

Lycoming County Women Maintain the Larder of Democracy during World War II

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Lycoming County Women

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During the World War II years, when food preparation in general was challenging, planning menus for the holidays was an especially formidable task.

The Williamsport housewife had to calculate budget points wisely, using the red stamps in the ration books for meat, cheese, and fats and the blue stamps for processed fruits and vegetables. There was an ever-fluctuating and limited supply of coffee and sugar and butter was scarce. Home canning was encouraged, but home-made wine was banned because the fruit was needed to go into the food supply. Definitely, women were in search of new recipes.

And this is not all that was asked of the homemaker. It would seem that the health of the whole nation and particularly of our fighting men rested on her shoulders. There were widespread diet deficiencies stemming from the Great Depression, and the most common reason for denying men entrance into the military was malnutrition. So women were called upon to start at home to fight the nutrition battle. The question "What can I do to help national defense?" was answered with "Start a nutrition movement."

The women's section of the *Sun-Gazette* often had announcements of nutrition lectures and programs, sponsored by organizations from garden clubs and church groups to the YWCA. Some presenters were local experts drawn from the home economics profession; others were speakers from Washington,

D.C. These presentations were supplemented by announcements by the James V. Brown Library of nutrition books available for check-out. An article in the *Sun-Gazette* on Jan. 21, 1942, describes a talk by Beula Manley, head of the home economics department at Williamsport High School. She called upon women to consider the health of fighting men and others needing energy to fight the war. She reminded them that they were responsible for maintaining the "larder" of democracy. Her words were a call to action: "Buy food wisely, use food wisely, and waste nothing."

Nutrition Classes

The Red Cross conducted nutrition classes in the west lounge of the YWCA. A certificate was awarded to attendees upon completion of the program.

In 1941, the *Sun-Gazette* sponsored a four-day cooking school at the Capitol Theater, bringing in an authority from Washington, D.C. to teach. Women were told that the classes would not be dull — promotional materials said that this was the beginning of a revolution and the lessons would have a party atmosphere with lots of good food.

In 1942, the Woman's Club announced a Friday afternoon class in nutrition for its members. Doris Eames, from the home economics department at Williamsport High School, would be the instructor. Response was great enough that additional courses had to be offered. In 1943, Williamsport Technical Institute offered a wartime cooking class as well.

The Lycoming County Nutrition Council enlisted volunteers from among the area home economics teachers to present lectures and demonstrations through a neighborhood nutrition initiative. Classes were held at Webster School, Penn Vale and the Salvation Army. There were four sessions: meats and

meat substitutes, fruits and vegetables, eggs and milk, and cereals and meal planning. Every class announcement reminded women to bring their own pad and pencil.

Advertising for Nutrition

Local businesses combined their advertisements directed at the housewife with nutritional facts. Brozman's and Stroehe's Bakeries both sponsored radio programs that furnished culinary information and Stroehe's also promoted the fact that its prize-winning bread contained B vitamins and iron for energy.

In 1944, L. L. Stearns and Sons brought in the Westinghouse home economist and reference nutritionist to demonstrate ways of preserving foods. The presentation was held in the housewares department basement area, and the ad for it also promoted the store's sales on pressure cookers, mason jars and caps, Foley food mills and cold pack canners.

Cookbooks for Area Housewives

The Lycoming County Historical Society has a few cookbooks from the era that were presumably used by local residents. Armour and Co. published a collection of 60 recipes thought to be especially useful during this time of rationing when the housewife had to be content with lesser cuts of meat. Bologna cups with hot potato salad, liver sausage loaf or scrambled brains and eggs could be featured on her dinner menu.

The Frigidaire division of General Motors Corp. compiled a cookbook that could be purchased at M. H. Housel & Co., 141-143 W. Fourth St. The introduction claimed that 20,000,000 refrigerators (See LYCOMING, Page C2)

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across the country were contributing to the war effort by storing food safely and making it last longer. Leftovers, which needed to be saved, could then be utilized in creative and appetizing recipes. When in doubt, the housewife was instructed to keep food in the refrigerator.

In 1942, the South Williamsport nutrition class compiled a recipe booklet with a cover designed by Helene Snell. The recipes included cornflake custard by Mrs. Lawrence Schopf (cornflakes were often advertised as having exceptional nutritional value), one-and-one sherbet by Mrs. R. P. Rhodes, and cole slaw by Mrs. William Helminiack. There was a section for meat substitute dishes such as rice ring and cheese rice souffle.

Christmas Dinner

Getting back to holiday cooking we turn once more to the local newspaper. Articles recommended that the homemaker not be ashamed of serving a casserole, or possibly "dressing up" a chicken, or even serving chicken pot pie. Spaghetti and meatballs and crusty breads would be filling, as would a stew. The housewife could use honey instead of butter on the bread, or she could splurge on pineapple and then use the juice to sweeten other recipes. Creamed cauliflower would be a possible vegetable dish. Suggested ways to finish off the meal included individual refrigerated cakes (made with the frequently used ingredient sweetened condensed milk) and the ever-popular fruit sherbet that substituted for ice cream.

Fighting men had to be properly fed, and this required that homemakers make sacrifices in their kitchens

while still managing to maintain good nutrition. Homemakers often did not receive enough credit for the role they

played in the war effort right in their own homes.