

# Northeast Historical Archaeology

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Volume 42 *Foodways on the Menu: Understanding the  
Lives of Households and Communities through the  
Interpretation of Meals and Food-Related Practices*

Article 9

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2013

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### Recommended Citation

Metheny, Karen Bescherer (2013) "Modeling Communities through Food: Connecting the Daily Meal to the Construction of Place and Identity," *Northeast Historical Archaeology*: Vol. 42 42, Article 9.  
<https://doi.org/10.22191/neha/vol42/iss1/9> Available at: <http://orb.binghamton.edu/neha/vol42/iss1/9>

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# Modeling Communities Through Food: Connecting the Daily Meal to the Construction of Place and Identity

Karen Bescherer Metheny

*Foodways are an aspect of community building that find expression in the physical and cultural landscape. Using family reconstitution, food maps, and other archaeological and anthropological approaches to study foodways and commensality in the mining town of Helvetia, Pennsylvania (ca. 1891–1947), I lay out a program to reconstruct the spatial relationships associated with food procurement, preparation, and consumption in historic-period communities. Particular emphasis is placed on food sharing and shared food activities in the context of the daily meal. These reconstructed relationships or food connections reflect the varied networks and boundaries within the community, based on ethnicity, gender, age, sex, and other variables. Using a range of visualization techniques, this food-centered approach provides insight into household structure and aspects of community formation, as well as the construction of identity and place.*

*L'alimentation est un aspect du développement d'une communauté qui s'exprime dans le paysage physique et culturel. À l'aide d'approches archéologiques et anthropologiques telles la reconstitution familiale, les cartes géographiques sur le thème de l'alimentation et la commensalité dans la petite ville minière de Helvetia dans l'état de la Pennsylvanie (ca. 1891-1947), je développe un programme permettant la reconstruction des relations spatiales associées à l'obtention, la préparation et la consommation des aliments dans des communautés de la période historique. Ces relations alimentaires -ou connexions alimentaires- reconstruites sont le reflet de réseaux et de limites variés au sein d'une communauté selon des variables telles, entre autres, l'ethnicité, le genre, l'âge et le sexe. Grâce à un éventail de techniques de visualisation, cette approche centrée sur les aliments nous donne un aperçu de la structure d'une maisonnée, de certains aspects du développement d'une communauté ainsi que de la création de l'identité et de l'espace.*

## Introduction

Daily forms of food sharing or commensality—the social act of eating together—create and affirm the social and economic bonds between individuals and groups that are central to the formation and maintenance of communities. Because such acts are bound up in social relations and cultural practice, a close examination of food sharing reveals information about economic or social status, gender, age, and ethnicity, as well as the existence of competition, conflict, or alliances that were forged, maintained, or challenged through the sharing of food (e.g., Hayden 2001; Dietler 2007; Turkon 2007; Klarich 2010).

The act of commensality derives its significance not only from the food itself, a powerful medium for communication and symbolism, but also through the enactment of social and economic relations (Douglas 1972). Food sharing, a cooperative social behavior (Isaac 1978; Jones 2007), is recognized as an important component of networks that are central to reciprocity, whether for the purpose of resource exchange or redistribution, the formation and maintenance of kin groups

and political alliances, or the creation and fulfillment of social and economic obligations (e.g., Mauss 1967; Stack 1974; Appadurai 1981; Dietler and Hayden 2001; Battle-Baptiste 2007; Weichart 2007). Food sharing is also performance—an enactment and reproduction of social relations among individuals, family members, kinsmen, and other groups. It is a significant social action that has implications for gendered behavior, kin networks and alliances, social and economic status within households and communities, and the exercise of political power. This is especially evident in the context of feasting, but the connections made through daily commensality or shared food activities also contribute to the creation and maintenance of networks, boundaries, and alliances within a community.

In historical archaeology, there are several works that examine the meal within the larger context of feasting, formalized dining, and ceremony (e.g., Wall 1994; Goodwin 1999; Beaudry 2010; Symonds 2010) but studies of daily forms of commensality, particularly those of an informal nature, and the significance of such acts are rarer (cf. Ferguson 1992: 96–97; Lucas

1994; Yentsch 1994; Battle-Baptiste 2007; Beaudry 2010: 65–68; Dawdy 2010: 394–395). In this article, the more mundane contexts of daily food consumption are the focus of inquiry, as are the related activities of production and procurement, processing, and service. Using data culled from a larger study of the coal company town of Helvetia, Pennsylvania (Metheny 2002, 2007, 2010), I argue that a closer examination of the daily meal can provide key insights into the construction and maintenance of familial and communal networks, as well as individual and group identities within historic-period communities.

This process begins by asking how the physical traces of food relate to a meal and what relationships, networks, or alliances were made, represented, or reinforced through food procurement and food sharing. What were the origins of the ingredients—staples, condiments, beverages—that were consumed at the meal? Were foods obtained through exchange or purchase, and, if so, from what sources? Were the ingredients grown by those who consumed them, or were they procured from a food vendor, a food kitchen, a market, or other commercial source? Was the meal prepared using food donated by an institution (state, religious, workers' union, or other), or were the ingredients borrowed from family or friends, or exchanged through informal, personal networks within the community? Given the range of food sources and the spectrum of relationships involved, was a hierarchical ranking of these procurement subsystems evident (what degree of confidence was placed in these relationships?), and how did that ranking affect food choices and economic strategies? Finally, what can be learned about the composition of the group that broke bread together? Was the meal in question an individual's lunch, a snack, a family dinner, or evidence of communal dining? In short, what *connections* did individuals, families, and households make in procuring ingredients for the kitchen, in preparing food, or in consuming the meal?

