselves indispensable, but rather to illustrate a fact. No matter who operates a newspaper in a small town and even though it may be a very poor one, the community loses a great deal when it is forced to discontinuance. We have seen this happen all over Iowa... Neighboring papers may start a department for the town...but never in our observation, have they really had a personal interest in the community that has lost its own paper.

The Turnbells continued, demonstrating the role of their newspaper as an institution to the small-town way of life:

We know of no community which has been more cooperative in providing news. Especially since the days of World War II when the Reporter literally followed our servicemen all over the world, the paper seems to have had the confidence of its readers to a degree not ordinarily enjoyed by small town publications. This has

⁴⁹ Bye, 154-155.

given us the personal satisfaction that compensates for a lack of more substantial material return.⁵⁰

From their position as newspaper editors and community leaders the Turnbolls documented and observed the subtle changes of American rural life in their newspaper. The work of community leaders in support of the continued independence and success of the local school district filled the paper's headlines in 1956, representing the community booster spirit and ambitions referenced in the small town and community studies authored by social historians.⁵¹ A host of meetings by community members and business leaders to save businesses and attract manufacturing jobs were reported.⁵² In the face of declining population, consolidation of farms, and the out-migration of youth, meetings of residents to preserve their community's population and amenities demonstrate the value they placed on their rural way of life.⁵³ The Turnbolls reported on meetings to hear lecturers on economic development and aimed at organizing a local development committee. After reporting on a community development meeting, they closed the article by saying:

we go out on an editorial limb to ask all readers of the Reporter to look upon this project with a positive approach, and to consider problems only in light of what can be done to overcome them. This is a time to forget small likes and dislikes, to abandon prejudices and personality differences. United we may be able to stand, divided we have already failed."⁵⁴

⁵⁰ "Diagonal Reporter Resumes Publication," *Diagonal Reporter*, 6 July 1967.

⁵¹ Richard Lingeman, *Small Town America: A Narrative History, 1620-The Present* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1980).

⁵² "Business Men to Meet On Show Question," *Diagonal Reporter*, 19 January 1956, editors cited the losses suffered by businesses on the Saturday evenings with the movie theater was closed. The following August another lecture given to local residents by an economist from Iowa State College noted the importance of industrial growth and economic development in staving off population loss: "Job Shift Doesn't Mean Rural Population Loss," *Diagonal Reporter*, 23 August 1956; idem, "Community Chatter."

⁵³ *Diagonal Reporter*, 26 January 1956, the Turnbolls wrote of a report by W. H. Stacy, an Iowa State College rural sociologist on the decline of population in rural counties and rise in suburban development. According to the expert the problem posed by these changes was of maintaining high-quality living conditions in smaller communities with an increasing average age of residents.

⁵⁴ "Large Crowd at 'New Paychecks' Meeting Here," *Diagonal Reporter*, 15 March 1956. A speaker from an industrial development service was invited to give a lecture titled: "New Paychecks for

The Turnbolls reported formal incorporation of the Diagonal Industrial Organization Committee before the close of 1956.⁵⁵ Whether boosters were successful is hard to determine. While the community lost population, it did so at a lesser rate than predicted.⁵⁶

School Consolidation

In the mid-twentieth-century nearly all of Iowa's rural communities grappled with the issue of school consolidation. While Diagonal boosters were ultimately not successful in recruiting industry, they preserved their independent school district and the Turnbolls documented the details of the effort in their newspaper.⁵⁷ A legacy of the Progressive Reform Era and Country Life Movement, one-room country schools closed throughout the United States during the early twentieth-century. Iowa communities and their boosters, possessing both the necessary economic means to sustain independent schools and a rural heritage that strongly valued local control, were some of the last in the nation to succumb to school consolidation. The question of whether progressive reform efforts to replace one-room schools were misguided has been raised in the literature.⁵⁸

According to David R. Reynolds, reformers should be questioned not because they were necessarily wrong, but because they were not necessarily right either. Reformers never

Diagonal." The Turnbull's reported that over one hundred people attended; the lecture and discussion focused on population loss trends in rural communities, resulting from the consolidation of small farms due to mechanization. The speaker outlined the desire of many industries to relocate to rural communities, complimenting the community for the research it had already completed on the subject and stressing the need for citizens to unify on the subject. The community members present voted to organize a board and selected officers before leaving the meeting.

⁵⁵ "Development Committee to Incorporate," *Diagonal Reporter*, 29 November 1956, p. 1.

⁵⁶ "Studies of the Regional Planning Commission," *Diagonal Reporter*, 11 March 1971, p. 1, reported regional governmental group's estimate that county population would decline to 4,500 by 1990. In 1990 the county population had declined to 5,416.

⁵⁷ "Diagonal School News," *Diagonal Reporter*, 26 January 1956, p.3.

⁵⁸ David R. Reynolds in *There Goes the Neighborhood: Rural School Consolidation at the Grass Roots in the Early Twentieth-Century* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999), 234.

considered alternatives but pushed only for larger institutions and underestimated the importance of the relationship between schools and communities. Reynolds emphasized the importance of geography and natural boundaries and argued that efforts by reformers and legislatures to close one-room schools left rural people with a sense of impending loss that spurred opposition to future consolidation efforts and county and state reforms.⁵⁹

The need for schools to prove their merit became imperative in the middle of the twentieth-century. With the closing of open-country schools, town schools with increased enrollment were expected to adjust. Three country schools within five miles of Diagonal were closed and sold in 1956 alone.⁶⁰ For Diagonal school leaders, the need to equip their school with the space and resources to serve rural children was real, but so was an external force to consolidate. Consolidation forces tread over priorities that were central to the identity of rural people and communities: tradition and local control. Most of the *Diagonal Reporter's* local news coverage in 1956, focused on pressures from county and state education organizations to reorganize the local secondary school.

An article from early in 1956 establishes the Turnbulls' position as opinion leaders in their rural community. When republishing an article written by a professor of education at New York University for *Better Schools Magazine* on the benefits of smaller schools, the Turnbulls provided their commentary:

if you are still thinking about the problem of school reorganization, here is an article which we "lifted" from a Diagonal School Calendar and Bulletin...It happens to coincide with our view; you can read it and see what you think.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ "Special School Election at Knowlton," *Diagonal Reporter*, 19 April 1956. The sale of two more rural schools: Star Center and Siloam, both of Washington township was reported: "Will Sell Two Rural Schools at Auction," *Diagonal Reporter*, 30 August 1956.

⁶¹ "Small School Benefits Outlined By Speaker," *Diagonal Reporter*, 5 January 1956, p. 4.

In the next issue the Turnbolls used their “Community Chatter” column to highlight the local school’s payroll report and lobby further for community support of the school:

salaries paid to teachers, custodians, bus drivers, represent considerable purchasing power and if at some dark date in the future we were to lose the school, local businesses would certainly feel the effects.⁶²

Much of the information the Turnbolls provided to readers reflects their desire to defend the local institution of education in light of external forces of reform. In May 1956 the county board of education’s School Study Committee voted to recommend the reorganization of all county schools into one administrative unit with one county high school.⁶³ While the committee was composed of administrators and board members representing all county schools including Diagonal, the decision reflects the position of the state of Iowa’s educational leadership. In July 1956 the *Diagonal Reporter* republished an article relating a recent visit to the county by Iowa’s superintendent of public instruction, J.C. Wright, in which Wright claimed, “Iowa schools cost too much” and that farmers had done well to close country schools at a rate of three hundred per year for the previous ten years with the number of Iowa schools declining from 4,417 to 4,142 in 1956 alone. Wright said the problem was now that there were too many high schools and argued for the founding of new schools able to efficiently serve large numbers of students with opportunities for four years of core subjects, two years of foreign language, and strong programs in industrial arts, commercial arts, physical

⁶² “Community Chatter,” *Diagonal Reporter*, 12 January 1956, p. 4.

⁶³ “School Study Committee Recommends One High School in County,” *Diagonal Reporter*, 17 May 1956, p. 1.

education, and extra-curricular programs like Future Farmers of America or Future Homemakers of America.⁶⁴

A reorganization to fit the state superintendent's description and fulfill the recommendation of the county board would result in the loss of Diagonal's independent school district and the busing of its students to another location. Local school leaders and community members responded, and the Turnbills covered their effort. The Diagonal School Board called a public meeting in August 1956 to discuss their aims for the year. The Turnbills described an audience of 150 men and women from the town and surrounding rural community with "interest in the present and future condition of the school." The meeting opened with the local superintendent detailing progress made on building updates and staff and course offering expansion. Board members addressed an "unfounded rumor" that the school building had been condemned stating: "these rumors have no foundation in fact. The school is operating, as it always has, with full approval of the State Department of Public Instruction." Audience members were notified of a recent threat to the local school: a plan presented by the neighboring district, Clearfield to reorganize its boundaries to include land within two miles of the Diagonal town limits. The Turnbills published the proposed map of the reorganized district, notifying readers that it would require joint approval of the two county boards of education in which the proposed boundaries of the Clearfield district lay. Before the meeting closed, school officials noted the district's dependence on the support of rural residents and students and shared plans to give parents and landowners more voice in the school's operation. To close the story, the Turnbills editorialized: "it was encouraging to see the widespread

⁶⁴ "Iowa Schools Cost Too Much, Says J.C. Wright: Superintendent of Public Instruction Advocates Reorganization," *Diagonal Reporter*, 19 July 1956, p.1.

interest in the present operation and future planning of the Diagonal school.”⁶⁵ The efforts of Diagonal school officials exemplify tenets of rural heritage outlined by Lowry Nelson, who cited the impact of the frontier experience of previous generations, on the sense of localism that influenced mid-century issues like rural school consolidation.⁶⁶ In September 1956 the Turnbolls used a front-page story to follow-up on the neighboring schools district, Clearfield’s, proposal to appropriate land from the Diagonal district. A petition challenging the proposal had been signed by more than three hundred citizens and more than 150 people attended the public hearing on the subject. The Turnbolls reported that of the 150 “it is said that more than one hundred voiced objection to the plan.” While the county proposing the reorganization voted for the plan, the committee representing the Diagonal district voted unanimously in opposition citing the loss of taxable land and the County’s plans to reorganize into a single high school.⁶⁷

While the vote favored Diagonal school boosters, the board made no mention of their confidence in the district itself, but Diagonal school officials and community members were not finished in advancing their aims. Notice of the hiring of two additional teachers was published in the same issue of the *Diagonal Reporter* and by the end of September 1956 Diagonal school officials acted in direct opposition to the county board’s plans for a unified county high school, by publishing architectural drawings of its own new elementary school and high school addition on the newspaper’s front page.⁶⁸ The wishes of community leaders to maintain an independent school were clear; the Turnbolls

⁶⁵ “Large Crowd Shows Interest in School,” *Diagonal Reporter*, 16 August 1956.

⁶⁶ Nelson, 231.

⁶⁷ “County Board Reject Clearfield Reorganization,” *Diagonal Reporter*, 6 September 1956, 1.

⁶⁸ “Hire Additional Grade Teachers,” *Diagonal Reporter*, 6 September 1956, p. 1. “Proposed Elementary Addition to Diagonal School,” *Diagonal Reporter*, 27 September 1956, p. 1.

reported on additional meetings where citizens shared opinions on the proposed building, and before the end of 1956 the school board voted to proceed with construction.⁶⁹

The Diagonal school district continues to operate as the smallest independent school district in the state of Iowa and the efforts of community members and leaders in 1956 are partly responsible. The coverage provided by the Turnbells in the *Diagonal Reporter* provides more than an accounting of meeting notices and official details, but reflects the role of an institution, like a local paper. It also reflects the role of individual community boosters, and a governing rural ideology built on tradition and local control on the maintenance of rural traditions and values.

By the Turnbells' own admission they liked the community to think of the *Diagonal Reporter* and "Harold and Mildred" and as a single unit and believed that communities lost something great with the loss their newspaper.⁷⁰ The *Diagonal Reporter's* role in the 1956 community effort to resist outside forces and maintain an independent school bears out the premise that as editors, the Turnbells were community leaders and the institution of the newspaper had an important role in community identity.

Bird Notes

The 1956 coverage of local concerns like school consolidation and the loss of rural jobs demonstrates the centrality of the *Diagonal Reporter* to the community's identity and the role it played as an institution in maintaining the rural way of life. Through its coverage of local issues, the newspaper helped the Diagonal community

⁶⁹ "Board will proceed with Building Plans," *Diagonal Reporter*, 29 November 1956, p. 1.

⁷⁰ "Diagonal Reporter Resumes Publication," *Diagonal Reporter*, 6 July 1967.

uphold the markers of Midwestern, mid-century, rural life, but Mildred Wiley Turnbull used her bird-watching column to directly observe and describe rural life for readers. The column *Bird Notes* was published with only Turnbull on the byline and is where her voice can be discerned most clearly, giving a sense of how she enacted the markers of rural womanhood and defined rural life for her audience by describing it in detail. She used her column to discuss not only her bird-watching hobby, but as a device for discussing daily activities, and providing observations and subtle commentary on the rural way of life. The columns are filled with Turnbull's appreciation for nature and the local countryside and the virtue of the ordinary as she discussed the passage of time, neighborliness, and the changing rural landscape.

The *Bird Notes* column is reminiscent of the domestic literature tradition, a field of writing that women have used since the early nineteenth century to share thoughts beyond domestic duties, discussing everything from politics to education and using the space to project and interpret notions of femininity.⁷¹ Janet Theophano argues that writers of domestic literature used the space to demonstrate sophistication, affirming middle-class identities by demonstrating skill in articulation, quoting literature, and enhancing mundane daily activities to show that their lives and thoughts were more than their daily household obligations.⁷² In a *Bird Notes* column from May 1956 Turnbull illustrates Theophano's argument with her expressive skill sharing opinions beyond the domestic, and helping readers reflect on the virtuousness of rural life:

That New Englander, James Russell Lowell, who wrote so lyrically of the perfect days of June should have lived in Iowa in May. Probably the difference in latitude accounts for the difference in season, but June does make a good rhyming word so that we all repeat after him, "What is so rare as a day in June. Then if ever

⁷¹ Theophano, 6.

⁷² Theophano, 141-142.

come perfect days, and Heaven try earth if it be in tune, and over it softly her warm ear lays.” That describes Iowa in May when the wild flowers bloom in profusion over the rolling hills, the trees come into leaf, and the turbulent winds vacate some of the days at least. May is always bird month...⁷³

In March 1956 Turnbull used the column to discuss domestic life while speaking to the seasonality of the Midwest, gesturing toward a nostalgic view of contented, home-bound housewives as she discussed tasks women often saved for winter evenings, but never quite got to:

Time to wonder again where and when those mythical long evenings of winter have occurred. You know, the ones “they” talk about every fall. Never in all of my life have I experienced a long evening that had to be whiled away. This is sure, the winter is nearly past, the spring is nearly here, and those things supposed to have been taken care of on “long winter evenings” are not yet accomplished. Books unread, scrapbooks unpasted, papers unsorted, sewing unfinished. None of these will stop the tide of spring. Not one ever has.”

Turnbull used her observations of bird behavior to share bits of life advice in her column; observing the owl she wrote: “A lot of people could learn something from the owl. He says nothing, and people deduce that he knows a great deal.”⁷⁴ And describing the blue jay she wrote:

Like many a human being, the blue jay uses his intelligence only when he has a real need for it. A blue jay is a playboy during the fall days and even when the winter days are not too bitter. If food is available then he spends his time whooping it up with other jays. They have coffee breaks and political discussions all day long, all week, all month...But comes a winter morning with thermometers saying zero and the jay is all business.⁷⁵

After receiving a story from a reader who was confined to her home due to illness, but had enjoyed watching a weed stalk grow and eventually attract birds with its seeds, Turnbull wrote: “some of us aren’t as useful as the weed...for it gave pleasure, it

⁷³ Mildred Wiley Turnbull, “Bird Notes,” *Diagonal Reporter*, 17 May 1956, p. 3.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 12 January 1956, p. 3.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 26 January 1956, p. 3.

blossomed, bore fruit, and furnished food for the hungry all in a few short months.”⁷⁶

Turnbull’s observations of bird and plant life were an opportunity to use the column for subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, commentary on human behavior.

