

FOLK COOKING CLASS

by Marjorie Sackett

Because I feel that Kansas has a rich cultural heritage of which I am proud and because I also feel that we have not fully utilized our cultural resources, I requested to teach a class in Folk Recipes during our college Intersession which met for the first two weeks in January, 1972.



From the first folk-art poster announcing the class much interest was roused among the natives who wondered what Mrs. Sackett could possibly teach about their cooking, the regular-age students who found it unique, and the community residents, some of whom wondered about the staff—especially one anthropologist who was listed as a guest lecturer and consultant on food, for those who knew him felt he knew little about cookery.

It was an interdepartmental class—two middle-aged English teachers, one young instructor in the Home Economics Department, and our young man instructor in the Anthropology Department. The heterogeneous make-up of the instructors was an important factor in developing an interesting and varied group of students, for each teacher attracted a different type of student—regular-age students, girls, both long and short-haired boys, and community women, young and old.

We had to focus our study on two ethnic groups in our immediate area because of the short period of time we had for the class to meet and because of the possibility of bad weather limiting our collecting of recipes. The two groups we studied were the Catholic German-Russians who had settled in Ellis County and the Czechoslovakians who had settled in the Ellsworth County area.

First, we studied books on traditional recipes of ethnic groups to see what types of material were included in the general area of folk cooking. I had asked our anthropologist who is a young, vital researcher, if he would lecture on how eating habits reflect family patterns; for example the German-Russians serve a marble soup which is many dumplings rolled into small balls and added to a beef or chicken broth. I felt that had the German-Russians not been patrilocal and not had the extended family units with many older women to do the work the food could not have been so popular. He, after researching, felt that he

could not speak on this theory because very little had been written on the subject and he did not have time to do enough original research; however, he felt that it was an excellent area for study both by anthropologists and folklorists. Thus, instead he spoke on and interpreted the history of particular peoples, mainly the German-Russians, and gave illustrations of the importance of foods in customs of ethnic groups.

Then the class moved to studying our two units. We had general lectures on the historical and cultural backgrounds of the people, family patterns, music, arts and crafts, and finally foods. Both groups have records of their native music played by local musicians—polkas and *hochzeits*. We had arranged for an elderly German-Russian to play on the hammered dulcimer, which he had built, but he suffered a stroke the day before, so we had to listen to tapes instead. We had hand crafts illustrated by the German-Russian ash trays and book ends made from buffalo horns, and highly decorative eggs and glass-blown objects from the Czechoslovakian group. We had an interesting slide show illustrating folk art in the German-Russian crosses in the cemeteries near the churches in the small villages in Ellis County. We were especially fortunate in having a guest lecturer from Wilson, Kansas, who gave a program with a slide show illustrating the history and the beauty of Czechoslovakia. She brought with her a friend who was dressed in the native costume.

The students chose their area of study, sent folk-art invitations to guests for their meal, collected authentic recipes from area residents, decorated the dining rooms with appropriate designs, made favors for guests, bought food, cooked it, dressed in costumes for their meal, served the meal, and presented a program. Each guest was given a favor.

The German-Russians gave guests a sack of noodles made from authentic recipes and the Czech group gave decorative recipe holders. The German-Russians served a harvest meal—of course, dumplings, plain or stuffed with mashed potatoes or cottage cheese, sauerkraut, *bierocks*, sausage fried in water, bread, green beans fried with bacon and onions, and heart cookies and many more delicious foods.

The Czech group served food representing different festivities in their culture—roast duck and roast pork, sauerkraut, dill gravy, Christmas fish gravy, beer rye bread, *kolaches*, cottage cheese pie, lamb cake, and poppy-seed cake.

Of course we had some mishaps before we got through—one of the students had accidentally turned off the gas under his stuffed dumplings and we wondered why they were not cooking, especially after our

fifty guests started arriving, but he looked at me and grinned and said, "It's no sweat, Mrs. Sackett, we'll get it done," and we did! Another experience I have never had before was to have class hand-outs stolen! Word of our recipe books had spread and several were taken. I should have realized their value because I had had some calls requesting the privilege of buying them which we, of course, refused to do. Fortunately we still had the carbons so we could make enough for the class and guests.

I enjoyed looking over the classroom when we were eating our meal, seeing long-haired college boys working side by side with little grey-haired ladies and getting along fine. Our guests at the dinner were also heterogeneous in make-up coming from all economic and social levels—the Dean of the College sat next to a local cleaning woman.

Thus, I feel that the class was successful in presenting a segment of our cultural heritage in Kansas.



(Courtesy of American Angus Association and Kansas State Board of Agriculture.)

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

JANE MOBLEY holds a PhD in English from the University of Kansas where she taught folklore as an assistant instructor. She is currently an assistant professor in English at SUNY-Binghamton.

ELIZABETH BUTLER SCALET received her BA and MA degrees in English at the University of Kansas. She is currently on leave of absence from her academic studies in order to free her to pursue a career as a musician/singer/songwriter. She and her husband Joseph make their home in Lawrence, Kansas.

LILA WISTRAND ROBINSON spent eight years doing year-round fieldwork with the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Mexico and Peru. Fieldwork with the Cashibo was accomplished between the years 1958-65. She completed the Doctor of Philosophy degree at the University of Texas at Austin 1969 in an interdisciplinary program of linguistics and folklore. She taught linguistics and anthropology at Kansas State University for three years, then moved to Topeka where she has been in an adjunct relationship with the Linguistics Department of the University of Kansas. She has published some fifteen articles and books in areas of folklore, linguistics, and anthropology chiefly on North and South American Indians, with others forthcoming.

JAMES F. HOY, Assistant Professor of English, is a member of the Committee for Great Plains Studies at Emporia Kansas State College. He first became acquainted with *The Cattleman* on the Cassoday, Kansas, ranch where he was raised. He has published in a variety of scholarly journals, and is co-editor of *The Language Experience*.

LARRY DANIELSON was born in Lindsborg, Kansas, in 1940. He took a BA in English at Bethany College in Lindsborg in 1962 and taught in Salina for three years. In 1972 he received a PhD in Folklore and American civilization from Indiana University. He currently teaches folklore and film at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He has published articles in *The Kansas Magazine*, *Folklore Forum*, *Indiana Folklore*, and the *Swedish Pioneer Historical Quarterly*.

GLADYS (CHEGWIDDEN) CRAWFORD, a native Kansan, has spent most of her life in Russell County. Before her marriage she taught in the rural schools of Barton County and in Luray High School. After rearing her two children, she resumed her teaching in Russell High School. She renewed her lifelong interest in folklore after a course taught by Dr. Sam Sackett of Fort Hays. When mini-courses were introduced into the English department at Russell High School, she taught folklore there. She does private collecting of folklore even though she is no longer teaching.

SAMUEL J. SACKETT is a past president of the Kansas Folklore Society and, with William E. Koch, co-editor of its collection of *Kansas Folklore* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961). His doctorate is from U.C.L.A., and his most recent publication is a critical study of *E.W. Howe*, Kansas novelist, in the *Twayne United States Authors Series*. He teaches at Fort Hays Kansas State College.

MARJORIE SACKETT, assistant professor of English at Fort Hays Kansas State College, holds an MA from the University of Missouri at Columbia. She is a former secretary of the Kansas Folklore Society and will be president in 1975-76. She has taught a class in Folk Recipes and has published articles and read papers at meetings of the American Folklore Society.