This review of food practices in Helvetia serves two purposes. First, I suggest that a reexamination and reconsideration of the material culture of dining and the physical evidence of food is desirable. If the context and content (the social act) of the daily meal are to be recovered, and the significance of actions surrounding its preparation and

consumption understood, our analytical and interpretive focus must be expanded. This process requires the alteration of the lens through which the artifact is viewed and, as the above paragraph suggests, the reframing of the questions asked. Second, I offer an approach utilizing the mapping or graphic representation of food sharing and cooperative tasks associated with meal production—defined here as the steps involved in assembling ingredients and preparing a meal, from food procurement or food production (in this case, production through agriculture, gardening, or husbandry) to processing and preparation.

Visualization techniques, such as food mapping (Marte 2007), provide a useful tool for linking the physical remains of the meal and the spaces in which food was grown, bartered for, purchased, cooked, and consumed with the individuals, families, and communities who shared the meal or who interacted with one another during its procurement or preparation. Food maps are an example of participatory or cognitive mapping, a tool that increasingly is used by anthropologists to diagram cognitive landscapes that reflect, for example, boundaries, ownership, identity, and place—ideas that vary by gender, race, ethnicity, economic or social status, age, and other categories; it is a collaborative process in which informants, previously subjects, become active participants (e.g., Sletto 2009). Cognitive maps reveal information about social networks, alliances, and boundaries that are integral to individual identity, household structure, and community formation. Through the lens of foodways practices, this approach allows the delineation and interpretation of the role of formal and informal food sharing, food exchange, and cooperative food-related tasks within household, workplace, and community

### Family, Community, and Identity in the Corporate Landscape

The company town of Helvetia was located in Brady Township, Clearfield County, Pennsylvania, at the site of the newly opened Helvetia Mine (FIGS. 1, 2). The town was built to house miners and laborers, managers, and the families of these men. Construction of the town began in ca. 1891 at the behest of the mine owner, Adrian Iselin. The Rochester and Pittsburgh Coal Company (R&P) purchased

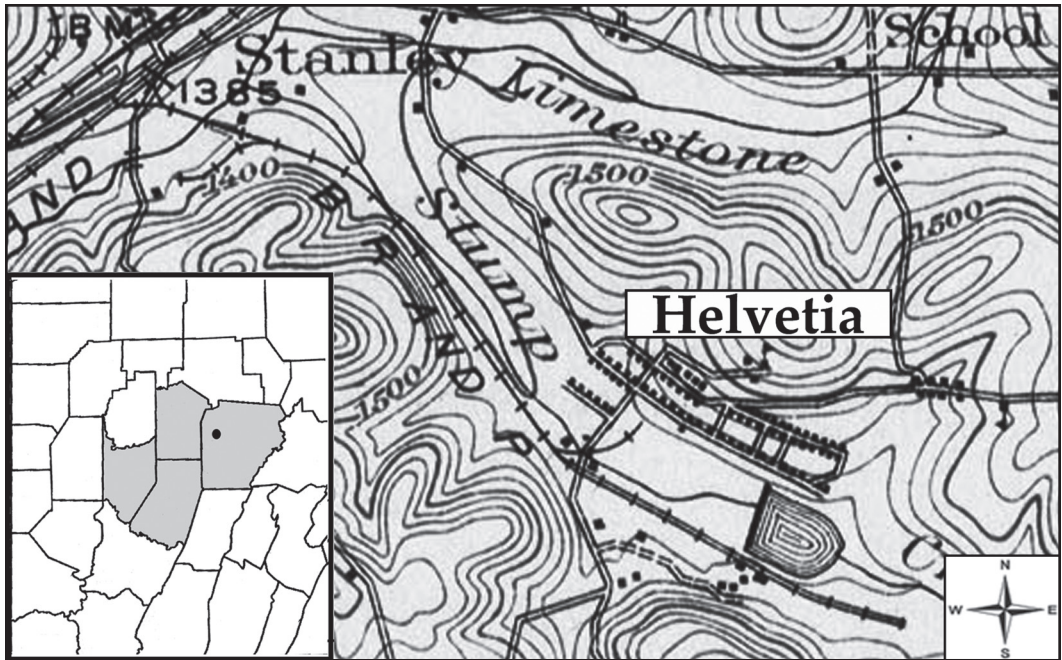


Figure 1. Location of Helvetia in Brady Township, Clearfield County, Pennsylvania (United States Geological Survey [USGS] 1924).

the mine and the town from Iselin in 1896 and continued to operate the town until 1947, when it was sold to a salvage company; the mine was closed in 1954.<sup>1</sup>

Helvetia was home to an ethnically diverse community, with 600–800 residents during the peak years of the mine's operation (U.S. Census Bureau [USCB] 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940). Company documents suggest a deliberate effort by Iselin and the R&P to create, maintain, and highlight the differences between the mine's largely Western European, Protestant, English-speaking managers and a predominantly Eastern European, Roman Catholic workforce (e.g., Robinson 1902a, 1902b, 1902c, 1902d; see also Cooper 1982; Metheny 2007: 79–86). The R&P actively recruited non-English-speaking Eastern Europeans in the late 19th to early 20th centuries to reduce labor costs and to prevent

unionization. Census records confirm that these hiring preferences were operationalized and that the bulk of Helvetia's immigrant laborers came from the empires of Austria-Hungary and Russia (USBC 1900, 1910, 1920). Many individuals and families self-identified as Poles, Slovaks, Slovenes, Lithuanians, Galicians, and Magyar. Differences in culture, language, and religion set them apart from Helvetia's managers and miners of Western European origin.