Gladys Talcott Rife identified several rural Iowa women’s columnists from the 1950s who focused on the similar themes of Iowa landscapes, daily experiences, and the continuity in family and community life.⁷⁷ Anchoring many of Turnbull’s columns were her discussions of the symbols and seasons that typified the rural Iowa experience and the landscapes she experienced personally. As Turnbull set the scene for the experience of mid-twentieth-century rural Iowans, she emphasized the “rootedness” and sense of place so central to their lives by writing: “Our lives turn with and depend upon the seasons in this so-called temperate climate.”⁷⁸

Following Turnbull’s description of the season passing over the course of the year reveals their centrality to rural life. Her focus on changing seasons reflects their significance to the agricultural livelihoods of readers and their anchored sense of place, passed down by their rural ancestors: “Our location on this earth gives us four distinct seasons which merge and overlap until we live in a constant change of scenery.”⁷⁹

Turnbull’s columns provide a real sense of the rural Iowa experience of winter, from start to finish, beginning with a scene in late November:

When the leaves fall, as they have, the wind turns bitter as it has, when the temperature drops, as it does, when the snow blows as it did, and when November reaches its last week, it is winter. So it is.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Ibid., 4 January 1962.

⁷⁷ Rife, 665-672.

⁷⁸ Turnbull, “Bird Notes,” *Diagonal Reporter*, 25 November 1971, p. 1.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 7 June 1962, p. 4.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 25 November 1971, p. 1.

Continuing to describe the landscape she writes of the snowdrifts of mid-winter:

Living in zero and sub zero weather makes last summer and next spring seem very remote. All we can see is snow cover, with drifts sculptured by the wind, and all we can feel is a chill that penetrates the bone.⁸¹

Turnbull drew the attention of her readers to the respite of a warm February day:

Given a halfway sunny day in February, the hint of a thaw, and the cardinal releases his clear whistle on a surprised world. This is the same song he will be using when greening begins, so he is getting ready to whistle for hours on end when spring is more than a sometime thing. We were slogging through deep snow when we heard it; and were suddenly better able to pick up our feet, and carry on. If that red bird on the bough can see spring past drift, over ice, and hopefully slush, then I should be able to whistle, too. If I could whistle.⁸²

Speaking to the feeling of accomplishment Midwesterners experience in late March, after enduring another winter, as well as the backdrop for family and community life provided by a beautiful winter landscape, Turnbull wrote:

Native Iowans located elsewhere find it difficult, if not impossible, to observe Christmas without snow and cold, who miss the complete change of wardrobe required between January and July...not the least of these indelible feelings is the triumph that comes to stay-at-homes from weathering another winter, of winning in a battle with cold, ice, snowdrift, and lack of comfort. Iowa never loses her beauty, no matter the time of year. Stark silhouette of trees against the sky, pristine sculpture of millions of snowflakes, glitter of ice...morning is sharper, more clearly defined, and Iowans have a complete change of scenery even as they rise, work, eat, and communicate in a familiar world, with family, among friends.⁸³

Writing of the spring thaw Turnbull commented on family life and the passing of time:

We have come on a weary journey to the mud season. Pity the children. These are the days when adults never look into the open, trusting face of a child until first glancing at the condition of his shoes. Those who dislike the wet and sloppy days of March are not young any more. The youth have mouths with corners turned up, way up, while they wade "hub deep" in icy water, squishy mud. Joy does nothing but increase when ice obligingly shatters on shallow puddles, when a glutinous mixture of Iowa soil and water adheres to the surfaces that encase a child. Mothers may not harbor ill feeling toward a child, but they do against the

⁸¹ Ibid., 4 February 1971, p. 1.

⁸² Ibid., 18 February 1971, p. 1.

⁸³ Ibid., 25 March 1971, p. 1.

season and its accompaniments. It is easy to understand why the wading generation feels unwanted, unloved, and misunderstood. No generation ever bypassed or forewent the pleasure of going through a spring puddle, and if such a generation ever comes along they will be a sad and sorry lot.⁸⁴

Turnbull looked forward to the summer season and lamented its end nearly as soon as its start in observing the return of the cicadas:

Summer...began last Tuesday...another prophet was abroad in the land that day sounding the imminence of yet another season. From the trees at the foot of the hill, his voice unsteady from disuse, a locust was droning the first see-saw song of the year 1971. Six weeks to frost, we used to say when we heard the first cicada. But it seems he comes on earlier each succeeding year.⁸⁵

Detailing the pleasures provided by fall Turnbull wrote:

While August hints broadly at the turning cycle of seasons, September speaks in tones which cannot be mistaken. We near the equinox, a full three months past the advent of summer and the longest daylight period of the year. Daylight lessens until the amount is more than appreciable, becomes noticeable and, in view of winter, alarming. We have no criticism of September, or October, either. We should like both of them to go on and on. Drifting leaves, floating butterflies, relief from summer heat bring a doorway to repose. Somnolence resides in sunlit air, in cool nights, when insect song drowns without urgency, when harvest happens.⁸⁶

Turnbull's discussions of bird watching or landscape observations, center on describing what she sees as extraordinary in the everyday. By grounding her writing in a sense of place she provides insight into the characteristics and unique experience of real rural settings.⁸⁷ Speaking to the abundance of the growing season she wrote:

The corn is green, in orderly rows on black earth, and the crop of hay is condensed into compact bales, dotting the field which bore it. Here in the fertile Midwest we start the harvest before the planting is done. Radishes, onions, and lettuce we have had; strawberries we have, even as the cherries start to redden on the bough. From now until frost the land aided by sunshine and rain, with the help

⁸⁴ Ibid., 11 March 1971, p. 1.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 8 July 1971, p. 1.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 16 September 1971, p. 1.

⁸⁷ Rife, 672.

of man, will produce food for man and beast. Given an average year we shall marvel at the bounty, and wish the same conditions for all people.⁸⁸

Reflecting on the moral superiority of the rural experience she told her readers:

Leaves and grass, beans, corn, and grain cover the land, drawing the eyes over a cool, refreshing landscape to the blue haze of the hills, the uneven line of the horizon. It is to wonder how man, nurtured in such an environment, can find it in his heart to harm another human being. The one raised in cruelty of the city, the squalor of the poverty, perhaps. The Midwest countryman, cherished by family and the land, never.⁸⁹

In mid-summer 1967 commented on the centrality of weather to the everyday lives of Iowans, if only as a favorite topic of conversation:

Every year and nearly every season in this middle state of the Midwest is unusual. Usual weather would be even more unusual than what we have. In this land of sudden change in temperature, humidity, and barometric pressure, every change is observed with interest, dictates activity, and affords an everlasting topic for conversation.⁹⁰

As Turnbull discussed changes in her own experience of bird watching, she subtly documented environmental change resulting from agricultural industrialization. After describing the scene of a successful bird-watching experience in the countryside she wrote:

All of this is along a little traveled country lane, for birds like seclusion. They like protection from the wind, and a supply of water...So many fence-rows, so many thickets and fence corners have been cleared in recent years, that it is a pleasure to find the spots in which birds find sufficient cover and food to live in contentment.⁹¹

Turnbull's writing expresses the legacy of a strain of rural thought that William Bowers found to be conflicted at its root. In tracing this strain to the Country Life Movement of

⁸⁸ Turnbull, "Bird Notes," *Diagonal Reporter*, 7 June 1962, p. 4.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 27 July 1967, p. 1.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 13 July 1967, p. 1.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 12 January 1956.

the first decades of the twentieth-century, Bowers noted how rural Americans sought the benefits of industrialism while maintaining attitudes rooted in nostalgia. The forces of industrial agriculture, argues Bowers, were destined to undermine the social and political virtues of the agrarian past that rural people wished to preserve.⁹² Technological change and ever-increasing demands of food production made transformation inevitable. While rural families benefitted from high land prices, rural and community life as they knew it decayed, as communities lost population and profits shifted from the hands of individual farmers to corporate interests.⁹³

Bowers' argument is demonstrated in the case of the small rural Iowa farming town of Diagonal. In her columns published in the pages of the *Diagonal Reporter* Turnbull alerted readers to the environmental changes she observed in her immediate setting. In a February 1956 column she presented her observations for consideration in understanding changes to the climate:

There is room for speculation in the changing habits of the birds. It could be that our weather is actually changing, the winters and summers getting warmer... There was a time when a cardinal was a rarity in Iowa summer or winter. Now he lives here in numbers, winters here, too, and has extended his range as far north as Minnesota. You can get amazed over the fact that we now have robins the year around, and can open your eyes even wider to learn that Ed Toman saw a flock of bluebirds the last days of January... Things are coming to a pretty pass. You can't count on the old signs even in the area of birds. What will become of the saying that a robin makes a spring and a bluebird makes a summer...⁹⁴

In the spring of 1971 Turnbull discussed the impact of spraying on local wildlife and vegetation:

⁹² William L. Bowers, *The Country Life Movement in America, 1900-1920s* (Port Washington, KY: Kennikat Press, 1974).

⁹³ Dennis S. Nordin and Roy V. Scott, *From Prairie Farmer to Entrepreneur: The Transformation of Midwestern Agriculture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

⁹⁴ Turnbull, "Bird Notes," *Bird Notes*, 9 February 1956, p. 3.

Listening at twilight, and in that gray moment before dawn we dare to hope that the robin population has increased. No explosion, mind you, but there were years of DDT when only one robin sang a daybreak and at day's end.⁹⁵

As a bird watcher, Turnbull preferred the natural state of spring foliage and wrote of her enjoyment of the fact that “thickets of wild plum are returning to native haunts since wide scale spraying has been curtailed.”⁹⁶

There is likely nothing more worrisome to agricultural communities than drought, in a 1956 column referencing sailor's lore, Turnbull summarized her reader's experience of the long-term drought:

After a dry summer, a dryer fall and winter, everyone scans the sky for signs of rain. There are the long mare's tail clouds and mackerel sky, both of which prophesy rain, but none falls. The grass waits for moisture, the tulips grow dark and close to the soil, needing water. Seeds cannot sprout. Our world is dry and dusty, soiled with the grime of winter living. Everyone thinks with longing of the time when rain came with the spring days and nights, reviving, life-giving rain.⁹⁷

Focusing on the topics like the natural landscape and the meaning and significance of rural and small-town life and values, Turnbull set the scene for the mid-twentieth-century rural experience in her *Bird Notes* column. The columns frame interpretations of the way rural women viewed their place and purpose in the world.⁹⁸ By articulating the uniqueness, virtue, and merits of rural life for her audience, she served as a caretaker for the social and cultural life and values of her community.

Mildred Turnbull upheld themes of rural womanhood and life as she worked with her husband to cover local news, especially in the case of supporting community efforts to save the local school in 1951. They articulated and upheld the rural way of life for

⁹⁵ Ibid., 1 April 1971, p. 1.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 6 May 1971, p. 1.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 23 February 1956, p. 3.

⁹⁸ Rife, 662.

audience members. In discussing the death of two community members they reflected on the egalitarian virtues of rural life, which made it separate and superior to urban life:

In the forty odd years we have operated the old linotype that weekly turns out the news of this community, we have recorded literally hundreds of births, weddings, deaths and all the countless activities that go with living life. Now we find ourselves entering a sort of final stage. Locally, almost every death seems to take from us, and the community as well, a long-time friend. In the passing of Fay Coverdell, recently, and in the death of Lew Strange last week, we felt a personal loss in each case...Measured by the yardstick of financial success, neither of these friends could be called outstanding. Like a lot of us, they experienced hard times. And, like most of us, what they made, they made the hard way. The really important thing, to us, is not what they had, but what they were. They were both honest, sincerely friendly, loved and respected by their families, and while Fay's life was relatively short, and Lew's spanned almost ninety years, they lived those years well. And that is a lot more than you can say for some of the high-and-mighty who break into the public prints. We would rather know and have for a friend, one common man, than to hobnob with the rich.⁹⁹

Women across the countryside like Turnbull manifested a rural heritage founded in egalitarian notions, emphasizing tradition, local control, and a sense of place and virtues unique to rural life and people. Turnbull's columns offered an outlet for her to interpret and uphold ways of rural life, amidst mid-twentieth-century change.

Leanna Field Driftmier: Advising Rural Womanhood

Another caretaker of the social and cultural life of rural communities was southwest Iowa "radio homemaker" Leanna Field Driftmier. During the twentieth-century women throughout the Midwest turned to Driftmier for guidance, domestic advice, and companionship in the regional daily radio program and monthly homemaking magazine. Driftmier referred to her listeners as "radio sisters" and while on-air shared recipes, household "helps," poem, prayers, and discussions of family life. She furthered

⁹⁹ "Country Side," *Diagonal Reporter*, 21 December 1967.

the sense of familiarity and community among her radio audience by publishing the monthly magazine: *Kitchen-Klatter*.

Driftmier was an early member of a tribe of “radio homemakers” broadcasting throughout the twentieth-century from Shenandoah, Iowa, on KMA and KFNF, with other Midwestern stations syndicating many programs. A niche profession, radio homemaking carved out an economic role for women in supplementing and sustaining family income. With family life a central topic of content, the family was always part of the business. In the early days of *Kitchen-Klatter*, Driftmier’s youngest son sat on her lap during broadcasts.¹⁰⁰ The *Kitchen-Klatter* radio program, *Kitchen-Klatter* magazine, and the small manufacturing business it inspired, eventually produced full-time careers for Driftmier, her husband, and several of their children.¹⁰¹

Few recordings of the radio show survive but copies of the companion magazine, published from 1926 to 1986, remain. *Kitchen-Klatter* magazine offers a sense of the radio program and audience and with 150,000 subscribers at the height of circulation, it provides a window into the experience of everyday rural Midwestern women in the middle of the twentieth-century.¹⁰²

Sampling the magazine provides a sense of the changing experience of its rural female audience.¹⁰³ The magazine material was “homey” and reflected the traditional

¹⁰⁰ Driftmier, “Letter from Leanna,” and “Fifty Years in Radio,” *Kitchen-Klatter* (May 1976), 2, 8. *Kitchen-Klatter* is the name of both the radio program hosted by Driftmier and the title her monthly publication, the magazine is italicized throughout this text for differentiation.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., “Letter from Lucile,” *Kitchen-Klatter* (January 1986), 2.

¹⁰² Ulrich’s Periodicals Directory lists 78,000 *Kitchen-Klatter* subscribers during the early 1980s (during the final years of publication) while the section of the *Kitchen-Klatter* that solicited paid advertisements continually listed between 125,000-150,000 subscribers; Tom Longden in “Broadcaster 1886-1976- Driftmier influenced generations of Midwestern women,” *Des Moines Register* (April 19, 2008) referenced 90,000 subscribers.

¹⁰³ Note on Sampling Method: The Greater Shenandoah Historical Society has one issue per year from 1926-1929 and six issues for 1936-1939. There is a gap in publication from 1930-1936 due to

tone of twentieth-century rural life in America. Content included household advice, recipes printed with a “Tested in the Kitchen-Klatter Kitchen” seal of approval, poems, prayers, content on popular hobbies, gardening, photographs, letters from readers, and editorial and feature columns on topics ranging from raising poultry to raising children, what to read and buy, how to fundraise for local causes, or get along with neighbors. Subscribers sold home-produced goods in the magazine’s advertisement section and Driftmier eventually used the platform to promote a small manufacturing business that made household products under the Kitchen-Klatter name.¹⁰⁴

The magazine documents the experience of rural and small-town life in the Midwest through first-hand accounts of rural women. Rural and small-town women, including Driftmier, her daughters, guest columnists, and the countless unnamed readers who submitted letters, generated all magazine content. Analyzing *Kitchen-Klatter* over time reveals change in women’s daily work. Recipes reflect modifications in preparation and nutrition, resulting from industrialized production or adjustments made in times austere or ample. Changes in feature columns like the disappearance of the “Poultry Pointers” column in the 1950s, denote the loss of an economic responsibility long-held by rural women. The decline of home production and the rise of consumer culture are marked with the replacement of personal buy-sell ads of home-produced goods with ads for mass-produced items.¹⁰⁵

Driftmier’s paralyzing automobile accident in 1930. The 1940-1986 issues are available at the State Historical Society of Iowa in Des Moines and online through the e-Archives of Iowa State University Archives and Special Collections. Four issues per year from 1940-1960 were sampled for this study because these featured the most “From My Letter Basket” columns (nearly every issue). As the frequency of letters from readers dwindled between 1960 and 1980, only three issues per year were sampled and only one issue was sampled from the years 1980 to 1986 when virtually no questions from readers were published.

¹⁰⁴ Driftmier, “Letter from Leanna” and “Fifty Years in Radio,” *Kitchen-Klatter* (May 1976), 2, 8.

¹⁰⁵ See previous note on sampling method.

Despite providing evidence of change in the lives of rural midwestern women, the pages of *Kitchen-Klatter* do not support a drastic demarcation in conceptions of rural womanhood before and after World War II supported by Deborah Fink.¹⁰⁶ The evidence indicates that women experienced the shifting circumstances of agriculture and labor, but changes in the way they articulated and enacted their roles as rural women were subtler.

