

Prairie Cooks: Glorified Rice, Three-Day Buns, and Other Reminiscences, by Carrie Young with Felicia Young. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993. x, 134 pp. Illustrations, index. \$15.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY CAROL HASVOLD, VESTERHEIM NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN MUSEUM

A cookbook and a family history, *Prairie Cooks* is special because of the strong and adventurous woman at its center. Carrine Gafkjen was an immigrant from Norway at the age of 3, settling on a Minnesota farm with her family in 1882. At the age of 15 she hired out to a well-to-do Minneapolis family, where she learned American cookery.

Not content with tame domesticity, in 1905 Carrine independently homesteaded 160 acres in western North Dakota. Renting the land on shares to a neighbor, she made extra money during eight summers by cooking for threshing crews as they followed the harvest across the Dakota plains. In a mobile cook car, Carrine made five meals per day for fifteen men. She produced twelve loaves of bread at a time, dozens of doughnuts each day, and pies from fruits in season, in addition to a sturdy meat-and-potato diet for the threshers. *Fattigman bakkels* reflected her Norwegian heritage, and elegant pies her years in an urban society.

The book begins with vivid descriptions of the frontier and immigrant culture and the place of food in it, as recalled by Carrine Gafkjen's daughter Carrie. Reflecting pioneer times, the recipes generally require only the most ordinary ingredients, reminding one of the multitude of foods based on flour, sugar, and dairy products in varying proportions. The story continues with the evolution of prairie society and its foods, some of which were excellent and much loved, such as raised doughnuts and hand-cranked ice cream, and some of which were more controversial, such as the dreaded and ubiquitous "glorified rice."

The author includes clearly written directions for ethnic food classics, in quantities appropriate for modern families. Typical of Norwegian cuisine, recipes for meat and vegetable dishes are few and simple, while those for desserts and pastries are abundant. The recipes seem reliable, and remind one that cooking "from scratch" gives a uniquely satisfying product.

Stories of *julebukking* and the burning of an outhouse reflect a lively atmosphere and good humor, making this book a pleasure to read. With the passing of the immigrant generation, recollections in any form from those who knew "the old folks" are now precious resources.

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