The company's hiring policies and internal hierarchy were embodied in and reinforced through the architecture and physical layout of the town (FIG. 3). Single houses for management were built in the downtown, or western end of Helvetia, nearest to the company store and the entrance to the mine. Company housing in the downtown was primarily assigned to families of English, Welsh, or Scottish extraction. The Protestant church, Bethel Union, also was located at this end of the town. Occupants of the doublehouses in the eastern half, or uptown, were predominantly Eastern Europeans, and the Catholic church, St. Anthony's, was located beyond Helvetia's eastern boundary. To some extent, the company's hiring policies and housing assignments succeeded in

1 Originally organized as the Rochester and Pittsburgh Coal and Iron Company in 1881, the company was reincorporated in 1927 as the Rochester and Pittsburgh Coal Company (Cooper 1982: 10, 90). In this study I have used the latter designation or, simply, the R&P. For a general history of the Rochester and Pittsburgh Coal Company, see Cooper (1982). The extensive correspondence, ledgers, and files of both Adrian Iselin and the R&P may be viewed in the Special Collections and Archives, Stapleton Library, Indiana University of Pennsylvania. For a discussion of the establishment of Helvetia Mine, its acquisition and operation by the R&P, and its closure, see Metheny (2007).





Figure 2. Helvetia in the 1920s. The western or downtown section of the company town is visible to the *left two-thirds* of the photograph. Bethel Union Church and the baseball field appear at the western edge of town. A portion of the eastern half of the town is seen to the *far right*. (Photo courtesy of Thomas Crop.)

emphasizing differences of language, ethnicity, religion, and economic status. This is indicated by oral informants who described a division within the community—a cultural and economic separation that led them to think of spaces within the town in terms of “uptown” and “downtown.” Ethnicity and religion were seen as strong markers of identity within the town; for many years it was generally accepted that “you stayed on your side, and they stayed on their side” (T. Crop 1994; see also Brown 1991, 1994, and W. and S. Crop 1995; for a discussion, see Metheny 2007: 100-102, 139-143).<sup>2</sup>

Though Helvetia was a community with distinct social, cultural, and economic divisions, residents formed alliances and support networks across these divides based on mutual interests. Food sharing and cooperative tasks associated with meal production would have been important responses to a new industrial regimen and the controlling practices of corporate paternalism (Metheny 2007: 139-142, 174-176; see also Bodnar 1977, 1985; Miller and Sharpless 1985). The webs created by food sharing linked residents across a range of intersecting identities, networks, and social, cultural, and economic boundaries. Commensal dining and food-related activities would have been especially important within the household as the locus of resource sharing so central to individual and family wellbeing in this industrial community (Metheny 2010). It is critical, then, that the evidence for food practices in Helvetia is examined—its materiality, as well as the relationships enacted and reinforced through procurement, preparation, and consumption—for what it reveals about household stability, community networks, and identity formation.

2 For transcriptions of oral history interviews, see Metheny 2002.

### Connecting Food-Related Artifacts with Household, Workplace, and Community

To show how food connections may be embedded within the physical remains of historic-period communities like Helvetia, I highlight the example of the coal miner’s dinner pail (FIG. 4). It is a truism to say that behind every miner stood a woman who baked the bread that he carried in his pail as he entered the mine each day. The importance of women to the stability of the miner’s household is well documented (e.g., Giesen 1995; Metheny 2007, 2010). But artifacts associated with mining are often interpreted first as the material signature of a culture of resistance to mine owners, programs of corporate paternalism, and the institutionalized practice of working-class exploitation (e.g., Saitta, Walker, and Reckner 2005; for discussion, see Paynter and McGuire 1991; Hardesty 1998; Shackel 2003). The miner’s dinner pail is such an object. James Pope describes the symbolic content of the pail in the context of the 1933 coal strike in western Pennsylvania:

Women set themselves a specific task on the picket line. When nonstrikers approached, the women would converge on them and seize their dinner pails. Sometimes the pails would be emptied and returned. Testifying in open court, Mrs. Anna Moshak explained that the women went to the line “because they had work to do,” and that “me and other women were there to pull buckets.” Bucket pulling had a double significance. First, it dramatized the strikers’ feeling that nonstrikers were taking the food from their families’ mouths. Second, the women were neatly neutralizing the shopping and food preparation of their “scab” counterparts. (Pope 2003: 238)