Women did not turn to *Kitchen-Klatter* for national news or world affairs, but for the sense of connectedness and community fostered among the audience.¹⁰⁷ Readers were often geographically and socially isolated in small rural towns and on farms throughout the Midwest and eastern Great Plains. Subscribers felt a connection to one another because they could imagine fellow readers as companions, reading the same thing at the same time.¹⁰⁸ Among her readers Driftmier created a community of women built upon shared interests and a sense of mutual support.¹⁰⁹

The readers' letters Driftmier published in her advice column: "From My Letter Basket" are a window into the way the community of readers perceived and embodied the rural womanhood identity.¹¹⁰ Surveying the columns from 1940 to 1960 provides evidence of the rural woman's experience in her own words, how she enacted prescribed notions of femininity and upheld family life and traditions. Women shared their

¹⁰⁶ Fink, *Open Country Iowa*, 13-15.

¹⁰⁷ Carl F. Kaestle, Helen Damon-Moore, Lawrence C. Stedman, Katherine Tinsley and William Vance Trollinger, Jr., *Literacy in the United States: Readers and Reading Since 1880* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

¹⁰⁸ Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* is useful in analyzing how *Kitchen-Klatter* columns informed readers about "imagined worlds" of national identity and reinforced concepts of community for groups of rural people and women within the nation.

¹⁰⁹ Theophano, 145: applies the same sense of mutual support to the community cookbooks women generated.

¹¹⁰ Janet Galligani Casey, "This is YOUR magazine": Domesticity, Agrarianism, and "The Farmer's Wife" *American Periodicals* 14 (2004), 194: argues for the value of "The Farmer's Wife" periodical as better historical evidence than many magazines because much of the magazine's content was determined by readers.

experiences, troubles, and worldviews as they discussed class conflict, customs governing parenting, gender relations in marriage, generational differences, changes brought by transformations in the rural economy, and more, in ways that were sometimes unique to rural women but more often suggest increased similarities in the experience of urban and rural women.

As was the case with Turnbull's column, sharing the unexceptional was as important as the exceptional because it was real to the lived experiences of everyday women.¹¹¹ Unlike *Bird Notes*, which only provides Turnbull's commentary on rural life, "From My Letter Basket" includes many voices from throughout the region.

The role Driftmier played with audience members was also different than that of Turnbull. By taking on the responsibility of advice-giver, she did more than observe and provide commentary on small-town and rural life: she prescribed norms of rural womanhood for readers. In the March 1945 issue Driftmier instructed readers on their responsibility as women in wartime:

Homemaking is our job although it may seem we are not doing enough for the war effort. After all to protect homes and all they stand for, are the chief reasons our boys are fighting. Our privilege was won at a great sacrifice and we should constantly give prayerful thanks for the homely daily tasks that are ours.¹¹²

Driftmier provided guidance as readers experienced change. Readers managed scarcity and family separation and saw their role as producers advanced by the government and society at-large during World War II. Following the War, and throughout the 1950s the nation experienced a baby boom, unprecedented economic prosperity, and a heightened emphasis on the nuclear family and the male-breadwinner,

¹¹¹ Rife, 675.

¹¹² Driftmier, "Just Visiting," *Kitchen-Klatter* (March 1945), 2.

female-caretaker model. As society placed children and the family at the center of political, social, and cultural concerns, pressure on American women to uphold domestic standards and perform as idealized versions of wives and mothers mounted.¹¹³

Most requests for advice focused on motherhood and marriage, revealing that everyday issues were the concerns most pressing on the minds of rural women. Driftmier's guidance fluctuated from upholding tradition to encouraging readers to embrace change, while always emphasizing the importance of women in providing a stabilizing force as families and communities encountered change.

Some subtleties of the difference, both real and perceived, between rural and urban life are documented in the advice column. Upholding conservative ways was a concern for one woman who wrote that she worried her neighbors were embarrassed by the "informal" clothing worn by her sister visiting from California. In her response Driftmier emphasized the value of reserving judgment over the fashion concerns of neighbors and instructed the reader to remember that real friends would not notice her sister's clothing.¹¹⁴

When Driftmier recognized urban and rural differences, rural America held the advantage. Writing of her daughter and son-in-law's return from California to their Iowa farm after World War II she commented that most readers who spent the war years in congested cities probably felt the same enthusiasm and lack of regret as her children when returning to "a middlewestern farm."¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (NY: Basic Books, 1992): 24-25, 32.

¹¹⁴ Driftmier, "From My Letter Basket," *Kitchen-Klatter* (August 1951), 6.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., "Letter From Leanna," *Kitchen-Klatter* (Dec 1946), 2.

While satisfied to return, the next generation of rural Midwesterners would face intense change. The farms that young couples made their lives on after the War were different from those they were raised on a decade before. Life for farmwomen changed as home dairy and poultry production, formerly the domain of women, were replaced by mass-production methods.¹¹⁶ Problems ushered in by the war and postwar years, including labor shortages and increased production demands, encouraged government-subsidized research, which yielded far-reaching results for agriculture. Changes ranging from more machine labor, which replaced farm hands or the labor of children, to the extensive use of pesticides and fertilizers, automated feeding and nutritional supplements in animal production, and shifts in the social and economic aspirations of farmers overall, each reshaped rural life on and off the farm.¹¹⁷ An indirect consequence of these changes was that the experience of rural women became more like that of women in cities.¹¹⁸

While the concerns of some letters in “From My Letter Basket” are tempered by rural life distinctions, when considered over the period they show how the experiences of rural and urban women became more similar during the middle of the twentieth-century.

One domestic ideal that rural readers felt increasing pressure to uphold was that of the perfect home with mannerly children. Demonstrating the difficulty women felt in performing as idealized homemakers, a reader and wife of a farm tenant asked Driftmier to share her experience in hopes of influencing the wives of landlords:

¹¹⁶ Dorothy Schwieder in Murphy and Venet, *Midwestern Women*, 218: as farm women’s role as producers diminished, many turned to off-farm labor. During the 1950s the off-farm labor of women increased twenty-five percent; see also: Jellison, *Entitled to Power*; Fink, *Open Country Iowa*.

¹¹⁷ J.L. Anderson, *Industrializing the Corn Belt: Agriculture, Technology, and the Environment, 1945-1972* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009): 7-8.

¹¹⁸ Rochelle Gatlin, *American Women Since 1945* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1987): 61-73, outlines similar concerns among urban and suburban women from 1945 through the 1960s as those discussed in Driftmier’s “From My Letter Basket” column in *Kitchen-Klatter*.

Would you take this means of reminding all landlords' wives that their tenant's wives have genuine feelings and pride? We have rented this place for five years now and there are no troubles and have never been, but it would mean so much to me if the wife of our landlord wouldn't drop in unexpectedly several times a month and make pointed comments. I have four children, no help, and it really seemed like the last straw when I was in the middle of canning last week with a cross, sick, baby, and my landlord's wife called at eleven in the morning with friends she wanted to see the farm.

The tenant's use of the column to influence the landlord suggests that gender and geography, more than economic class united the *Kitchen-Klatter* audience. In her response, Driftmier noted the frequency of such problems: "I'm sure that this Minnesota farm-wife doesn't realize how many times this particular problem has reached me...The letter appears as written and surely needs no further comment."¹¹⁹ Ruth Schwartz Cowan notes that with the introduction of new household technology and appliances meant to save labor often came raised standards of cleanliness, resulting in greater pressure on women to perform as idealized homemakers.¹²⁰ The *Kitchen-Klatter* reader's appeal demonstrates the mutual respect she sought from her landlord for her effort to uphold prescribed standards of domesticity.

A Minnesota reader wrote of her troubles with technology, newly introduced to the countryside, that she found impeded her performance of domestic duties:

We moved into this neighborhood a year ago last March and although I really do appreciate the kindness and interest that our new neighbors have shown, still I don't know what to do about the telephone. I can't figure out when the other women get their work done. They think nothing of calling at least once a day and hanging on for a half-hour at a time. I just feel wild when I have to stand there with precious time flying by and work stacking up...I can't remember ever hearing what a serious time-waster the party line really is. What can I do about it?

¹¹⁹ Driftmier, "From My Letter Basket," *Kitchen-Klatter* (January 1946), 7.

¹²⁰ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Book Publishers, 1983).

Driftmier advised the reader to embrace the change and focus on the advantages: “The party line may be a time waster, as you say, but would you want to live on your farm without that telephone? Remember this when you get to feeling impatient.”¹²¹

Many readers seeking Driftmier’s advice were mothers wavering in parenting decisions. Advice seekers worried about the opinions of neighbors, their ability to protect their children from the world beyond their own communities, and felt pressure to teach traditional values, enforce norms, or make the “right” choices. During the War, a mother wrote of her concern that a rural upbringing had not prepared her daughter to take a defense job in the city. Driftmier instructed the reader to let her go and stressed that “any girl whose conduct makes her safe in a small town will be just as safe in a big city.”¹²² A mother who disapproved of her daughter wearing slacks to school was told by Driftmier to allow her daughter to fit in with peers.¹²³ As she had with the reader worried about her California sister’s informal dress, Driftmier encouraged the mother to disregard the opinions of others on trivial issues like fashion.

On bigger issues like decisions regarding childbirth, Driftmier also took the position of focusing on the merits of a situation, rather than the opinions of others. An expectant mother from Nebraska questioned whether she should drive to a hospital or “call” for a nurse and deliver at home. Mostly concerned for the opinions of women in her neighborhood the woman wrote: “Everyone seems to think I’m a baby and ‘can’t take it’ and now I’m so undecided I don’t know what to do.” Driftmier advised her to take advantage of the privileges of the hospital.¹²⁴ The letter represents another change to rural

¹²¹ Driftmier, “From My Letter Basket,” *Kitchen-Klatter* (Sept 1947), 7.

¹²² *Ibid.*, (July 1944), 5.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, (Sept 1947), 7.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, (July 1942), 7.

life with the shift from home births to reliance on hospitals; by 1950 nearly all women went to the hospital for childbirth.¹²⁵

A blend of economic prosperity and the vestiges of progressive reforms, the rural issue of school consolidation meant changing opportunities for youth, while challenging the traditions and dynamics of some rural families.¹²⁶ A *Kitchen-Klatter* reader questioned the fairness of sending her daughter to high school:

My oldest daughter wanted so badly to go to high school but we simply couldn't afford it. Now our other girl is ready to go and we could manage it, but I feel that it wouldn't be right to let her go when the other girl was disappointed...What do you think?¹²⁷

Driftmier advised the reader to have a family discussion among all members before making the decision.¹²⁸ Many farm families managed to send children to high school "in town" by having them board with relatives but one reader complained that her family members had burdened her daughter with unfair responsibilities in exchange for boarding her while she attended school. Driftmier affirmed the tradition of education as a rural value as she reminded the reader that her child's education was worth more than family trouble and suggested she maintain the arrangement until she was certain of clear disadvantages.¹²⁹

Kitchen-Klatter had a multi-generational audience and a request for advice from a young Minnesota woman provides evidence of the way young women encountered and challenged the traditional ways of rural life:

¹²⁵ Hartmann, *Home Front and Beyond*. In 1940 three out of five babies born in the United States were delivered in hospitals; by 1950, ninety percent of United States babies were born in hospitals.

¹²⁶ Glenn C. Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock 'N' Roll Changed America* (Oxford: University Press, 2003), 100, notes that by the end of the 1950s, eight-seven percent of United States adolescents went to high school.

¹²⁷ Driftmier, (June 1943), 5.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., (January 1944), 5.

Leanna, what do you think of parents who try to run their children's lives? I am twenty-six, still living at home, and my folks boss me from morning until night. I want to go to town to work for the Telephone Company, but my folks won't let me go. I'm not needed here.

Driftmier advised the girl that if she was no longer needed on the farm, she should try and make as happy a break as possible and "go to visit them on Sundays when you have time...I suspect that they'll look at you with respect when they see that you are capable of holding down a job and living independently."¹³⁰

Changes in rural life addressed in the column such as hospital over home childbirth, sending children to high school, adapting to new technology and increasing pressures to uphold domestic standards are evidence of the ways rural women encountered transformation to rural life in ways that made their experience more like that of their counterparts in cities and suburbs. By 1960 more of Iowa's women lived in urban than rural areas and, with mechanization of farms, the work lives of women who remained on farms and in small towns evolved in ways that increasingly reflected housewives throughout America.¹³¹

Change in Driftmier's responses to letters concerning marital issues between 1940 and 1960, suggests an evolving attitude toward domestic gender roles. In early columns Driftmier affirmed the belief that the role of women in marriage was to support their husbands, putting aside their own opinions and concerns to maintain peace in the home. By the late 1950s however, her advice shifted to reflect a changing opinion that supported a greater balance in gender relations in marriage.

¹³⁰ Ibid., (October 1945), 7.

¹³¹ Jellison, "'Comment' on Gladys Talcott Rife," 686.

Driftmier's audience members may have remained rural, but their focus on domestic life and relationships in their families and communities reflect experiences common to many women, regardless of place.¹³² The experiences and frustrations readers expressed about marriage reflect the same frustrations eventually articulated by Second Wave feminists.

In 1943 a Minnesota woman, distressed over her husband's intent to buy more land wrote: "We have 160-acre farm all clear, and we worked hard a good many years to achieve it. I like to be free of debt, and that's why I'm strongly opposed to my husband's desire to buy another 160 acres. We'd start the old struggle all over again."¹³³ This letter reflects the mid-century agricultural transition wherein successful farming required an ever-increasing amount of landholdings and capital.¹³⁴ Preserving the model of gendered positions with men as breadwinners and women as caretakers, Driftmier advised the woman to remain quiet on the subject writing that it was unwise to hold back hardworking men from business ventures.¹³⁵ A reader writing to complain of the young sisters-in-law, for which her husband had financial responsibility and she believed spent her husband's money "extravagantly," was instructed by Driftmier to remember that it was her husband's money and therefore his decision alone.¹³⁶

By the mid-1950s however, Driftmier's responses reflect a change in opinion. While Driftmier had previously encouraged readers to subvert their own desires to maintain peace in the home, she delivered the following response to a reader in 1954:

¹³² Ibid., 683-685.

¹³³ Driftmier, "From My Letter Basket," *Kitchen-Klatter* (June 1943), 5.

¹³⁴ Jellison, *Entitled to Power*; Adams, *The Transformation of Rural Life*, 4.

¹³⁵ Driftmier, "From My Letter Basket," *Kitchen-Klatter* (June 1943), 5.

¹³⁶ Ibid., (March 1946), 7.

I wonder if other women have my trouble and how they cope with it? I have never been able to find out what my husband's business dealings are- he's in the real estate business and has been for years. He gives me money when I ask for it, pays all the bills himself and really isn't stingy, but it frightens me when I think how I don't know anything about our affairs. What if he should pass away suddenly? We're both in our late fifties and I sometimes get so worried and exasperated about this that I can hardly stand it. He refuses to tell me, so don't advise me to ask him.

Driftmier called the reader's marriage arrangement out-of-date, contending that modern arrangements were an improvement: "I thought that this type of husband had just about disappeared and I think to a large extent he has. One of the good things about these younger generations is that husband and wife share all of the financial problems together."¹³⁷ In a similar vein Driftmier advised a reader in 1958 to go ahead and hire help if her husband failed to fix the house as promised.¹³⁸

On the subject of affection in marriage Driftmier's position that wives could expect more than economic support from husbands, remained consistent over the period. In the early 1940s a Kansas reader wrote that while she felt well provided for, she was unhappy due to a lack of companionship:

Everyone thinks that I should be the happiest woman in the world, Leanna, because I have a lovely home, two fine children, and plenty of money to spend, but all of this doesn't mean much to me for the simple reason that my husband seems a stranger, not a companion. He thinks that since he's provided well for us he's done his duty. He never talks to me, never goes with me anywhere, and I'm not exaggerating when I say that he regards me in the same light as a piece of furniture. I'd give up everything I have to live with him happily, to share things with him. Why don't men understand how we feel about only creature comforts?¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Ibid., "From My Desk," *Kitchen-Klatter* (May 1954), 12.

¹³⁸ Ibid., (May 1958), 5.

¹³⁹ Driftmier, "From My Letter Basket," *Kitchen-Klatter* (Oct 1943), 5.