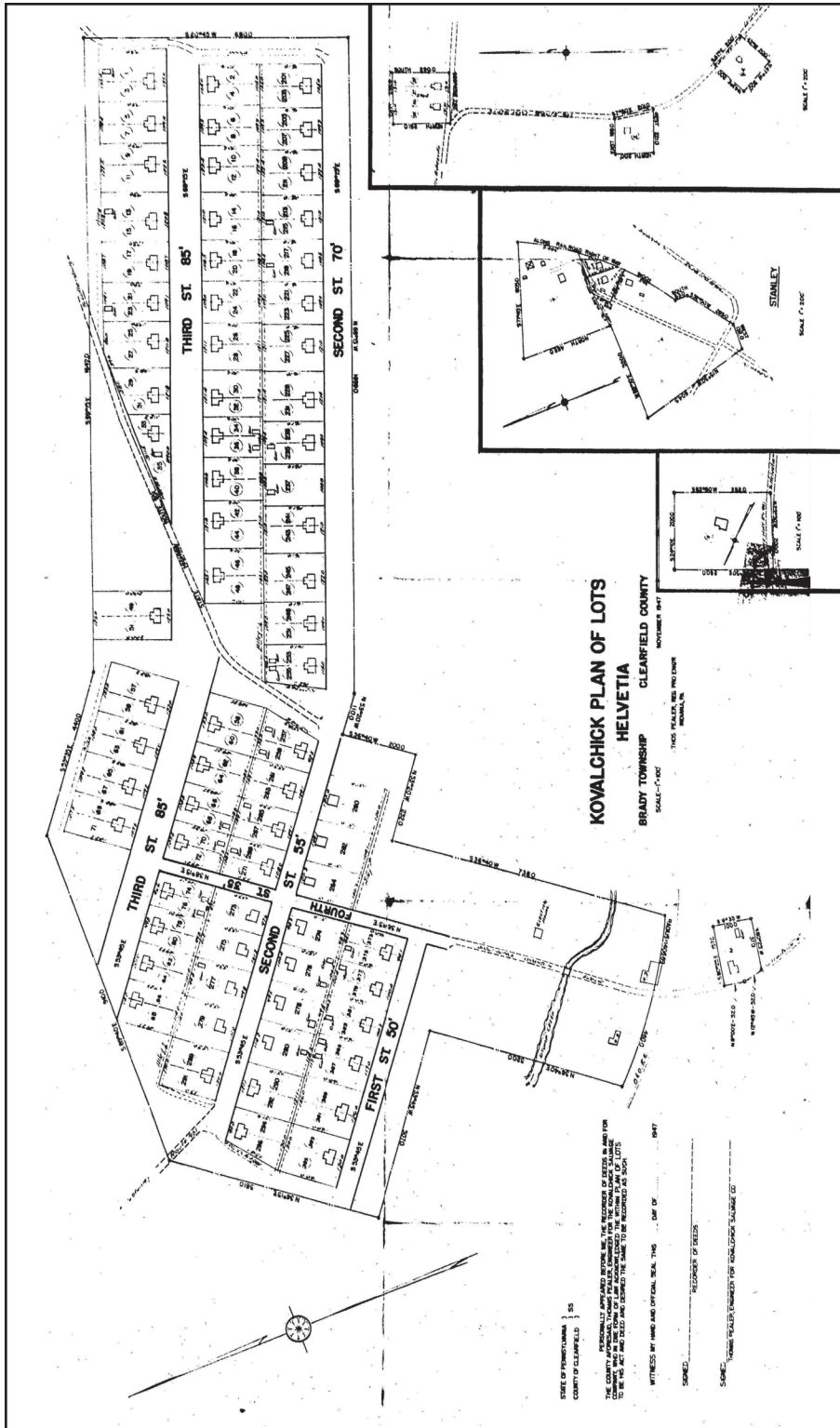


Figure 3. A plan of Helvetia, drawn for the sale of the company town to the Kovalchick Salvage Company in 1947, shows the physical layout of buildings and streets. The western half of town is to the *left* and the eastern half to the *right* (R&PCC 1947). (Photo courtesy of the Special Collections and University Archives, Indiana University of Pennsylvania.)

As described, bucket pulling was a dramatic act of resistance against mine owners as well as strikebreakers. But when archaeologists focus on the dinner pail as an item of resistance, they are negating its most important and basic function as a container for a daily meal—one that provided essential nutrition and energy for the miner. In prioritizing one archaeological expression over another—a symbol of power or an indicator of daily survival—an important aspect of this artifact's story is overlooked. A photograph of miners sharing a meal at the face, where the work of mining took place (FIG. 5), is a reminder of this function. It is essential, then, to ask questions that investigate this meal context. Where did the bread come from? Where did the miner's wife procure the ingredients used to make the bread? Did she share the labor with others, and, if so, how was that labor divided among members of the household? Did she purchase the flour to bake the bread, and, if so, what social and economic links did she make in procuring it? Did she use the kitchen in her own home or bake the bread in a communal oven? Finally, whom did she feed with the loaves she made each week? the miner? her children? members of the extended family? household boarders? and if the latter, were these immigrants from the same community in Europe in which she herself was born?

Tobacco and other substances with psychoactive properties (e.g., alcohol, caffeine, drugs) are, like food, embodied material culture (i.e.

Dietler 2006, 2010; Douglas 1972; cf. Jankowiak and Bradburd 1996 who categorize sugar, tea, alcohol, and tobacco as drug foods). Following this broad definition of food, I offer a second example of an artifact with embedded social and food-related subtext, the clay tobacco pipe. This common artifact also has garnered attention from archaeologists as a symbol of resistance. One oral narrative from Helvetia includes an account of how the miners used common clay pipes to create a gas jet that could be lighted and used to warm coffee in the mine (Brown 1991). Smoking behaviors of the working classes were also a direct challenge to middle-class values concerning gender and class (Beaudry, Cook, and Mrozowski 1991; Cook 1997; Dixon 2006). Yet the smoking of tobacco is also a social act; thus, the tobacco pipe is also representative of socialization among the miners. When their shifts were over, many of Helvetia's miners sat on the porches of the company houses to share a pipe with their fellow workers. This social act is reflected in the recovery of numerous tobacco-pipe fragments in association with the porches in front of No. 294/296, a company-built doublehouse that was investigated in 1995 (Metheny 2007: 169–174) (FIG. 6).

A brown stoneware pipe-bowl fragment from Helvetia serves to illustrate the overlapping and complex values of an artifact that would have been used on a daily basis until it finally broke. The bowl of this pipe was embossed



Figure 4. The miner's dinner pail. Undated photograph (R&PCC 1900–1981c). (Photo courtesy of the Special Collections and University Archives, Indiana University of Pennsylvania.)





Figure 5. Miners eating lunch at Lehigh Navigation Coal Co., Coaldale, Pennsylvania. Undated photograph (Pennsylvania State Archives, n.d.). (Photo courtesy of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Pennsylvania State Archives.)

with an open, extended hand (FIG. 7), an advertisement for Helping Hand brand tobacco (Murphy and Reich 1974: 57–58; Murphy 1980: 27–28, 31). Where did the miner purchase the pipe and tobacco? Having a Helping Hand advertisement literally in his hand, did he buy Helping Hand tobacco? Should not the context in which the tobacco pipe was used also be investigated? With whom did the miner share a pipe and where? What type of social exchange occurred?

It is likely that the individual bought the tobacco pipe (and presumably some tobacco) at Helvetia's company store. Because of the town's isolation, until the 1920s–1930s when the automobile became more affordable, most of Helvetia's families were dependent upon the company store for meats, a variety of staple foods, and dry goods (T. Crop 1994; Gray 1995; see also Fello 1969; Cooper 1982; Metheny 2007: 65–67, 135–137). The company store served an important economic function as a source of food and material goods, while simultaneously acting as an arm of the corporate structure of the mine. It is clear from oral narratives,

photographic evidence, and documentary sources, however, that the company store served an overlapping function as a meeting place. Residents stopped there daily to pass the time with friends, to talk about the day's events, and to gossip and exchange the news (Brown 1991, 1994; T. Crop 1994; McKee 1994; W. Crop and S. Crop 1995; Gray 1995; Metheny 2007: 140–142, 227). Did the pipe smoker pull out his pipe on the front steps of the company store to do the same? When he did so, with whom did he associate?

### Visualizing Foodways and Food Connections

The use of food mapping, as conceptualized by anthropologist Lidia Marte (2007), may help archaeologists visualize the networks of associations created in connection with food procurement and food sharing. In "Foodmaps: Tracing Boundaries of "Home" through Food Relations," Marte examined the spatial/temporal aspects of food relations from the perspective of her informant-participants,



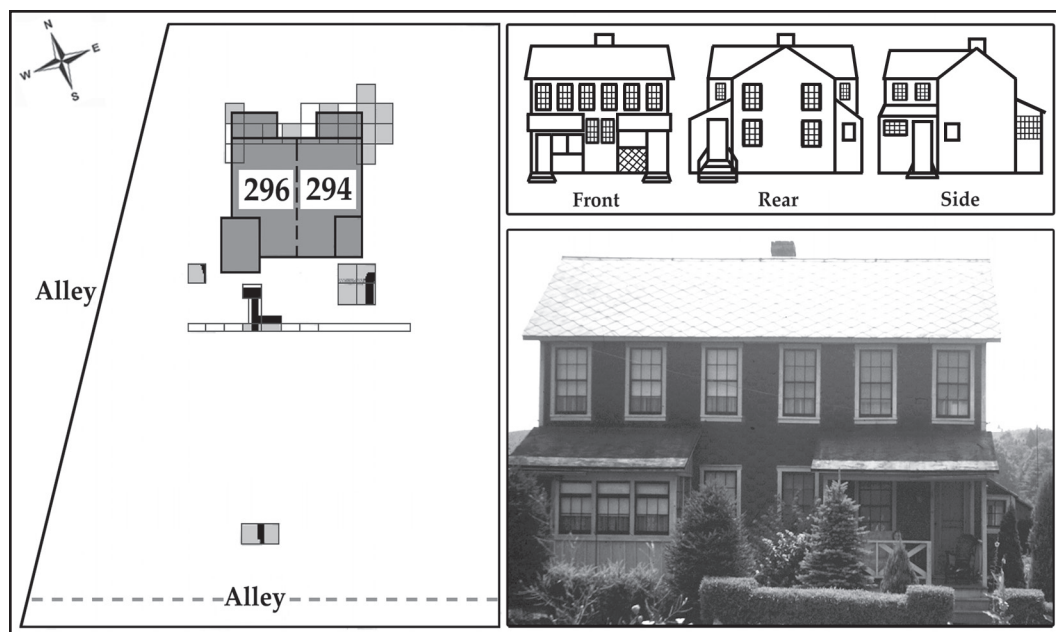


Figure 6. The miners' doublehouse. *Left*: plan of No. 294/296 showing excavation units from 1995 and a conjectural footprint of the doublehouse based on archaeological evidence, photographs, and oral sources. Excavated walkways are shown in black. Tobacco-pipe fragments were found in association with the front porches and with outbuildings in the backlot (units in light gray). *Top right*: Front, rear, and side elevations of the doublehouse. The rear and side elevations are conjectural; *Bottom right*: Undated photograph of the front of No. 294 (*left*) and 296 (*right*) (R&PCC 1900–1981a). (Figure by author, 2014.)

members of a Dominican community in New York City, through the creation of “foodmaps”—graphic representations of “food–place connections.” Marte’s interest in the creation and maintenance of place-memory led her to look closely at “the unnoticed threads that food relations create” (Marte 2007: 261) and to chart graphically the food connections that her study group made each day over the period of a year. These encompassed all food sources, including stores, markets, gardens, and sources from outside the city, most notably the Dominican Republic and Mexico; informants also recorded all locations where food was prepared, consumed, or shared. Participant-drawn maps of food connections ranged from very specific renderings of city blocks and kitchen spaces to more abstract conceptualizations of home and community.

Marte found that the associations and networks built through food procurement and food sharing were instrumental in the construction of community and the creation of identity and place-memory by these immigrants.

Food-related activities brought together people with common interests and cultural ties, helping to counter feelings of alienation, anomie, disconnectedness, and loss. Food and food connections also provided a medium through which members of this immigrant community could negotiate identity and place in a new country.

Graphic representations, such as those drawn by Marte’s informant-participants, make visible the process of networking, community building, and the construction of a sense of place. These maps also demonstrate that the creation of place may involve the incorporation of geographically disparate locations and people who live apart, and that food connections can be essential to this process (see also Codesal 2010). Marte notes that food maps are “maps of relations” or “perceptual models of how people experience the boundaries of local home through food connections” (Marte 2007: 262–263); they help scholars conceptualize and visualize the ways in which social and economic relationships function



Figure 7. Fragment of a stoneware pipe bowl with the letters 'PING' and an open, extended hand. This fragment comes from a commercially produced tobacco pipe that was manufactured with an advertisement for Helping Hand brand tobacco. (Photo by Michael Hamilton, 2002.)

within a community, as well as the ways in which people perceive and construct identity and place (see also Beaudry and Parno 2013 for non-spatial approaches to movement and mobility in archaeology).