Driftmier published another letter from a wife wishing to socialize with neighbors because of her husband's disinterest in taking her anywhere.¹⁴⁰ Driftmier acknowledged how common the problem was among her audience:

I only wish that a good many men could see the letters on my desk year in and year out that express what this unhappy woman has expressed... You men who may happen to read this- don't let the sun go down tonight without showing your wife in some way that you appreciate her. It matters more than anything else in the world."¹⁴¹

While Betty Freidan did not publish her tome on the prevalence of women with feelings of domestic discontent until nearly two decades after some of these letters appeared, her book was a product of the 1950s.¹⁴² While Freidan had surveyed suburban women, the letters in *Kitchen-Klatter* demonstrate a struggle among rural women to find satisfaction in marriage and domestic life and how the subordination of women's needs to those of the family through the 1940s and 1950s planted seeds of discontent beyond suburban households. Perhaps Driftmier's readers' problems could be solved with more attention from their husbands, or perhaps they spoke to a deeper feeling of dissatisfaction among women, the result of having identities consumed by domestic life. Although the larger gender injustices in social and political life were outside Driftmier's responses, and possibly awareness, her small rural woman's domestic magazine provides evidence that women's dissatisfaction with domestic life existed in the countryside. Letters from *Kitchen-Klatter* readers document the experience of rural women as they encountered change in customs of parenting, gender relations within marriage, and economics. While the concerns of some letters are tempered by distinctions of rural life, when considered

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., (July 1944), 5.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., (Oct 1943), 5.

¹⁴² Friedan, 11-12, 20-21.

over the period they show how the experiences of rural and urban women became more similar during the middle of the twentieth-century.¹⁴³

Dorothy Deemer Houghton: Leading Rural Womanhood

In the twilight of her career of public service and leadership, Dorothy Deemer Houghton was the first female recipient of the State University of Iowa's Distinguished Service Award. Upon recognition the president of the university, Virgil Hancher made the following remarks:

When the definitive story of this State is told, it will be written that over a course of decades in the 20th century, there was a woman in whom the fires of purpose and zeal burned brilliantly. It will be noted that the flame of her endeavors illuminated all of Iowa, spread outward across the nation, and leapt oceans to shine in far countries of the world...it may well be recorded that after the Fates fashioned Dorothy Houghton, they lost the pattern for that special breed.”¹⁴⁴

While Houghton received recognition for her public service, the forces driving her actions were foundationally similar to that of Turnbull, Driftmier, and countless rural women who served as stabilizing forces in their families and communities through their work and lives. Like Turnbull and Driftmier, Houghton believed in the traditional rural values of education and mutual aid. While Turnbull described the virtues of rural life and worked to preserve its institutions, and Driftmier helped women respond to change, Houghton led other rural women: enlisting their support in state, national, and international efforts to uphold and spread the democratic principles embedded in rural life. Unlike Turnbull and Driftmier, Houghton's took her away from southern Iowa and

¹⁴³ Gatlin, 61-73, outlines the same concerns among urban and suburban women from 1945-1960s as those discussed in the “From My Letter Basket” column in *Kitchen-Klatter*.

¹⁴⁴ “President Virgil Hancher's Introduction of Houghton, State University of Iowa Alumni Award Luncheon,” Dorothy Deemer Houghton Collection, Montgomery County History Center, Red Oak, Iowa.

around the world many times over, defying the stereotype of rural women as isolated or unfamiliar with the world outside their home communities.

Using the markers of rural womanhood: mothering, marriage, community, and domesticity, Houghton fashioned a leadership role beyond her own family and community in upholding the social and cultural ways of rural America, amid mid-twentieth-century change. Houghton's experience provides a different frame in which to view twentieth-century rural womanhood in Iowa, because it is atypical for the scope of its influence. At a time when the voices of women were devalued, Houghton used her position as an exemplary wife, mother, and neighbor to carve out leadership roles at the local, state, national and international levels. Her influence eventually reached men of the highest political standing including at least two American presidents and foreign leaders, but reaching and encouraging countless unnamed housewives always remained the center of her focus.¹⁴⁵

Houghton's work began in her small southern Iowa community of Red Oak. As a young mother she joined the Monday Club, a local woman's club and served as a trustee on the library board. In her work Houghton enacted and upheld the principles of rural womanhood: she placed a premium on tradition, community engagement, mutual aid, the virtuousness of rural people, and the need to look beyond social stratification. Her leadership as member of the Board of Regents governing Iowa's three state universities, and work in founding the International Christian University in Tokyo, illustrate the value she placed on education. Her work as President of the Iowa Federation of Women's clubs, the General Federation of Clubwomen, Director of the Office of Refugees,

¹⁴⁵ Dorothy Deemer Houghton Collection, Montgomery County History Center.

Migration, and Volunteer Assistance, and service on the boards of UNICEF and UNESCO were all built upon the rural tradition of strengthening community in working for the welfare of others.¹⁴⁶

A scrapbook of Houghton's work is maintained at the Montgomery County History Center in Red Oak, where she is recognized as a citizen of prominence. The scrapbook and associated papers in the Houghton collection are an account of her leadership of the General Federation of Women's Clubs and includes: newspaper clippings, correspondence, photographs, transcripts from speeches and interviews, introductions written by contemporaries, biographical data used in her travels and work, and materials from the Red Oak Monday Club, including a life history written by a member.¹⁴⁷ In addition to the scrapbook, Houghton's perspective on rural womanhood can be gleaned from the memoir *Reflections*, which she self-published in 1968.¹⁴⁸

Houghton upheld the view that women's place was in the home but believed that the privileges and values this role encompassed should be used for greater good. She outlined the responsibilities of women as homemakers, mothers, citizens, and thinkers in a 1950 interview with *International Mother's Digest*:

Women can be good homemakers and at the same time take an active interest in what is going on in the world. I have always said that home was the center of our living but not our circumference, and so we have taken our maternal instincts to push back our horizons until they are world-wide. We are trying to nurse a war weary world back to normalcy where love, understanding, tolerance and sympathy will prevail- and these qualities alone can bring that understanding between people of different classes, creeds, and color which forms them into a family of nations...let us have all our American mothers lead the women of the world in the vast procession of humanity climbing to the mountain top of peace

¹⁴⁶ Nelson, 225-234.

¹⁴⁷ Dorothy Deemer Houghton Collection.

¹⁴⁸ Dorothy Deemer Houghton, *Reflections* (Red Oak, Iowa: Self-published, 1968).

by being good homemakers, loving mothers, participating citizens and global thinkers.¹⁴⁹

Houghton's discussion exemplifies the domestic revival that accompanied Cold War politics. As scholar Elaine Tyler May has argued, Americans in the middle of the twentieth-century had an intense need to feel liberated from a past of economic struggle and global war and secure in the future. The Great Depression and World War II altered family and work life and families sought to embrace the gendered division of the male-breadwinner and female-homemaker roles.¹⁵⁰

Houghton was raised in a political family, the daughter of an Iowa judge and progressive reform advocate. Her drive for public service, she claimed, could be traced back through a suffragist grandmother who called Susan B. Anthony a friend and a great-grandfather who played a role in the Underground Railroad.¹⁵¹ Her father, Horace Emerson Deemer was elected district court judge in 1886 and Iowa Supreme Court judge in 1894. Deemer played a very influential role in his only child's life, teaching Dorothy that public service was "the rent you pay for the space you occupy in the world."¹⁵²

Beyond sharing their ideals of service, Houghton's parents emphasized education and made travel a priority. She attended Wellesley College where she claimed to have felt like an outsider, even after her parents had sent her to a girl's preparatory school to give her more "background" to prepare for the eastern education.¹⁵³ According to Houghton, her parents sent her to Wellesley over her choice of the State University of

¹⁴⁹ Dorothy D. Houghton, "Mothers with International Viewpoint," *International Mother's Digest* (Nov/Dec 1950): 1-2, in Dorothy Deemer Houghton Collection.

¹⁵⁰ May, 4-5, 10.

¹⁵¹ Peter Hoehnle, "Iowa Clubwomen Rise to World Stage: Dorothy Houghton and Ruth Sayre," *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* (Spring 2002), 33.

¹⁵² Houghton, *Reflections*, 12.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 15.

Iowa because they wanted her to have vision beyond her own town and to learn to serve others in whatever way she could. In her memoir she said: “I have tried to push back the horizons, to see the world as a community of men, each one like an Iowa neighbor.”¹⁵⁴

Upon her graduation and return to Red Oak, Dorothy married banker Hiram Cole Houghton and had her first child in 1913.¹⁵⁵

When first asked to join the local women’s club as a young mother, Houghton thought of caricatures made of club women, as well as what the membership had meant to her mother and joined the Red Oak Monday Club “to become reacquainted” with her Iowa neighbors.¹⁵⁶ The Monday Club had been founded in 1895 for the purpose of sharing papers and presentations, deliberating current events, and unifying the community’s women of different religious denominations in the name of civic activity.¹⁵⁷ Houghton’s club involvement began in a time when women’s involvement in public life was delicate, even on the margins; a time before American women had suffrage. The women’s club movement promoted the involvement of women in public affairs under the banner of preserving the morality and quality of life for the home and family.¹⁵⁸ Club work provided women more than an opportunity to socialize, it was an outlet for intellectualism and an avenue to for a voice in community improvement, otherwise closed-off to women.

Clubwomen learned meeting and speaking skills as they met in the name of community improvement at the local and sometimes national and international levels.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 13.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 27.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 37.

¹⁵⁷ Hoehnle, 34.

¹⁵⁸ Anne Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in US Women’s Clubs 1880-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press).

¹⁵⁹ Hoehnle, 32.

Clubwomen of every status and location grappled with misrepresentations. Clubwomen had to walk a thin line: gaining influence over public causes, without appearing overtly “political.” Grover Cleveland ridiculed the work of women’s clubs in a 1905 article in *Ladies’ Home Journal*, calling it political work in opposition to men, largely focused on suffrage. The General Federation of Women’s Clubs responded to Cleveland asserting that their work was not political or social but focused on intellectual and philanthropic issues.¹⁶⁰ The early decades of women’s club leaders relied on prominent men to cite the “moral power” their work afforded society and depended on this messaging to support the lobbying they did on behalf of legislation that they believed would protect the home and family.¹⁶¹

Recognizing the strength they could achieve through numbers, most women’s clubs worked beyond the boundaries of their own communities. The Monday Club in Red Oak belonged to the Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs, which was an affiliate of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, an international organization. Houghton’s club involvement grew with her children; she became president of the Iowa Federation of 35,000 members, in 1935 and the General Federation in 1950.¹⁶² She wrote that her state leadership took her from farm community to farm community: providing loans to Iowa girls for college, granting scholarships, giving speeches and lobbying politicians for kindergartens in public schools, paved roads, and state parks; of this work she claimed: “we literally took Iowa out of the mud.”¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Gere, 31.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 32.

¹⁶² Houghton, *Reflections*, 35; Hoehnle, 34.

¹⁶³ Houghton, *Reflections*, 32-35.

For the constituency of clubwomen she represented, Houghton described the outlet provided by club work in the following way: “Housewives need the mature social contacts women’s clubs offer. As companions, small children are frequently amusing and always beloved, but they are not intellectually stimulating. Neither is an unrelieved regimen of laundry, cookery, and dishwashing.”¹⁶⁴

Houghton had little personal experience with the “unrelieved regimen of laundry, cookery, and dishwashing” herself. Growing up the only child in a family with means, she had little experience with housework, and when she was expecting their first child, her husband Hiram hired a maid so that she would not have to cook.¹⁶⁵ Houghton’s analysis that most women’s lives were consumed with daily tasks and concerns are borne-out in the everyday experiences rural women shared in the pages of *Kitchen-Klatter*. The fact that the details *Kitchen-Klatter* readers focused on seem mundane and self-centered compared to Houghton’s focus on the politics of societal betterment, results from differences in economic advantages. Houghton’s privileges enabled her to take-up public causes without distraction and circumvent stereotypes about small-town life being secluded and focused on daily concerns. She could use the time and energy many women devoted to housework and caring for family to extend the rural and small-town values of community support to the larger world.

Houghton represents a paradox faced by many middle-class women in mid-century America. While her parents had cultivated her potential as she traveled with her father to political speaking engagements through his role as a judge and securing an East Coast education, the opportunities available to her as a wife and mother were limited.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 37.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

Club-work provided an available and accepted creative outlet for Houghton's skill and energy.¹⁶⁶ The experience of caring for neighbors, a central part of small-town life and legacy of "open-country" living for farm families, made women a force for good citizenship in not only their own communities but throughout the world.¹⁶⁷ Writing to clubwomen, Houghton outlined their power in upholding democratic principles:

I see you in your clubhouses, meeting in each other's homes, in churches, in public buildings, in hotels, wherever you come together to study and work and play... in your ceaseless efforts to build a better life...the libraries which you founded...the community centers which your efforts made possible...the youth centers where you work with and for young people...the new school buildings which you helped make possible. I see communities brighter, cleaner, safer, healthier, happier, because of your untiring work on their behalf.¹⁶⁸

The image of rural homemaker was one Houghton used to craft her persona as leader of the General Federation of Women's Clubs.¹⁶⁹ Her vision of the world as a community of men each like an Iowa neighbor, drove her work; she said she viewed the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe following World War II as "simply an extension of Iowa farm philosophy...you always help your neighbor when he is down."¹⁷⁰ She organized the 1952 national meeting of the General Federation in Minneapolis so that "Eastern and Southern women can see our midwestern culture."¹⁷¹

While small town, midwestern values governed her leadership philosophy, Houghton emphasized internationalism during her General Federation presidency. She encouraged United States clubwomen, 810,606 in 14,604 clubs, to become involved in

¹⁶⁶ Kaledin, Preface.

¹⁶⁷ Rife, 677; Fink, *Open Country Iowa*.

¹⁶⁸ Mrs. Hiram Cole Houghton, "Hail and Farewell, 1950-1952," *General Federation Clubwoman*, (May 1952), 1, in Dorothy Deemer Houghton Collection, Montgomery County History Center.

¹⁶⁹ "Mrs. Hiram Cole Houghton Biography," in Dorothy Deemer Houghton Collection.

¹⁷⁰ Hoehnle, 37.

¹⁷¹ J.R. Williams, "Dorothy Deemer Houghton: A Memoir," *Palimpsest* (May/June 1973): 28-29.

international exchange programs and support the United Nations.¹⁷² She took four international trips during her tenure as president, and hosted foreign dignitaries at the United States headquarters: writing that what stood out to her was that “everywhere, there was a bond between mothers.”¹⁷³ In 1950 she wrote that the international trips she led helped “forge the friendships of the peoples of freedom-loving countries into closer bonds of understanding, for it is our belief that no country will go to war against another country whose women know and understand and love each other.”¹⁷⁴ Houghton discovered that her international trips made her more aware of “American apathy” writing that despite all the personal freedom and opportunity, Americans took too much for granted. She argued that Americans placed too much responsibility on the federal government, relying too much on others to tell them what to think and “forgetting that democracy demands mental alertness from those who deserve it.”¹⁷⁵ Sometimes she was stereotypical about her views, claiming that shopping easily distracted the women she took on international trips.¹⁷⁶ One aim of her international travel was to promote international club membership and by the end of her term, the General Federation had 48,207 members in 24 clubs abroad.¹⁷⁷

Houghton occasionally discussed the need for women’s rights and importance of women having a voice in public affairs. In the May 1951 issue of *McCall’s*, Houghton criticized male leaders who came to women for support only after the decisions were

¹⁷² “Administration Highlights,” *General Federation Clubwoman*, May 1952, 8, in Dorothy Deemer Houghton Collection; Hoehnle, 37.

¹⁷³ Houghton, *Reflections*, 12.

¹⁷⁴ Dorothy D. Houghton, “Mothers with International Viewpoint,” *International Mother’s Digest* (Nov/Dec 1950): 1, in Dorothy Deemer Houghton Collection.

¹⁷⁵ Houghton, *Reflections*, 47.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

¹⁷⁷ “Administration Highlights,” *General Federation Clubwoman* (May 1952), 8, in Dorothy Deemer Houghton Collection.

made.¹⁷⁸ While a pioneer of women's activism, Houghton's positions and politics were conservative, grounded in individualism, small government, voluntarism, law and order, and a strong military.¹⁷⁹

As the leader of the General Federation, Houghton pushed the economic power of women consumers. In an interview on the ABC Radio program "It's Your Business" Houghton stated that between 80 and 85 cents of every dollar spent in America was spent by women, and argued that the primary concern of clubwomen members was fighting the causes of inflation.¹⁸⁰ Women's groups have a long legacy of using their economic authority as consumers to gain political power.¹⁸¹ While Houghton's interview demonstrates that the cause remained on the agenda during the Cold War, organizations like the General Federation largely replaced consumer politics with the issues of world hunger, nuclear attack, and civil defense.¹⁸²

Cold War issues dominated the agenda during Houghton's tenure as president from 1950 to 1952. As a white, middle-class, educated, protestant woman, Houghton was the perfect messenger to stress to homemakers the significance of security in home and family in safeguarding freedom.¹⁸³ During her installation speech she told club members to "return prayers to the family tables and bring the world out of its moral and spiritual collapse." To inspire members, she entreated: "let us eliminate lethargy, political sickness

¹⁷⁸ Williams, 29-30.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 28. Houghton's political views were most clear in remarks made as co-chair of the Citizens for Eisenhower campaign in 1956.