While participatory food-mapping techniques will have limited application to the study of historic-period communities, the concept of tracing food connections is valid nonetheless. Used as a multiscalar tool, food mapping has the potential to reveal relationships between individuals, households, and communities. This technique may therefore help archaeologists to identify and interpret the range of social and economic interactions occurring through food sharing, and their role in the creation and maintenance of familial and communal structures. Further, by working outward from the material evidence of the site, this approach

allows archaeologists to remain connected to the physical evidence of daily life.

A partial reconstruction of food relations is possible using archaeological, oral, material, and textual evidence to reexamine the spaces of food production and consumption, as well as artifacts and the physical remnants of the meal. In the past, historical archaeologists have successfully used material culture from a variety of archaeological contexts, such as embossed or labeled bottles, canning jars, tin cans, and makers' marks, to suggest connections over a range of distances (local, regional, national, global) (Adams 1991; Stewart-Abernathy 1992; Adams, Bowers, and Mills 2001; Johnson 2010; Poulsen 2011). The physical remains of the meal may provide some general evidence of these linkages as well. Cut marks can be used to link faunal remains to a professional butcher working at the company store, for example, or to domestic processing activities (Landon 1996; Stoyka 2009). Increasingly specialized techniques greatly enhance the information we are able to extract from the archaeological evidence, allowing us to detect plant micro-remains, organic residues such as fats and oils, and starches that adhere to a variety of cooking surfaces; to source foods and cooking vessels; and even to discern cooking methods and the spread of food technologies (Evershed 2008; Henry, Hudson, and Piperno 2009; Graff and Rodríguez-Alegría 2012; Twiss 2012; Simms, Berna, and Bey 2013). The application of these analyses in historical archaeology, though as yet limited, may enable us to make additional food connections, whether they be broad trade networks, market access, site-specific provisioning patterns, or variations in the diet of humans by geographic location and demographic classification (Monette et al. 2007; Müldner and Richards 2007; Guiry, Noël, and Tourigny 2012; Guiry et al. 2012; France, Owsley, and Hayek 2014).

Historical archaeologists can also trace food connections using written records specific to the community (Purser 1991, 1992a). Documents suited to this type of inquiry include census records, maps and atlases, business directories, store accounts and ledgers, society sections in local newspapers, advertisements, and other forms of print media (Purser 1991, 1992a; Mullins 2008; Johnson 2010; Poulsen 2011; Pipes and Janowitz, this volume). Certain commercial

products as well as wrapping and packaging material (e.g., Jones 1993) sourced from area or regional distributors will reflect transactions that would have taken place outside of the home or may have involved some form of delivery or exchange (cf. Johnson 2010; Poulsen 2011). Other documents, such as newspapers and community cookbooks, may provide evidence for food-related associations in descriptions of community or household events, and the variables (e.g., kinship, race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status) that shaped those contexts (Bower 1997; Carroll 2010; Metheny 2013; Metheny and Yentsch 2014; MacDonald and Needs-Howarth, this volume; Pipes and Janowitz, this volume; Yentsch, this volume). Oral testimony, whether collected through directed interviews or from previously gathered narratives, will provide another important line of evidence (Purser 1992b; Metheny 2007: 249–257).

Since a goal of this research is to find the links between these actions and the formation or strengthening of identity and community, a more challenging task is to graphically depict these movements in a way that usefully demonstrates the associations that were created through food. It will not always be possible to tie food referents to specific locations on a map; flexibility is needed to move between spatially distinct locations and more representational forms of mapping.

The maps that follow demonstrate the potential for visualization techniques from a food-centered approach. The evidence of foodways practices among Helvetia's mining families makes it possible to begin to graph or map the face-to-face connections and contacts made between individuals—the miner or miner's wife and the company-store clerk, for example—and households in the procurement of ingredients and the preparation of daily meals. This analytical step can potentially unveil a range of relationships. A map of a garden might depict its physical layout, but might also be drawn to reflect gender roles associated with the garden's planting and care, for example, or, in a comparative sequence, ethnic choices in relation to plant selection and preparation. Food maps also have the potential to chart the movement within household spaces—from kitchen and pantry to dining room, parlor, or porch—but also between

house and backlot, and within different areas of the backlot. Such movement would reflect gender roles and the division of labor within households. Finally, maps of meals (literally, food on the plate) drawn by informants might reveal geographic and ethnic associations with each food type, recipe, set of ingredients, method of preparation, or form of consumption. In Marte's (2007: 270–276) study, participant-drawn maps of the staple dish *la bandera*, or rice and beans, revealed variations in ingredients, preparation methods, serving style, and pairing with other dishes based on regional or national identities, but also showed individualized touches, or what Abarca (2004) calls "chiste."

The food maps offered on the following pages use a range of scales and visualization techniques to show the process of identity and group formation, networking, and community building that occurred through food connections. As will be seen, depending on the scope and detail of the study, food maps of multiple scales are necessary to graph the movement of individuals and groups across the landscape. The first map in this series illustrates a landscape described by oral informants—what Rappaport (1968) labeled a cognized environment or landscape—showing perceived boundaries within the community based on ethnicity, language, and religion (FIG. 8). These boundaries are important for understanding the movement depicted in the maps that follow, and Figure 8 should serve as a point of reference when considering the relationships enacted and reproduced through commensality and shared food tasks.

## Mapping Food in the Miner's Household

### Subsistence Practices in Helvetia

The miner's wage often was insufficient to feed, clothe, and house family members. Some basic ingredients that were critical to food preparation and preservation—salt, sugar, spices, flour, perhaps vinegar or yeast—were purchased from the company store, along with canned goods and meats in limited quantities. Families relied heavily upon the food that they could grow and store, however. Archaeological evidence, oral narratives, written sources, and photographs provide some indication of what foods were grown and raised behind the



miners' doublehouse (T. Crop 1994; W. Crop and S. Crop 1995; Gray 1995; Lafko 2010; for a discussion, see Metheny 2007: 94–100, 128–136, 201–202) (FIG. 9). The backlot was a potential source for a variety of plant foods: pulses (peas, beans); vegetables (cabbage, kohlrabi, rhubarb); roots (onions, beets, carrots, turnips); gourds (pattypan or cymling squash); tubers (potatoes); herbs; fruits (apples, plums, elderberries, strawberries, tomatoes); and corn. Adjacent fields might also be the source for blackberries and other wild fruits. Many residents raised animals, including chickens, cows, pigs, and geese. The backlot of the miners' doublehouse, then, was a potential source of animal protein, milk, and eggs, as well as garden produce. Hunting and trapping occasionally supplemented these resources, but such activities were limited by the schedule at the mine, as well as the season. Residents hunted on company lands, and many also claimed the right to use company land for other subsistence-related activities, such as planting, cutting hay, harvesting wood, and pasturage.

Figure 10 illustrates the range of activities associated with food procurement, including subsistence gardening, animal husbandry,

store purchases, and hunting and trapping. Information about these household activities has been culled from multiple sources, providing a general picture of subsistence practices, most particularly with respect to the garden, food preservation (canning and pickling), and storage (T. Crop 1994; W. Crop and S. Crop 1995; Marlin Deitch 1995, pers. comm; Gray 1995); see Metheny 2007: 128–133, 135–137, 216–220). There is some documentation as well for the division of labor among members of the household based on gender and age for tasks associated with food production, such as plowing, sowing, watering, weeding, and pest removal, as well as food preservation.

Not all tasks occurred within the space of the backlot or the kitchen, however. Figure 10 depicts the need for and frequency of movement within and across the town landscape, from house lot to agricultural plot, from household to company store, and from town to areas outside the community. Coal used to heat the kitchen stove was frequently scavenged from the railroad or near the tipple, for example (Gray 1995). Slag and ash found in the garden matrix behind the doublehouse indicate that residents of No. 294/296 amended the soil, a fact confirmed by former residents who stated

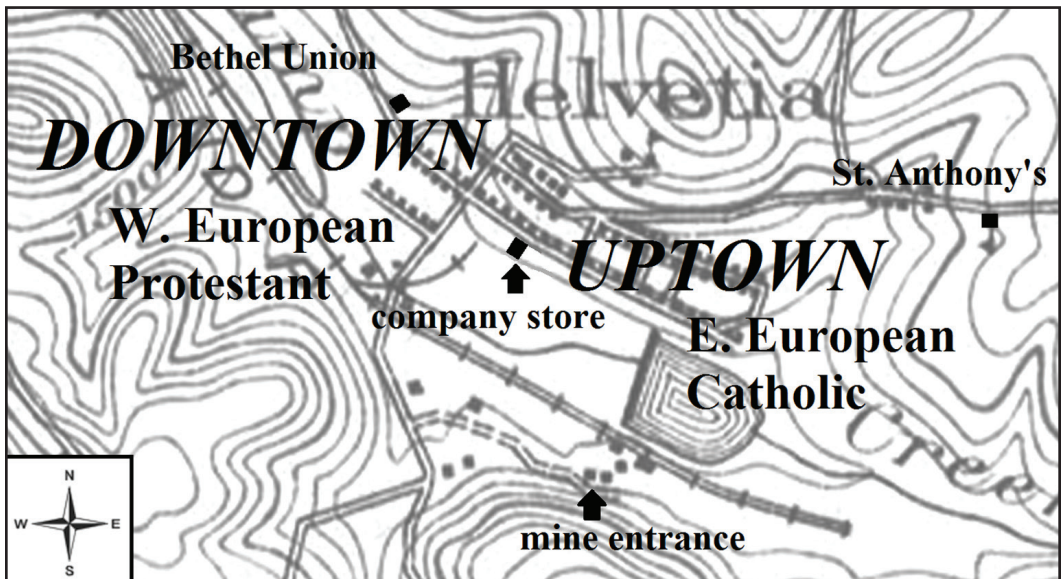


Figure 8. Cognized boundaries in Helvetia based on differences in ethnicity, language, and religion (base map USGS [1924]). According to oral informants, these differences divided the community into an “uptown” with predominantly Eastern European, Catholic households, and a “downtown,” where the mine’s largely Western European, Protestant, English-speaking managers and mineworkers lived. (Figure by author, 2014.)



that coal waste was carried home from the power plant for this purpose (Marlin Deitch 1995, pers. comm.; Gray 1995; Metheny 2007: 216–218). Other families procured cow or horse manure, from the company farm or from area farms, to enrich the soil (Gray 1995). Residents moved across the town landscape to tend to livestock. In the town's early days, animals were allowed to roam freely, but were retrieved at day's end; beginning in the 1930s, residents were required to pasture animals on designated company land and bring them home at night (T. Crop 1994; W. Crop and S. Crop 1995; Gray 1995).

Purchases at the company store also took residents outside of the home (or at least put them in contact with a representative from the store who came to take orders or deliver goods), as did trips to J. M. Leis's grocery, located just east of the company town. It is not clear how often residents from Helvetia's western end made purchases there, not only because of the distance to the grocery and

economic pressures to use the company store, but also because of the boundaries to be crossed in passing from the Protestant downtown into the predominantly Catholic, Eastern European uptown (FIG. 8). Leis's store was, nonetheless, a recognized landmark. In later years, some residents also traveled to stores in outlying communities (Metheny 2007: 66, 129). The importance of such resources must be stressed. In coal-mining communities like Helvetia, fluctuating demand for coal (the result of intense competition, overproduction, fluctuating markets, and unstable prices; see Dix 1988; America's Industrial Heritage Project 1992; DiCiccio 1996) and labor costs associated with unionization (or efforts to avoid unionization) led to frequent slowdowns and stoppages at mines across the country, leaving mining families economically vulnerable. The R&P closed several of its mines, including Helvetia, in 1924 and announced that it would also close the company stores in those communities for a two-year period, thereby removing a critical source of credit, but



Figure 9. Undated photograph from the R&P's annual gardening competition. The gardens behind No. 294/296 are located on the far side of the tree in the center of the photograph. The potato field planted by William Crop is visible just beyond the garden and outbuildings (R&PCC 1900–1981b). (Photo courtesy of the Special Collections and University Archives, Indiana University of Pennsylvania.)