¹⁸⁰ Transcript from ABC's *It's Your Business*. 30 June 1951, WJZ: New York, in Dorothy Deemer Houghton Collection.

¹⁸¹ Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 55.

¹⁸² Ibid., 251.

¹⁸³ May, 15.

and apathy—wake up, club women, we have unlimited power, let us use it!”¹⁸⁴ Houghton saw rural women and homemakers like herself as crucial to fighting communism and winning the Cold War.¹⁸⁵ Outlining this connection for readers of *International Mother's Digest* she stated:

The all-important living thing for peace is not so much the decision of delegates around international council tables of the wisdom of statesmen but rather the fabric of every-day decent living and this fabric is woven by the homemakers and mothers of the world...saying the war must not come again and that we shall do all in our power by sacrifice, by organization, by our activities and accomplishments, individually and collectively, to make a democratic way of life so that it will be a pillar of strength to all those who believe as we believe, and a beacon light to those who are living in darkened, troubled areas.¹⁸⁶

The General Federation presidency enabled Houghton to serve on the Women's Advisory Committee for Defense Mobilization and chair the Assembly of Women's Organizations for National Security.¹⁸⁷ At the end of her term, President Eisenhower named her one of only two women on the Advisory Board of the Office of Civil Defense and Mobilization.¹⁸⁸ After not choosing her for an appointment as ambassador to the Netherlands, President Eisenhower asked Houghton to head the Office of Refugees, Migration and Voluntary Assistance in 1952. To Houghton, “a good American...(was) a good internationalist” and she carried the principle that governed her work with the General Federation of Women's Clubs to her work with international refugees.¹⁸⁹ For her refugee work, Houghton was only the second woman to be recognized with the United

¹⁸⁴ Mildred Weilenman, “Resume of Life of Dorothy Deemer Houghton,” in Dorothy Deemer Houghton Collection.

¹⁸⁵ Hartmann.

¹⁸⁶ Dorothy D. Houghton, “Mothers with International Viewpoint,” *International Mother's Digest* (Nov/Dec 1950), 2, in Dorothy Deemer Houghton Collection.

¹⁸⁷ “Mrs. Hiram Cole Houghton Biography,” General Federation of Women's Clubs in Dorothy Deemer Houghton Collection.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Houghton, *Reflections*, 48-49.

Nations' Nansen Medal for "Most Distinguished Service to Refugees" and was awarded the honor by previous recipient, Eleanor Roosevelt.¹⁹⁰

In 1955 she left Washington and said of her return to Red Oak: "my lovely home is waiting, my church, my good husband, my family and my friends. I love that little town and I shall love to work for it and the welfare of our people like I did for so many years."¹⁹¹

The insights gleaned from her memoir, papers, and scrapbook at the Montgomery County History Center provides important insights about the "outliers" of rural womanhood. Most mid-century rural Iowa women were consumed by daily tasks and their observations and understandings of rural womanhood were largely contained to their own families and community. Houghton's vision and performance of rural womanhood was much more expansive: seeing the world as a community of neighbors and the applying the rural community pillars of education and mutual aid to international populations and rhetoric and realities of Cold War politics.

Rural community and social life are as important as agriculture in understanding the rural American experience. The collections of women provide an angle from which to analyze the experience of rural Iowa women more broadly and the boundaries of mid-twentieth-century rural womanhood. Turnbull, Driftmier, and Houghton were certainly not "feminists" or the beginning drumbeats of the second-wave movement, but each woman was modern and trailblazing in her own way. Each was curious about the world, eager to learn and share her knowledge. And in doing so they each played "public" roles

¹⁹⁰ "Mrs. Hiram Cole Houghton Biography," General Federation of Women's Clubs in Dorothy Deemer Houghton Collection.

¹⁹¹ Williams, 29.

in supporting education, emphasizing a respect for others and outsiders as a rural value, and wish to make the world better by taking-up responsibility for community, defined both broadly and narrowly. Their writing and work prioritized the traditional values they understood to be central to rural life while also supporting changes they felt would benefit their communities, Iowa, or the world.¹⁹²

¹⁹² Rife, 676.

CHAPTER 4. UNUSUAL ARCHIVES AND THE ARCHIVAL PERFORMANCES OF CREATORS, SAVERS, AND RESARCHERS

On an early fall evening in 1957 after a day of chores, dairy deliveries, and family laundry in the washhouse behind the farm home shared with her parents, 57-year-old Nola Simpson sat down to paste a stack of local newspaper clippings into her scrapbook. Simpson had been working on this particular book for over a year; it was identical in shape and form to the previous eight scrapbooks compiled since beginning her hobby as a teenager in 1915. Of her hobbies, which included quilting, crochet and embroidery alongside fellow Presbyterian women in the Dorcas society, playing piano on the upright during family gatherings, and caring for her beloved nieces and nephews- scrapbooking was the only activity Simpson completed in solitude. By 1957, her collection contained over four decades of local community life but assembling the scrapbook pages had started to feel more like a chore to complete than a hobby she enjoyed. She always enjoyed reading and clipping the local news, however. It allowed her to keep-up with the activities of family and friends, neighbors and acquaintances, some of which she had known since her childhood days in country school or as a young woman in teacher training at a nearby college. As Simpson aged it seemed she read as much about the children of her friends than her friends themselves. Taking a break from her work, Simpson wondered what would become of her scrapbooks someday. Without a husband or children of her own, would anyone want her possessions, let alone the scrapbook collection? She would not normally consider these things, but the declining health of her parents was at the front of her mind. She wondered about the future of their farm and

dairy business, what will her role be if her brothers-in-law takeover? Being a farmer had been a central part of her identity her entire life.¹

This imagined scene brings to life Nola Simpson's "archival performance" of creating scrapbooks of local news clippings. In creating this scene, I mean to draw attention to one of the central themes and questions of this study: what can be understood about the nature of historical saving and interpretation by studying what Ellen Gruber Garvey has called performances of archivalness?² Simpson's performance of archivalness began with the creation of her first scrapbook of local newspaper clippings and culminated in an eight-volume record of twentieth-century rural Iowa community life. What does her performance reveal about the role of individuals, particularly women, in the documentation of rural history? Upon Simpson's death, the books were donated to a local museum where Simpson's collection was subjected to a second round of performance of archivalness when a mother and daughter team of volunteers xeroxed, laminated, and indexed all volumes for long-term use. Their performance of archivalness demonstrates the role of everyday individuals, such as female volunteers for local historical societies, in historic preservation as they exercise authority over the order and interpretation of evidence.

Consideration of the processes of creating, saving, preserving these collections of evidence documenting the lives of everyday rural women raises the question of the purpose underlying all of the saving and preserving. In the case of the Simpson collection, untrained volunteers have cared for the collection and amateur genealogists,

¹ Details taken from interview of Simpson's niece Marjorie Reece, May 2010; Liz Wiley and Judy Newton eds., "Simpson family history," *Diagonal Centennial History, 1888-1988*: 426-427.

² Garvey, *Writing with Scissors*, 20.

local history buffs, and school-aged children have used the scrapbooks for research, bringing to light the significance of non-professional and non-academic individuals in archival practice and historical inquiry.

Chapter four of this study is a meditation on the relationship between evidence and history by considering the collections of rural women as performances of archivalness as they created their own “unusual archives” of scrapbooks, personal papers, or meeting minutes. The practices of “saving” by everyday rural women contribute to the historical record of the twentieth-century rural woman’s experience and shed light on the archival theory and historical inquiry.

Collection creators acted as their own archivists when they created, maintained, and preserved their collections. Often unknowingly, they made choices about what would be preserved for the historical record. In performing archivalness they made decisions regarding which events to write down or “clip and save” from the local newspapers, but when the collections were no longer under the control of their creators, other individuals and institutions acted to save, interpret, and understand the evidence, sometimes resulting in a second archival performance. Analyzing the collections of rural Iowa women that have been saved by local community organizations, accessioned by “official” archives, or privately-maintained by families sheds light on the role resources play in societal efforts to preserve evidence of the past.

In acting to save, preserve, and make sense of collections, individuals, amateurs, families and local community members can democratize the archive and widen the range of data for consideration in historical analysis. Broadened understandings of how

everyday people perform archivalness also supports a “new archival calling” wherein the role of private individuals and families in archival preservation is emphasized.³

Analyzing collections in light of the archival performances by their creators or subsequent caretakers inspires consideration of the human investment in the history: what is invested in saving and remembering, publicly and privately, by individuals, families, communities, organizations, and governments? Which histories are chosen for preservation, interpretation, and sharing, and which are lost?

Nola Simpson’s scrapbooks, Teresa Mottet’s peace march notes and ephemera, and the minutes and records maintained by the women of the Owl Country Club- case studies at the center of this chapter- each provide a lens for considering the relationship between creating and saving, researcher and subject, and historical methods and evidence. Considering not only the data they provide scholars, but the collections themselves, their original significance and use, how they have been maintained provides insight into notions of evidence, archives, and memory as well as larger narratives about twentieth-century rural women.

In finding, building, or interpreting the collections in this study, sometimes referred to as “unusual archives,” artifacts and personal documents are considered in relation to the people who invested meaning in them: the creators and their families and friends. In the name of saving and maintaining local history, small community-based historical institutions played a role in saving the Simpson, Mottet, and Owl Community Club records. Working in hybrid forms of archives and museums, the leaders of community historical organizations are often unpaid, and largely untrained and

³ Richard J. Cox, *Personal Archives and the New Archival Calling: Readings, Reflection and Ruminations* (Duluth, MN: Litwin Books, 2008).

inconsistent users of institutional archival methods and practices; in many cases they depend on the families and friends of collection creators as collaborators in historical preservation. The volunteers and amateur leaders of local historical institutions play a vital role in the historical preservation of evidence critical to understanding everyday family and community life.

Performing Archivalness: Collection Creators

Looking at the history of the collections themselves, in addition to the historical evidence the collection provides, affords insight into the relationship between women, record keeping, and saving. “Performing archivalness” is the term Ellen Gruber Garvey uses for the “gestures of preservation” made in creating historical records like scrapbooks. Garvey argues that the performances constitute archivalness because, like traditional archival work, it safeguards the transmission of historical knowledge.⁴

In finding and applying order to scrapbooks, calendars, diaries, or club-meeting records, everyday women were performing archivalness in transmitting knowledge pertaining to the social history of families and communities. In their homes they built democratized archival collections built from free or inexpensive materials to pass along information about their families and communities.⁵

Illustrating the “autobiographical acts” discussed in chapter two, the scrapbooks and records kept by Nola Simpson, Teresa Mottet and female members of the Owl Country Club are also autobiographical acts. In choosing what to write down or save and paste into a scrapbook the women documented their experiences, consciously shaping

⁴ Garvey, 20.

⁵ Ibid., 14-15.

their identities for themselves and for others by selecting memories for preservation as they collected, saved, and archived.

Focusing on the evidence in the collection and the significance ascribed by their creators provides another layer of exploration and analysis.⁶ Each collection contributes to the historical interpretation of the transformations to rural womanhood in Iowa during the twentieth-century. The collections serve as markers of the daily symbols and rituals in which their creators engaged to interpret, organize, and ascribe meaning to their lives. Taken anthropologically, the ritual of cutting and saving news from the local paper, gathering notes and setting-aside ephemera for safekeeping, recording and saving community club minutes, or filling-in and revisiting past entries in the family calendar represent quotidian, yet significant acts. To the women at the center of each performance the actions that held together their daily experiences and identities were more than hobbies or interests, they were affirmations of their rural womanhood.

As was the case for the collections considered in chapter three, the choices of women like Simpson, Mottet, and the secretaries of the Owl Country Club are informative of the ways rural women conceptualized their identities. In performing archivalness and assembling their collections the women made choices about how to record the histories of their families and communities. Decisions about how to represent events and experiences served to affirm their identities and fashion an image presented to others. In the act of cutting and pasting or recording community events and experiences,

⁶ Daniel Mendelsohn, *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006); David Hamilton, *Deep River: A Memoir of a Missouri Farm* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001). Both writers depend on personal emotional relationship to documents and build, what I would consider “unusual archives,” around document collections to interpret how individuals experience history in interpersonal ways, through place and across time.

rural women took time to add significance to their lived experience and extended their cultural authority, crafting an image of rural womanhood for outsiders. The collections are an amalgam of the themes of rural womanhood: work, family responsibility, intellectual or cultural influence, and upholding social ties. The collections also demonstrate that for many, chronicling and saving the experiences of rural families and communities was an inherent part of mid-twentieth-century rural womanhood.

Performing Archivalness: Savers and Keepers

Considering the everyday, handcrafted registers these women created as “unusual archives” draws attention to the way they, and those who later possessed and maintained these collections, performed archivalness. Private families and organizations, volunteer and paid professionals, and scholars in their research and writing, each influence historical understanding as they control and interpret evidence. In analyzing their influence, key considerations not only include how the creators of scrapbooks, ephemera, or organizational records engage in performing archivalness but the way others have subsequently exercised authority in the process of saving and understanding unusual archives.⁷

The stories of how these collections of ephemeral materials have avoided destruction through the actions of private and institutional “savers” reflects the scholarship of contemporary archival theory. Archivist Richard J. Cox has focused on personal archives and outlined a shift toward an open, postmodern concept of archives in what he calls a “new archival calling.”⁸

⁷ Garvey, 20.

⁸ Cox.

Expanding the notion of what constitutes “the archive” and its claims over historical evidence is a discussion in which many scholars have engaged. As early as the 1960s Michel Foucault questioned the power relations inherent in the organization and experience of archives. Carolyn Steedman noted that what was eventually called the “archival turn” was well underway before Jacques Derrida first discussed the ‘fever’ of the archive.⁹ Steedman found that discussions of a so-called “archive fever” affecting the objectivity of archival research were central to considerations of professional historians, particularly post-modernists and their critics and new social and cultural historians.¹⁰ These discussions yielded a more open concept of the archive: one that encouraged researchers to question the function and claims to authority of institutional archives. Antoinette Burton argued that to avoid the trap of claiming empiricism, scholars had to interrogate their archives, openly presenting the questions and issues they encountered while researching as part of their analysis of historical evidence.¹¹

These discussions encouraged a broadened concept of what constitutes archives, including scholarly work using alternate, non-institutional sites of evidence. Molly McCarthy defended the use of eBay for historical research and Caitlin DeSilvey applied archival methods to an abandoned rural homestead. In seeking evidence outside of the walls of institutions, both scholars demonstrate the benefit of expanding notions of archival practice. McCarthy argued that not using eBay for historical research had caused scholars to neglect both evidentiary sources and opportunities to engage with new

⁹ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 1-4; Derrida, *Archive Fever*. Derrida’s conceptualization of the archive almost completely separates evidence from place, and his idea of the *arkhe* is a metaphor for everything that holds information, including today’s information technology stores.

¹⁰ Steedman, 2-3.

¹¹ Antoinette Burton, “Thinking beyond the Boundaries: Empire, Feminism and the Domains of History” *Social History* 26 (January 2001): 66-67.

audiences for their historical research.¹² By applying archival collection and inventory methods to an abandoned Montana homestead, DeSilvey built an “artful inventory” of evidence primed for an analysis of the relationship between memory, place, and collecting practices. DeSilvey crafted a historical narrative by practicing sensitivity to emerging order while unearthing artifacts, opening cupboards, and exploring decrepit buildings.¹³

Engagement with evidence located outside of institutional walls such as McCarthy’s eBay collections or DeSilvey’s abandoned homestead, not only advances consideration of matters of empiricism and objectivity but helps integrate scholars into non-academic communities. The Burton, McCarthy, and DeSilvey conceptions of what constitutes evidence and how researchers should position themselves in the debate, encourage appreciation of a more democratized notion of the archive. Cox’s argument that archivists cannot possibly save all the evidence worth scholarly attention and that private citizens have an interest in saving and preserving collective memory also advances this notion.¹⁴ Cox encourages communities of archivists and scholarly researchers to nurture the capacity of private individuals to maintain archival collections and make them available for research. Cox’s notion of a new archival calling is built upon empowering individuals and families as “citizen archivists” by developing their expertise in saving and preserving personal and family collections as historical evidence for research. According to Cox, the private individuals, families, or groups that are most

¹² Molly McCarthy, “Consuming History?” *Common-place.org* 1 (January 2001) Part 2. <http://www.common-place.org/vol-01/no-02/ebay/ebay-2.shtml>.

¹³ Caitlin DeSilvey, “Art and Archive: Memory-work on a Montana Homestead” *Journal of Historical Geography* 33 (2007): 878-879.

¹⁴ Cox, 2.

invested in the collection and preservation of their own histories are essential resources for historians and archivists.¹⁵

Many collections found in institutional archives are excellent sources of data but removed to public spaces without ample provenance and information about their original creators can result in limited or unknowable narratives. The creator's intent is often lost once they are separated from their collection and by the time the materials reach an institution it can be too late to find the information.¹⁶ The original intentions of collection creators and subsequent custodians are integral pieces of context to both archival practice and historical research: did the creators complete their work for the benefit of their future selves, descendants, or outsiders? What purpose did they intend for the collections? Were they justifying their choices and identities, giving legitimacy to their lives or communities in times of change? To thoroughly understand the historical complexity of a collection, scholars must make accurate determinations about original use and valuing the roles of individuals, families, and community members connected to the collection helps scholars understand what drives the creator.¹⁷ Scholars value the annotations of creators as well as the comments and identifications added by descendants for the context they provide to their analysis.¹⁸ In the case of scrapbooks, Ellen Gruber Garvey argues that the value of a scrapbook as evidence is greater when it has been saved within a family because they possess first-hand knowledge of the creator and, as long as it does not

¹⁵ Cox, vii.

¹⁶ Garvey, 217.

¹⁷ Ibid., 216-217.

¹⁸ Ibid., 218.

become too much trouble to maintain, their interest and connection to the creator ensures the collection's safekeeping.¹⁹

Most creators did not imagine that their collections would be of value beyond their own families and friends. The survival of a great deal of historical material is contingent upon its valuation and preservation by descendants. Their determinations are sometimes based only on nostalgia or respect, rather than recognition of historical content or determination that the creator's experiences were significant. For these materials to be accessioned by institutional archives, creators or their survivors and descendants must not only make judgments of valuation and acts of preservation, they must be willing to lay bare private lives and experiences.²⁰ Once individuals and families gift their collections to formal archives they are "published" to an unknown public and audience of scholars for consideration as evidence and sometimes families can find this exposure hard to handle.²¹

The unease of sharing the details of private life with strangers can be an obstacle in the willingness of creators and their family and friends to share personal collections, but there are also obstacles inherent in the institutions of archives themselves. In her discussion of everyday records as a resource for unconventional autobiographical writing, Elizabeth Hampsten notes the history of "gatekeeping" practiced by institutional archives.²² Garvey compared the acquisition of collections by institutional archives and special collections to the publication of a book:

when institutions such as library special collections, local historical societies, and other kinds of archives devoted to preservation of artifacts and to providing some

¹⁹ Ibid., 220.

²⁰ Ibid., 217-218.

²¹ Ibid., 221, 217-218.

²² Hampsten, viii.

form of access make decisions...about what they accept...they act as gatekeepers.

A long-held tendency to value records based upon their connection to public life or significant historical events, placed little value on the “scribbling” or marginal notes of everyday women, devaluing many of the commonplace records created by women until recent decades, when archivists have increased their work to build informal networks to connect their institutional work with collection owners. The interest of amateur historians and genealogists has also encouraged the preservation of a wider range of document forms by institutional archives.²³ Connections between institutional archives and family and private “savers” have been enhanced greatly by tools of digitization and Internet technology. The ability to easily share evidence, combined with the continued interest of scholars in more expansive forms of evidence and research approaches, have increased the legitimacy of preserving and researching privately held collections.²⁴

The increased interest in and capacity to save and share personal, family, and local history and greater recognition by institutions and scholars is critical to expanding the historical narrative but as Garvey argues: considering the way something has been saved can be as important as the content of what is saved. In addition to noting the significance, value, and quality of material in a collection, professional and volunteer archivists, librarians, and curators working for special collections, museums, and historical societies need to emphasize the context of the collection’s formation.²⁵

²³ Ibid, viii, xi.

²⁴ Burton ed., *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 3, 5, refers to the “resurgence of positivism in popular generic forms” and speaks to larger understandings of the relationship of evidence to the study of history.

²⁵ Garvey, 213.

In addition to providing evidence of historical events or social experiences each collection itself is a subject of analysis. Stephens's calendars have made their way to the hands of her granddaughter when they could easily have been discarded each January, as a new calendar was started for a new year. Simpson's scrapbooks of newspaper clippings are quite cumbersome with a dozen books spanning nearly three-quarters of a century, she might easily have been the only person to place value on their content; instead, within five years of her death others reallocated their value, reformatting the scrapbooks for easy use in genealogy and local history research. Had Teresa Mottet not chosen to retire to a duplex in the same Fairfield, Iowa, neighborhood as the curator of the local Carnegie Historical Museum, she might not have ever contemplated the merit of her peace march notes and ephemera for preservation and public consideration.

There are spaces to be considered between the power and authority of the creators in recording their experiences and the subsequent power of those who process or research a collection.²⁶ Scholars should broaden their understanding of archives, considering their original significance and use, how they have been maintained, and analyze the histories of the collections themselves. While Stephens or Simpson performed archivalness in creating their collections, so did subsequent family members or volunteers. Researchers also perform archivalness, as their analysis requires them to apply systems of order or ascribe significance in details and origins.²⁷

In creating unusual archives of personal or community experiences, the creators of the collections discussed in this chapter generated both records for themselves, their

²⁶ Ibid., 213.

²⁷ Suzanne L Bunkers, " 'Faithful Friend': Nineteenth-Century Midwestern American Women's Unpublished Diaries." *Women's Studies International Forum* 10 (1987), 9; Bunkers applies a similar approach to studying diaries useful to understanding the range of forms considered in this study.

families, or communities to use as evidence of their identities as rural women or communities, as well as data for scholars to use in analysis. Alongside consideration of institutional saving, an examination of what the histories of these collections themselves reveal about the relationship of women to record keeping furthers our understanding of the relationship between people and their history and the nature of historical saving and interpretation.²⁸

Nola Simpson

Unusual Archive of Local History

The Nola Simpson Scrapbook Collection is evidence of the investment private individuals make in documenting history. Simpson's scrapbook collection is an unusual archive composed of newspaper clippings documenting the events of her family and members of her small rural farming community. The content Simpson archived is exemplified by page forty of the sixth book in the collection where the headlines of the newspaper clippings read:

Reece-Gray Vow Said November 2nd
McCormicks Leaving for New Pastorate
Clara Berry to Be Married Nov. 26th
Elmer Reece Shoots Record Deer
Quilters Observe Birthdays
Simpson Reunion Held At Thayer
Kay Davenport Home From Mexico
Life History of W.D. Herrington

In addition to the news of three weddings, the departure of a local preacher's family, a family reunion, the shooting a "record" deer, and return of resident from a vacation to Mexico, newspaper clippings scrapbooked on page forty also included four birth

²⁸ Ibid., 9.

announcements and a slumber party “in observance of” Simpson’s niece’s birthday. The clippings are labeled with dates ranging from October through November 1960.²⁹

From 1915 until her death in 1984, Simpson cut-and-pasted stories like these from local newspapers into 20” x 24” scrapbooks, creating an unusual archive of Simpson family and Diagonal community life. The selections she made about what events to clip and paste into her collection are a record of her life, interests, and relationships. The inclusion of stories about community members unrelated to Simpson demonstrates how her performance of archivalness extended beyond personal and family records, to records documenting her small southern Iowa farming town. The scrapbooks document what Simpson valued and the act of creating the unusual archive validated her identity as a rural woman. While rural womanhood often centered on marriage and motherhood, as a single woman Simpson’s identity as a rural woman was defined by her economic responsibility on her father’s farm, but also her community influence, as the collection’s content demonstrates.³⁰

The “story” Simpson told with her books was based upon what was chosen from local newspapers rather than how the clippings were arranged. Simpson performed archivalness by saving news clippings of interest over the course of a few weeks or months and labeling with dates as she saved. After amassing enough clippings to fill at least a scrapbook page, she laid them out in columns in rough chronological order and pasted them to fill the page. The scrapbook pages include clippings dated within a month or two of one another, with the exception of a few pages where the clipping dates differ

²⁹ Nola Simpson, Scrapbook Collection, Book 6, 1957, p. 40, Diagonal Printing Museum, Diagonal, Iowa.

³⁰ Ibid.

by almost a year. Although not arranged thematically, almost all pages include multiple obituaries, marriage and birth announcements, and “local news” stories. Simpson’s provided very little labeling of her scrapbook collection, writing only the ranges of years of newspaper clippings on small stickers attached to the covers of each scrapbook.

Simpson’s method of scrapbooking exhibits the same thriftiness qualities as Madge Lotspeich’s handmade recipe book, which was pasted over the text of a nineteenth-century book of speeches. A characteristic often associated with rural women like Simpson or Lotspeich, the prudence with which Simpson saved and pasted in order to use every inch of the scrapbook pages differs drastically from contemporary practices that value visual appeal over economy, making use of special background paper and embellishments to “tell a story” in their scrapbooks.

Simpson’s performance of archivalness democratizes the notion of archives. In the decentralized “archives” of her home, Simpson made selections and applied order as she selected and pasted newspaper clippings as she engaged in historical preservation.³¹ The scrapbook pages document the activities of members of Simpson’s community, with very little reference to events involving Simpson herself. As a single woman, Simpson did not personally experience the birth and wedding announcements that constitute so much of her scrapbook collection. Creating a record of rural community life allowed Simpson to express and solidify her rural womanhood identity through her position as a community member, rather than through the typical access points of motherhood and marriage. By documenting family and community ties built on pillars of rural life like

³¹ Garvey, 209.

mutual aid and support, Simpson's performance of archivalness bolstered her own cultural authority as well as rural traditions.

In documenting the births, deaths, marriages, departures and arrivals, gatherings and celebrations constituting the lives of community members, Simpson's unusual archive documents the strong ties that held together rural community life amidst twentieth-century change. The clippings Simpson included in her scrapbooks tell the story of a way of life built upon familiarity and reciprocal support that accompanied social ties forged in open-country networks and association with education and religious institutions, enacted by the descendants of rural pioneers.³²

The "local news" clippings involved Simpson's own family or the families of neighbors and fellow church members and included stories ranging from friends catching large fish to visits from family members in observance of a birthday, or visits to the homes of neighbors to celebrate their wedding anniversary. Scrapbook pages from the 1958 book include notices about Simpson, such as her recognition as a "Gallon Club" member for her blood donations to the Red Cross; and her family, such as her nephew's enrollment at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, or notification that her niece had a summer job teaching in a traveling Sunday School program.³³

Examples of her documentation of the activities of friends and neighbors include multiple stories covering the sale of rural schoolhouses to local farmers, a profile of a neighbor elected as president of the town's VFW Auxiliary, and story of a church friend who had, for decades, maintained Diagonal's only library in the backroom of her

³² Robert P. Swierenga, "Theoretical Perspectives on the New Rural History: From Environmentalism to Modernization," *Agricultural History* 56 (July 1982): 495-502.

³³ Nola Simpson, Scrapbook Collection, Book 6, 1957, p. 4, 6-10.

hardware store. Simpson's 1958 book included a news story with picture from the "Queen of the Band" ceremony at the Diagonal High School. She also scrapbooked an article from February 1959 titled: "Old-Time Weather Here" detailing below zero temperatures and a steady snow that, according to the newspaper editor recalled past winter storms that had "residents remembering when."³⁴ On a subsequent page Simpson continued documenting that winter's storms, with a March story from a local newspaper that detailed a three-day blizzard with twenty inches of snow and high winds. Capturing the local flavor, the story documents closures and delays and community members who had been stranded in ditches.³⁵

Unusual Archive Facsimile

Upon her death in 1996, Simpson's scrapbooks were donated to the Diagonal Printing Museum where volunteers xeroxed, laminated, and indexed the pages so community members and visitors could locate the birth, death, and marriage records of ancestors more easily than by using microfilm readers found off-site at county or state historical institutions. Teachers leading school field trips sometimes task their students with conducting local historical research by looking up an ancestor or prominent citizen in the books and sharing what they have learned with their peers.³⁶

The museum maintains the original versions of Simpson's scrapbooks and comparison to the reproductions offers insight into the ways in which the books were transformed for preservation and use. The book highlighted above was labeled: "Book 6:

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Arlene Sobotka, volunteer at Diagonal Printer's Museum, interview by author 10 July 2015. As an elementary student in Diagonal, I researched and shared the history of a female resident that owned and operated the town's hardware store for the school's "Night of the Notables" community presentation.

1957” by museum volunteers and corresponds with the tenth book in Simpson’s original collection, which she labeled with a small sticker on the book’s cover: “1958-1961.”

There are differences in form between Simpson’s original version and the facsimile created by museum volunteers to increase usability. Museum volunteers altered the original order of Simpson unusual archive of scrapbooks. The motivation of volunteers to make changes most likely resulted in their desire to fit the content of the original collection to the new books with wider dimensions. A comparison of the format of the original collection to the facsimile version shows that nearly all of the original content was copied and added to the second collection of books. Simpson’s original order of clippings pasting is not entirely preserved, however as museum volunteers combined material in the new books and in a small number of instances clippings from the original collection are on different pages in the new books absent, and in a couple of instances they are altogether absent.³⁷

As unusual archives Simpson’s scrapbooks, in original and facsimile form, do not add any information to the historical record not discoverable on microfilm at the county or state library. What they do provide, through their selection and arrangement, is a story of the community’s history through Simpson’s eyes. As Ellen Gruber Garvey states reading scrapbooks pages:

may not reanimate the life of their maker, but it places us for a moment behind the maker’s eyes, to glimpse what he or she saw in reading the newspapers about to be cut up to make the book. The scrapbook thus adds another ghostly figure alongside the researcher: the archivist/scrapbook maker who came before, with his or her own vision.

³⁷ Simpson, Scrapbook Collection.

Garvey argues that “scrapbooks are a democratic form of archives” because anyone can create them and many women who did not author memoirs chose the form to “write with scissors” in recording their life experiences.³⁸ In finding, choosing, and reorganizing the writing of others, the makers of scrapbooks expressed their own ideas documenting their experience as they enacted their identities. By saving and arranging writing that mattered to them, they created value for themselves or their families and communities, generating a record for future use.³⁹ The work of the volunteers provides visitors with a collection that they can use without fear of causing damage; but their work to preserve the original, deteriorating collection is also important since it contains Simpson’s arrangement and most closely reflects her “authorship.”

Scrapbooks as archival collections are often considered unremarkable especially when composed of ephemeral documents like newspapers, meant to be discarded. With most newspapers saved on microfilm or digitized, scrapbooks of newspaper clippings have little value to archives for their content and for families they can seem too common or cumbersome to merit preservation.⁴⁰ Most scrapbooks were not created with public audiences in mind and often come to archives in poor shape, without original order or much in the way of connection to their creators. Many archives have long been unwilling to make space for scrapbooks. According to Garvey scrapbook saving in most “bricks-and-mortar” archives has not been implemented democratically.⁴¹

Would most institutional archives have accessioned Nola Simpson’s scrapbooks? Considering they are nearly entirely composed of newspaper clippings available on

³⁸ Garvey, 227.

³⁹ Ibid., 4, 22.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 214.

⁴¹ Ibid., 216, 227.

microfilm, it is not likely. They also would never have been copied, laminated, bound, and indexed for public use in the way they have at the Diagonal Printer's Museum, because this process did not preserve original order and also took considerable time and resources. The original copies of Simpson's scrapbooks are safely stored, but not being subjected to established preservation practices they are deteriorating rapidly.

Advancements in digitization have increased the ability of many "bricks-and-mortar" archives to preserve and share scrapbooks, but the Simpson scrapbooks were accessioned in the late 1980s and even now the museum does not have a scanner. The Diagonal Printer's Museum, while technically a public archive, does not receive any sustained public funding; all maintenance and improvement is supported through donations and grants and all labor is the unpaid work of volunteers. Simpson's collection, while personally valuable as her record of events, has been saved and preserved despite the obstacles, because it is valuable to others in her community. To museum volunteers, supporters, and visitors, Simpson was "one of us." Rhoda and Jan Johnston, a mother-in-law and daughter team of museum volunteers completed the task of preserving the collection through much the same impulse that fueled Simpson's work to create her archives in the first place: as an extension of their rural womanhood identities tied to saving and preserving local history. They preserved the history of the community's members, affirming the rural way of life for themselves and supporting others in doing the same; saving a record of births, marriages, graduations, social gatherings, hospitalizations, deaths, and more, which presented rural people as simple but virtuous, bound together by common values and concern for one another. Simpson notes the departure of community members, such as the families of preachers from town churches

or teachers, coaches, and administrators at the school; if they relocated to towns in the area, Simpson continued to clip news of their families, published in area newspapers. The local paper often kept track of former residents living at greater distances from the community through their subscription renewals and these updates sometimes made Simpson scrapbook as well.

It is also important to consider what Simpson did not include. With the exception of a small clipping documenting her cousin, Marilyn Reece's petition for divorce, which specified the charging of her husband with "cruel and inhumane treatment" and request that her maiden name be restored, the books do not contain legal news reflecting negatively on community members. One reason Simpson might have included the documentation becomes evident in the reading of the couple's wedding announcement, also included in Simpson's scrapbook, which specifies that her cousin Marilyn Reece's husband was a community "outsider," originally from Minnesota who, after serving in the military, relocated to the area for a construction job.⁴²

The painstaking effort to index the collection is something a larger institution would have had difficulty in justifying the expenditure of resources and it is not part of typical archival practice. Instead, it represents the museum's visions of the collection as a record of community history and Simpson writing with scissors to "author" the history. Simpson's collection as a source of community memory is exceptional in terms of the time span it covers. The Diagonal Printing Museum holds three other scrapbook collections, but they are each narrower in their focus. While Simpson's spans news clippings from 1915 to 1983, the others focus on events or personal papers with a

⁴² Simpson, Scrapbook Collection, Book 6.

collection documenting news of World War II and a woman's collection of greeting cards received in her youth.⁴³

In her scrapbooking, Simpson performed archivalness for herself and her community, as she created and saved a record of life in the rural farming community in and around the town of Diagonal, Iowa. Simpson was the first to control her unusual archive and shape the collection as a chronicle of rural community history. In choosing which pieces of news to clip and paste, Simpson decided which events or individuals were worth preservation in her scrapbooks bringing some community members out from anonymity.⁴⁴

The new stories clipped and pasted into the scrapbooks amount to a record of community history that provides insight into the social and cultural context of twentieth-century rural American life, saved through the appraisal of a person who experienced it first-hand. Simpson's selections of local news and events for her scrapbooks were in no way comprehensive. In choosing which information about community members from the "local" or "personal" columns of area newspapers was worth saving and pasting into her book, her performance of archivalness dictated what was later accessioned and indexed to serve as evidence for interpreting community life in mid-twentieth-century rural America. The result is a record focused on religious and educational institutions, documentation of the vital life events of birth, marriage, and death in the lives of local families who were understood to be upright and respected by neighbors.

⁴³ Collections from the Diagonal Printing Museum, Diagonal, Iowa.

⁴⁴ Steedman, *Dust*, provides a meditation on the historian's search through the archives to "save the lives" of the anonymous dead and forgotten.

Simpson was unaware that her unusual archive would eventually be offered as a research tool for community members and their descendants. Simpson's niece briefly controlled the collection after Simpson's death. After determining that the material was dominated by community accounts, she donated the scrapbooks to the Diagonal Printing Museum where volunteers "processed" the collection by copying and indexing it, influencing local history narratives as they chose which family names, notable citizens, organizations or institutions to feature in the index.

The scrapbooks represent the way everyday rural women like Simpson made sense of their lives and communities. Stories of ordinary historical actors are often relegated to the margins but can be found by looking to ordinary spaces of public history like the Diagonal Printer's Museum and the way everyday people like Simpson, her niece, and the mother-daughter team of museum volunteers who created a copy of the scrapbook collection, invest in their history as archivists of personal, family, and community histories in order to bring to light the historical experiences of ordinary people.

Teresa Mottet Collection

The Mottet Peace Collection is evidence of the ways individuals knowingly perform archivalness in curating evidence of their own history into unusual archives. The collection documents Mottet's participation in the 4 August 1985 peace march on Washington, D.C., in observance of the fortieth Anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bomb. By happenstance of her neighbor's position as the director of the Carnegie Historical Museum in Fairfield, Iowa, Mottet's collection of ephemera has been preserved as part of an "official" archives. Because her neighbor determined that the

collection was of interest to scholars and members of the Fairfield community, Mottet organized her collection and gifted it to the museum in 2011 and her private archival performance has been sustained by formal expertise.⁴⁵

While Dorothy Houghton, whose collection was analyzed in chapter three, centered her political work on spreading American values abroad and mobilizing housewives in the fight to win the Cold War, the political activism of rural women traverses the spectrum. Mottet's 1980s peace activism embodies rural progressivism. A farmwife from Pleasant Plain in southeastern Iowa, and member of the Catholic Church, Democratic Party, and National Farmer's Organization, Mottet sewed panels and banners for gatherings and authored editorials on behalf of progressive causes throughout her lifetime.⁴⁶ Mottet's activism represents a continuation of the prairie republicanism highlighted by Frederick Jackson Turner.⁴⁷ As Jon Lauck argues, in valuing self-governance, representation, and decentralized politics small towns have always endeavored to fulfill the meanings of democracy and representation through civic engagement.⁴⁸ The manifestations of these actions for twentieth-century rural women were varied, as the Houghton and Mottet's collections demonstrate, but each collection reflects the centrality of civic engagement to their rural womanhood identities.⁴⁹

Mottet and her husband co-authored an unpublished life history for their family, which does not include the details of Mottet's experience at the peace march. These

⁴⁵ Teresa Mottet, "Francis and Teresa Mottet Peace Collection," Carnegie Historical Museum, Fairfield, Iowa.

⁴⁶ *Des Moines Register*, "Mary Teresa Mottet Obituary," 10 April 2018.

⁴⁷ Jon K. Lauck, *The Lost Region: Toward a Revival of Midwestern History* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013), 16.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁹ Dorothy Deemer Houghton Collection, Montgomery County Historical Society, Red Oak, Iowa.

details can only be understood from the Mottet Peace Collection gathered and gifted after Mottet's husband's death to the Carnegie Historical Museum in Fairfield, Iowa.⁵⁰

Mottet's collection includes a commemorative t-shirt, newspaper articles, handouts, and pamphlets passed around during the march such as Mark Twain's "War Prayer," her hand-quilted banner promoting the national and international grassroots effort to pressure United States and Soviet Union leaders to freeze the production and testing of nuclear weapons, that read: "Support the Freeze-Don't Be an Ash, Teresa Mottet, Richland, Iowa," which she tied to the ribbon during the culmination of the march when all individual, yard-length banners were linked to form a continuous seventeen-mile ribbon around the United States Capitol, White House, and Pentagon as a symbol of peace encircling the seats of power in the United States government. The collection also includes a legal pad filled with "eye witness notation" written from Mottet's reactions to events and conversations with fellow peace march participants on the bus ride from Iowa to Washington, D.C., during the march itself, and three pages of her personal reflections written after the event. In her notes, Mottet quotes and describes the people she encountered including their names, where they were from, why they were marching, how they decorated their banners, and how she was affected by the interactions.⁵¹

In his history of the New Left in America, Doug Rossinow outlines the way a search for authenticity drove leftist activism ranging from Cold War liberalism, to social gospel liberalism, evangelicalism, feminism, and student movements and these undertones are reflected in the 1980s anti-nuclear activism that is documented in the

⁵⁰ Mottet Peace Collection, Carnegie Historical Museum.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Mottet collection.⁵² Conversations with fellow protesters documented by Mottet frequently circle back to religion. In a conversation with a Methodist woman Mottet said that the 1983 Bishops' statement on peace had made her proud to be a Catholic, to which the woman responded more with envy than anger: "yes, that was really great; but what most people don't know is that the Methodist bishops had put out a similar statement before that. You Catholics get better publicity."⁵³ After hearing Mottet introduce herself a fellow passenger and Catholic noted her familiarity with Mottet's activism saying that she had read Mottet's letters in a diocesan newspaper, the *Catholic Messenger*.⁵⁴ A nun told Mottet that she had been sent to represent her sisters: "my group of nuns said: when they go to the Pentagon to tie that ribbon we want you to be there to represent us."⁵⁵

Mottet included her own responses to comments shared by others. After sitting on the bus with an Iowa teacher whose job was in jeopardy for her talking about peace in her classes, Mottet wrote "why is it so wrong to speak about peace in public schools?" A science teacher told Mottet she was on the trip because she had learned from the *Scientific American* that "we weren't being told the truth about nuclear residue...don't just say God will take care of it, God gave us brains to use. Humans put the atomic bomb together and humans can take it apart."⁵⁶

Mottet's notes capture the diversity of the group who boarded the bus with her from Iowa. She spoke with a World War II veteran who had been in Hiroshima in the months following the bombing and he told his fellow participants that he was proud of

⁵² Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 11.

⁵³ "Teresa Mottet's notes on 'the Ribbon' march in Washington, Aug. 4, 1985," in Mottet Peace Collection.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

them for taking part in the event. A native of the Middle East caught Mottet's attention for the embroidered tunic she wore as she shared with the group of her upbringing in Saudi Arabia and India. In her notes Mottet quoted a fellow bus passenger whom she referred to as a "young bride" as saying: "I wonder what God is thinking, looking down on this world. I need to be here to express to God how I feel about peace." The wife of a district judge told Mottet, "I raised my nine children to be peacemakers and now I'm on fifteen grandkids. I thought that was my contribution to peace. I feel that now is my time to speak for peace."⁵⁷ Mottet also noted that she was pleasantly surprised by the number of farm people in the group and her desire to take in all aspects of the experience: "apparently farm people have learned that we must speak out for our causes, whatever they are... I feel like a sponge: I want to soak all of this up."⁵⁸

The pages of Mottet's notes documenting the actual march and ribbon-tying were written in haste indicating that she carried her notebook and wrote whenever she was able. She described the banners she saw and carried and a program speaker who was a teenager in Nagasaki when it was bombed and had given birth to two dead babies. Mottet noted two Japanese men who spoke of their gratitude to be in Washington, D.C. as 100,000 people joined 30,000 ribbon segments in peace. Mottet noted that "a man from New York, Pete Seeger, sang a song for our Japanese friends (sung in Japanese) it said 'never again an A Bomb'."⁵⁹

Mottet and her husband traveled widely in their retirement and while she wrote that there were not many protestors at the peace march, she made the following note

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

about her interaction with one: “one heckler- you ought to all be shipped off to Moscow. My reply- I’ve been to Moscow last summer, sir.” The diversity of people and groups represented on the banner was significant to Mottet who wrote that she saw banner segments representing the “gay community” as well as teachers unions, priests, sisters, kids, and a group called Physicians for Social Responsibility.⁶⁰

The notes include Mottet’s conversation with their bus driver who told her he had watched from the bus with binoculars and saw people and banners as far as he could see and was surprised that no problems resulted. He thanked her for allowing him the time to go to the Vietnam Wall where he found the names of fourteen men who had been his friends. He told Mottet: “it was an emotional experience for me.”⁶¹

The documents provide insight into Mottet’s identity as a rural woman and activist. Mottet’s response on the way home from the march noted in the pages of the legal pad under the heading “reactions going home” include the note:

people will come by linking up with other people. You don’t just do it by yourself. You give power to other people. We all need to link up with other organizations to work for people. Also people need to learn how to gain information to be able to vote intelligently. There is a scad of information available if people learn how to find it.⁶²

Taking the notes from the bus ride and march shows how Mottet wanted to do more than participate as an activist, she wanted to create a record of the experience. This impulse eventually led to the archival performance of putting the collection together and gifting it to the Carnegie Historical Museum.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

The final pages of the legal pad include Mottet's draft of the story she wrote for her local paper, the *Fairfield Ledger* and the archival collection includes a newspaper clipping of the article published on 19 August 1985. The story contains some of the details Mottet recorded in her legal pad.⁶³ What is missing from the *Fairfield Ledger* article is the emotion with which Mottet recorded her experience in her notes. Some notes from the actual march are almost illegible, as if she was writing so quickly because she needed to keep moving or because she was too excited to steady her hand. Her reactions are also more candid in her legal pad notes, while those shared with readers of the *Fairfield Ledger* are more restrained and composed.⁶⁴ The differences illuminate the analogy presented by Ellen Gruber Garvey that gifting collections to official archives was like publishing to unknown audiences, since the evidence could be used in analyses and interpretations beyond the creator's control.⁶⁵ Mottet may not have intended for there to be much of a difference in the "real time" account in her notepad and the article drafted for printing in the local paper, but the notepad offers insight into the excitement Mottet experienced at the march and anchors the entire Mottet Peace Collection as a record of her the trip.

Having organized and donated her collection to the Carnegie Historical Museum before her death, Mottet made her Peace Collection available as a case study of an institutional collection with a unique relationship between the donor, museum, and researcher.⁶⁶ The collection is one of the few in this study that has been subjected to

⁶³ Teresa Mottet, "Helping tie peace ribbon gives local woman hope," *Fairfield Ledger*, 19 August 1985.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Garvey, 221.

⁶⁶ Mottet Peace Collection.

professional archival methods. It is the only one preserved in an archival box and one of just a few with a signed gift agreement and a finding aid. Prior to the donation, Mottet saw herself as the only person with an interest in the collection's preservation, but because of a personal relationship with the museum curator, she reconsidered the collection's potential as an archive of historical evidence.⁶⁷

This case is an example of the ways institutional archives have shifted their role as “gatekeepers” by strengthening networks with donors and collection owners.⁶⁸ In researching this study, a request to a listserv of local Iowa museum and historical societies yielded a response from Mark Shafer, director of the Carnegie Historical Museum. Shafer shared information about both the Mottet and Kainz collections and arranged an interview with Mottet, his neighbor. The interview provided insight into Mottet's history of performing archivalness. Mottet performed archivalness in other ways, creating another unusual archive on the wall in the living room of her duplex, what she referred to as the “wall of witnesses,” which was filled with dozens of labeled photographs of ancestors, contemporaries, and descendants.⁶⁹ The peace march collection Mottet curated and gave to Fairfield's Carnegie Museum is an important record of the role of civic life in performances of rural womanhood and a democratized understanding of archives reveals that it is not Mottet's only archival collection.

⁶⁷ Teresa Mottet, Interview by author, 16 April 2013, Fairfield, Iowa.

⁶⁸ Hampsten, xi.

⁶⁹ Teresa Mottet, Interview by author.

Owl Country Club Collection

The Owl Country Club Collection is evidence of generations of rural Iowa women collectively performing archivalness. Each year the Owl Country Club's elected secretary/treasurer recorded the experience of the members of their open country community club and preserved club records from year-to-year until they were gifted to the Story City Historical Society.⁷⁰

The Owl Country Club began meeting in 1919 and for eighty years the club provided an open country social network for residents of rural Story County, Iowa. Formally dedicated to the purpose of "gathering knowledge as the wise Owl" and originally limited to twenty-two families, the club's mission was to educate young people and develop agriculture through lectures and demonstrations given during evening club meetings. Maintained by the Story City Historical Society, the clubs record books and meeting notes themselves, are an unusual archive of rural community activity, documenting the importance of neighborhood networks for rural families. Comparison of the membership rolls to census records reveals a membership of property-owning families, with farms in close geographic proximity. The club provided social activities, education, entertainment, and a network of mutual aid and support.⁷¹

In identifying the experience of everyday women, sources like scrapbooks, hand-made cookbooks, or calendars are informative, but the experiences of many twentieth-century rural midwestern women remain untold. Collective records maintained by community organizations are one source for uncovering common experiences of women

⁷⁰ "Owl Country Club Collection," Story City Historical Society, Story City, Iowa.

⁷¹ Ibid.

who did not leave individual records in private or publicly held collections. The meeting minutes and related materials of the Owl Country Club document the group activities of rural people, documenting the role of community networks in twentieth-century rural life, chronicled and preserved collectively by everyday rural Iowa women.

The club records, which include meeting minutes, resolutions, pamphlets, and articles written for the local newspaper, the *Story City Herald*, reveal that women provided all record keeping for the club, performing archivalness in the process. Participation in civic life as a key component of the identity of rural womanhood is evidenced in the officer election records of the Owl Country Club. Female club members were always elected to the combined office of secretary/treasurer while male club members were elected to the remaining offices of president and vice president. Women took attendance, kept meeting minutes, and drafted the resolutions documented in the club record books; they also set and published the club calendar, prepared club correspondence, and submitted articles to the local newspaper. The female secretary/treasurers of Owl Country Club performed archivalness for themselves and their communities. Without the work of these women the record with valuable insight into rural community life that is the Owl Country Club collection, might not have been maintained, preserved, or shared. By saving the club records from generation to generation for the better part of a century, the women of Owl Country Club were answering the “new archival calling” to preserve and maintain their own records, long before it was discussed by Richard J. Cox.⁷²

⁷² Cox, 120.

The first volume of Owl Country Club record books provides an example of the way the unusual archive recovers from anonymity, the experience of some every day rural women. Within the record book of meeting minutes and attendance, the secretary/treasurer documented a club “resolution” in honor of the life of member, Julia Wierson:

Whereas it has pleased God to call from this life, on June 14, 1919 one of our members, Julia Wierson, be it resolved by the Owl Country Club: That we express our sincere appreciation of her sterling character, and her co-operation and assistance in the organization of the Owl Country Club. It is with... regret and sorrow that the club loses (sic) the pleasure and benefit of her association. That we express to the members of the bereaved families our deepest sympathy and pray that our precious heavenly father may comfort their grief-stricken hearts. It is further resolved that these resolutions be made a part of the permanent records of the Owl Country Club; that it be published in the Story City Herald, and that a copy be sent to the bereaved families committee.⁷³

Later notes on the club’s history show that Wierson was the first secretary of the club, followed by Ada Ericson who authored the resolution.⁷⁴ The expression of condolences publicly following Wierson’s death provides insight into the ways rural Iowa people used open country networks to provide mutual aid and support. Cemetery records show that Wierson was only twenty-five years old at her death and left behind a husband, toddler, and infant.⁷⁵ The club record demonstrates not only the sympathy club members had for Wierson’s widower and surviving children, but that they planned to secure resources for the family by reaching out to the larger community. Wierson’s obituary would have expressed similar niceties, without showing how the death of a young wife affected those

⁷³ Ibid, “1919 Book.”

⁷⁴ Ibid, “Owl Country Club Celebrates 50 Years of Organization,” *Story City Herald*, 19 February 1969.

⁷⁵ Ancestry.com. *U.S., Find A Grave Index, 1600s-Current*. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012.

in her open-country network and how rural people enacted rural principals of mutual aid and support.

Other secretary/treasurers elected from 1937 to 1976, whose civic lives were saved from anonymity through their performances of archivalness in collecting and saving club records from year to year include: Hallie Frandson, LaVern Ganber, Hazel Deaton, Alma Sampson, Marie Forth, and Leah Frandson.⁷⁶ Without the club records they maintained, the details of the ways in which these women supported their rural communities in club meetings that provided educational, social, and cultural outlets for rural families would be largely lost. The work of documenting the experience took different forms. Some secretary/treasurers detailed only the meeting dates, times and locations, roll call, and payment of dues, while others meticulously chronicled meeting program materials and correspondence with club and non-club members of their open country community. The 1943 club secretary, Hallie Frandson documented the following meeting program details: a book review given by Mrs. Pierce, three violin selections from Mr. Mill, which were accompanied by member, Barbara Peterson, a quiz on club history prepared by Mrs. George Sowers, and the election of Alice Fae Balders as “Queen of the Club.”⁷⁷ Frandson’s account provides a snapshot of the experience of rural people in their open-country clubs. The self-concepts of young women like Alice Fae Balders were likely enhanced as they were held in esteem by neighbors. With the opportunity to perform before of an audience, talented rural residents like Mill and Peterson received

⁷⁶ Owl Country Club Collection, “Record books: 1927, 1943, 1944, 1945, 1955, 1960, 1965, 1976.”

⁷⁷ Ibid., “1943 Book.”

purpose and recognition for rehearsals used to occupy long winter evenings in their respective farmhouses.

Like many facets of rural life in America, open-country club life was at its height during the middle of the twentieth-century. Owl Country Club by-laws were commercially printed and distributed in 1944 and outlined the club's mission, voting age, requirements for dues, attendance, and hosting meetings, and an amendment limited membership to twenty-two families.⁷⁸ Club membership remained steady with nineteen families in 1955, twenty in 1965, and nineteen in 1975.⁷⁹

The work of the clubwomen in saving and preserving the records fulfilled their desire to legitimize and justify rural life, so much a part of the rural womanhood identity. While most club membership rosters and roll calls list only the male head of household, the notes pertaining to the content of meeting programs and refreshments served, as well as the service of female women elected to the office of secretary/treasurer, document the role of women in supporting and sustaining rural community through social networks like community clubs.

It is through the effort of female club members, that researchers have the opportunity to analyze the role of open-country community clubs like the Owl Country Club in rural life. The women sustained the club with refreshments and programming, documented membership, dues payments, and meeting calendars, but they also performed archivalness in preserving the club records for future members to reference and ultimately gift to the Story City Historical Society. Without their female members, the

⁷⁸ Ibid., "Constitution and By-Laws: The Owl Country Club, Story City, Iowa."

⁷⁹ Ibid., "Record books: 1955, 1965, 1976, Owl Country Club Collection."

record would not have been maintained, and our understanding of mid-twentieth-century rural, open-country social and cultural life in Iowa would be more limited.

In her study of a twentieth-century rural Iowa community, Deborah Fink considered social organizations, particularly women's clubs. She found that the networks were built upon the premise that women utilized strong social relationships to wield power in a societal structure that men controlled formally. Fink noted the value rural women placed on social contact with one another and desire to support and maintain these contacts to circumvent the social isolation of rural life. With less work, "town women" had more time for meetings with longer programs and intricate luncheons, but rural women still made social interaction a priority.⁸⁰ The Owl Country Club records show that they designed their social interactions took place within parameters defined by rural life and men with meetings beginning at 8:30 p.m. to provide time for members to finish evening chores and rules set to limit the refreshments served by host families.⁸¹

By the end of the twentieth-century the features of rural life that compelled the Owl County Community Club, and open-country community clubs like it, had unraveled. Agriculture consolidation and industrialization led to an open country with significantly fewer family farms. Post-World War II economic and social changes to the role of women had expanded opportunities beyond those that served as an extension of a rural womanhood defined by marriage, motherhood, and civic life tied to church, school, or club. In the second half of the century it was increasingly likely that farm family incomes were diversified to comprise off-farm labor, including that of rural women; and also that

⁸⁰ Deborah Fink, *Open Country Iowa: Rural Women, Tradition and Change* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 100.

⁸¹ Owl Country Club Collection, "Constitution and By-Laws: The Owl Country Club, Story City."

the economic role of women as producers on the farm was diminished. Both factors made rural communities less isolated and increasing geographic mobility meant that many young women found themselves distanced from the traditional rural social networks that had supported their mothers and grandmothers.⁸²

After eighty years of meeting, the Owl Country Club disbanded in 1999 and those who remained gathered the decades of performances of archivalness by secretary/treasurers in collections of newspaper clippings, club handouts, meeting minutes and membership rolls. The remaining club members held a second reunion where memories and materials were shared, as they had been at the fiftieth reunion of club members in 1959.⁸³ The archival collection shows that thirty-three members attended the reunion; two of them were former treasurer/secretaries who had maintained the club records and assembled them for donation to the Story City Historical Society. This final gathering was the culmination of eighty years of women investing in documenting and preserving the history of rural life in Iowa. Throughout the decades club secretaries/treasurers made choices about which stories and experiences would be recorded for posterity justifying and legitimizing their experience of the rural way of life.⁸⁴

Revisiting the Stephens Collection

Maxine Beymer Stephens's collection of calendars documenting the social experience of a mid-twentieth-century rural Iowa woman and her family is not in an

⁸² Fink, 2-3.

⁸³ Owl Country Club Collection, "After 80 years, Owl Country Club disbands," *Story City Herald*, 7 April 1999.

⁸⁴ Owl Country Club Collection.

institutional archives, but was discovered in a musty paper sack in a cabinet inherited by my uncle on the site where Stephens, my grandmother, recorded the collection content. While Richard J. Cox contends that this collection should be analyzed, to the surprise of many archivists and researchers he argues that unless it is to remain in a musty paper sack forever, it belongs with me and my family: those who can offer oral histories, add letters as they are discovered, provide photographs and artifacts related to the collection's contents, and perhaps most importantly: maintain an emotional investment in the collection, one that is too often lost during the process of institutional archival accessioning.⁸⁵

In considering Stephens's calendars and the way she herself performed archivalness, focus can be drawn to the events she selected to record on the calendar, their manner of representation, but also the additions and edits made by her family members. Many experiences Stephens documented were fleeting, but through their preservation by family members and subsequent historical interpretation, they constitute a lasting document of the daily life of a farm family. The Stephens collection is more than evidence of mid-twentieth-century change to rural American life however, it is verification that citizen archivists and researchers who utilize privately held collections, imagined and built-up as unusual archives, can support archival theory and practice as well as the methodology and mission of scholarly research.

As demonstrated in chapters two and three, collection creators have individual experiences that must be placed in the social, historical, and cultural contexts of the times in which they lived. Richard J. Cox argues that individuals and families should be

⁸⁵ Cox, 1-2.

empowered as citizen archivists who can build this context in ways that institutions cannot. Developing the expertise of private citizens to save and preserve personal and family collections for future research furthers the archival mission and the interpretation of American history and life.⁸⁶

By Cox's admission, privately held collections can pose problems to traditional methods of scholarly research. Without the authority of traditional archives to stand behind, researchers utilizing privately held collections have an additional burden to defend the legitimacy of their methods and ensure that the evidence is accessible for future research. But to some degree, a similar risk underpins work in traditional archives where scholars operate under the assumption that their research will be safeguarded by established standards that are sometimes, due to limited resources, violated by selectivity or choices to deaccession materials.⁸⁷

The process of researching the Stephens collection demonstrates that citizen archivists, empowered to use established standards and practices for collection and preservation, can support disciplinary standards of research while alleviating the burden placed on institutional archives to save and preserve everything.⁸⁸

The authority families can exercise as they control collections is powerful in its capacity to enhance the evidence with context, biographical detail, and additional knowledge transmissions from the creator. The opportunity to evaluate, re-order, and, in the process, alter the archival collection also exists for individuals and families.

⁸⁶ Cox, vii.

⁸⁷ Cox, 7.

⁸⁸ Richard J. Cox, *Vandals in the Stacks?* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002): 50-72.

The Stephens collection, as compiled by the family over the course of a decade, began with the set of calendars Stephens maintained from 1955-1972. Not all calendars were found with the original collection. Two of Stephens's children had calendars from the years they were born, but upon learning that family materials were being organized and researched, added them to the collection. Upon learning of the creation of this unusual archive of family materials, one of Stephens's daughters added a diary Stephens kept in her adolescence and first year of marriage, and multiple daughters added their copies of the letters Stephens had written to her grown children in the late 1960s and early 1970s. These documents are valuable to historians in the study of societal change and using Cox's *Personal Archives and a New Archival Calling* as a guide, I solicited materials from family members to build the Stephens collection, recording the provenance of the artifacts and notes from the various family members who had been responsible for their safekeeping resulted in detailed collection descriptions and finding aids. The roles of archivist and researcher were merged to "build up" the family archival collection as I conducted oral interviews of Stephens's children and filed copies of photographs among the calendars and letters.⁸⁹ Following in the vein of Cox's argument, and equipped with knowledge of archival practice and methods, I was empowered as a citizen archivist to preserve the unusual archive for both the family and historical record.⁹⁰ Without this effort, documents and artifacts relevant to the collection would have remained displaced, with valuable context being lost to the passage of time and memories.

⁸⁹ Interviews with Stephens family; Maxine Stephens, Calendar Collection: 1955-1976.

⁹⁰ Cox, *Personal Archives*, 1-2.

The resulting collection of materials tells a more complete story of not only family life, but of the social history of rural life. As historian Dorothy Schwieder writes:

in a wider sense...family history is the true stuff of social history. Families help us see and understand the working and the dynamics of the wider society, and they help us to sense what matters most to people; most larger phenomena are refracted through the prism of the family in some manner. Perhaps most important, the perspective of family life allows us to see the past in very human terms, something that is not always possible with more traditional approaches to history.⁹¹

The study of collections like Stephens's goes beyond what they can contribute to existing scholarship or as a defense of the idea that archival missions need to evolve to support individuals and families in the process of documenting, collecting, and preserving societal heritage; the experience sheds light on the relationship between saving and memory, history and emotion; the experience of what Jacques Derrida calls "archive fever."⁹² Stephens's calendar entry from 26 September 1969 describes the day her husband Velmer died, and the arrival of her sister and grown children in the aftermath: "Dad died 4:15 PM Barb's, Dave's, Don's, Jerry's, Sue's, Joan's and Pauline came..." and the calendar entry from the following day noted the arrival of more family and striking-out of an appointment her husband would not keep: "~~Velmer eye doctor 9:30~~ Judy's and Grandpa came Jim came at 12:20 Sunday morn."⁹³ These entries provide less historical information and more of a focus on family connections, but with family connections at the heart of much of social history, they provide more historical insight the addition of greater context. Two more entries that forever interrupt the regular pace of

⁹¹ Dorothy Hubbard Schwieder, *Growing up with the Town: Family and Community on the Great Plains* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002): xi-xii.

⁹² Burton ed., *Archive Stories*, 3, discusses Derrida's reference to archive fever as the driving force behind the search for "origins and genealogies...an inheritance from the ancient world."

⁹³ Maxine Stephens, Calendar Collection: 1955-1976.

Stephens's record-keeping appear in the calendar entry for 25 October 1975; in a script not belonging to Stephens: "Mom died 1:30...Susie, John, Tami, Sheryl, Betty, Dave's, Jim's home" and two and three days later the same handwriting is used to document the following notes: "Everyone here!" on October 27 and the following day: "Mom's funeral 2:00."⁹⁴

Reading these particular entries has little to contribute to scholarship on farmwomen in mid-twentieth-century America. Stephens's entries concerning the number of acres planted, livestock sold or slaughtered, or the purchase and maintenance of farm machinery, reveal more to the end of rural history scholarship. At the same time, reading these funeral entries written by Stephens, on the day of my grandfather's death; or by her youngest daughter, on the day of Stephens's own death, reveals more to me about the endeavor of historical inquiry than any scholarship could. After reading, I lowered my face to the calendar page to breathe in the smell of the document, to somehow get close to a person I never knew but who somehow, in the moments of my reading, my breathing in the dust and must, felt present. Stephens's calendars are saved so that I can know her and may hear her voice from the past; the documents mark her experience, stand witness to her life, and through their preservation reveal something to me about my own identity. This experience defends the entire endeavor of archivists, record keepers, and scholars to save, preserve, organize, and interpret historical evidence and experiences. The act of saving, whether personal or professional, is for future reference, to understand how people live and have lived, and through interpretation and understanding, to know more about the human condition. My experience of using Stephens's collection in research not

⁹⁴ Maxine Stephens, Calendar Collection: 1955-1976.

only contributes to the history of rural Iowa women and the argument that archivists need to support the maintenance of private collections, but also the role of saving and keeping in the study of history. Stephens's collection of calendars is a case study of Cox's new archival calling demonstrating how privately held collections, when developed into "unusual archives" informs the new archival calling and contributes to the historiography of American rural life and women.

Archivists sometimes lose sight of individual fascinations with the document, forgetting the sentimental value that led to their initial safekeeping. Focusing on the appraisal checklists of documenting provenance, valuation, and the legalities of accessioning and assuming rights, sometimes causes them to miss what Cox calls the "romance of the document." Citizen archivists on the other hand, are driven by the romance of the document, but pay less attention to issues of provenance, value, or preservation.⁹⁵ Almost never viewed in terms of monetary value, those interested in their personal and family archives consider other meanings to the term value. As Cox puts it, personal and family papers give us an "intimate means to understand the past, seen through the eyes of distant family members or captured in our own innocent reflections."⁹⁶ One does not need an education in archival theory to ascribe vitality to documents one simply needs to "interview an individual reading the diary of an ancestor...the sense of documents speaking...is well articulated."⁹⁷ There is an opportunity to be seized by archival professionals to link the impulses of private citizens with the missions of archives as preservers of societal heritage.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Cox, *Personal Archives*, 36.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

Cox's call to widen the authority of historical evidence and expand the larger historical narrative depends on recognizing and empowering individuals and families to save and maintain personal and family archives. In charging private individuals or organizations with the task of maintaining their own records and supporting them in meeting standards required for scholarly research, archivists can circumvent the problem of limited resources that leads to selectivity or deaccessioning, which depends, at least somewhat, upon public perception that archives lack relevance or necessity.⁹⁹

Researchers and archivists must always consider why documents and artifacts have been preserved; it is perhaps, as important as the actual evidence contained in the collections themselves. Considering the process of creating, saving, and preserving collections documenting the lives of everyday rural women raises the question of the purpose to saving. Saving as a cultural impulse embedded in social customs or traditions reveals how a society understands itself.¹⁰⁰

Considering the collections of rural women as performances of archivalness as they created their own unusual archives of scrapbooks, personal papers, or meeting minutes, sheds light on archival theory and historical inquiry. As their own archivists, rural women created, maintained, and preserved the history of their families and communities: deciding which events to write down or "clip and save" from the local newspapers. When these collections were no longer controlled by their creators, other individuals and institutions acted to save, interpret, and understand the evidence, sometimes performing archivalness themselves. In acting to save, preserve, and make

⁹⁹ Ibid., Cox writes at length about the opportunity archivists have to increase their relevance to the broader public by teaching "citizen archivists" to value their collections.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 120, 187; Antoinette Burton ed., *Archive Stories*.

sense of collections, individuals, families, and local community members can democratize the archive and widen the range of data for consideration in historical analysis.

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