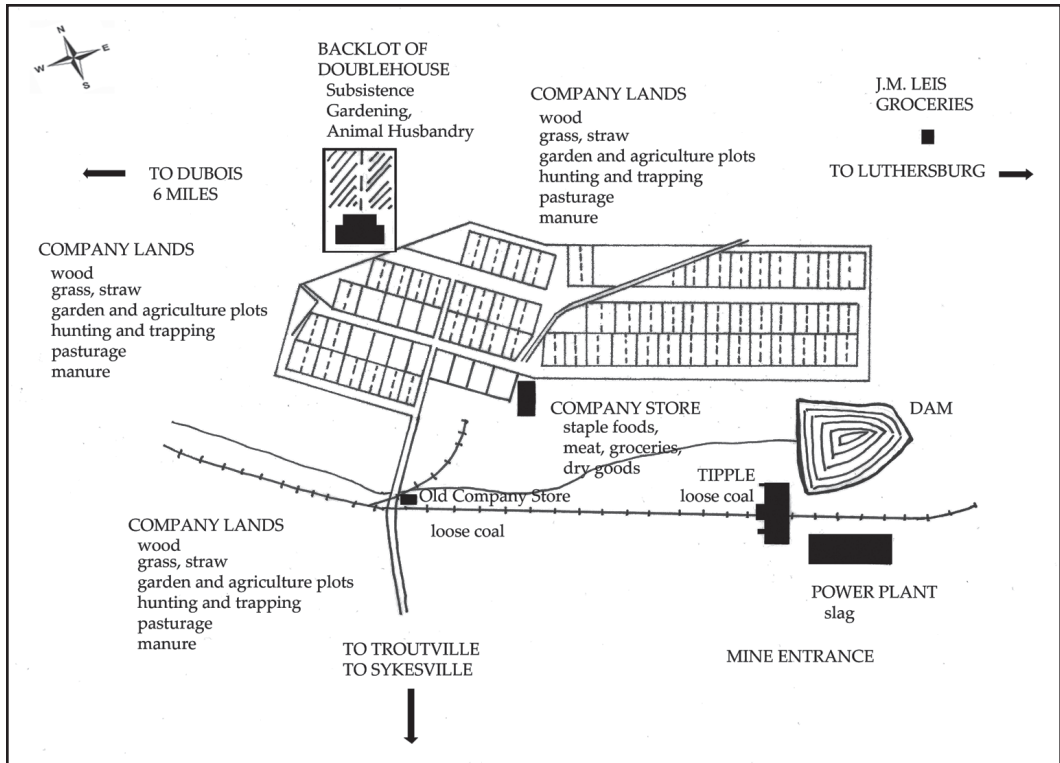


Figure 10. Subsistence activities and food procurement sources for Helvetia's mining families. (Figure by author, 2014.)

also leaving residents to find alternative food sources (*National Labor Tribune* 1924). In such circumstances, residents would have turned to stores in adjacent communities to supplement the food that they grew or raised.

#### Shared Food Tasks and Procurement Sources for the William Crop Household, No. 296

The William Crop family resided in No. 296, the western half of the doublehouse (FIG. 6), from 1928 to 1951 (USBC 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940; T. Crop 1994; W. Crop and S. Crop 1995). The doublehouse, the westernmost company structure on the main road, was just over half a mile (3,500 ft. or 1.07 km) from the mine entrance (FIGS. 1, 3, 8). Figure 11 depicts the core food-production areas and procurement sources of the household, including the company store, located roughly  $\frac{1}{4}$  mi. (1,100 ft. or 0.34 km) to the east. The garden, which was the primary source of food for the household, was approximately 100 ft. (30.48 m) in length, by 30–60 ft. (9.14–18.29 m) in width, following the irregular shape of the backlot (FIG. 11). The family

grew cabbages, carrots, beets, rhubarb, peppers, cucumbers, and dill for pickling. Oral histories indicate that tomatoes were a significant food source, and that Grace Crop put up nearly 100 quarts of canned tomatoes each year, as well as tomato juice and ketchup. Canned produce would be stored in the cellar; likewise, vegetables and root crops would be stored there in a barrel or in a box of dried earth.

Oral testimony from William Sr.'s sons and neighbors, and photographs taken by the R&P during its annual garden competition (FIG. 9), also show that William Crop plowed and planted a field across the alley from the doublehouse (R&PCC 1900–1981b; T. Crop 1994; W. Crop and S. Crop 1995; Gray 1995) (FIG. 11). William Sr. planted a bushel of potatoes in this field, with a yearly return of some 17 bushels. The potatoes were subsequently stored in the cellar for his family and served as a steady source of nutrition during the winter months or, critically, during mine stoppages and slowdowns, when the miners' earnings fell and their buying power was reduced. Other families plowed and

planted additional parcels of company land with the encouragement of the superintendent (Gray 1995). The Grays and the Crops also bartered for or exchanged labor with extended family members, co-workers, and area farmers to clear and plow these additional parcels. This form of exchange is reflected in the map.

Figure 11 also uses an alternate visualization technique to represent the range of procurement sources available to the Crops so that sources lacking spatial references are incorporated. Oral narratives show that residents had access to mail-order catalogs, for instance, although the extent to which they used these resources

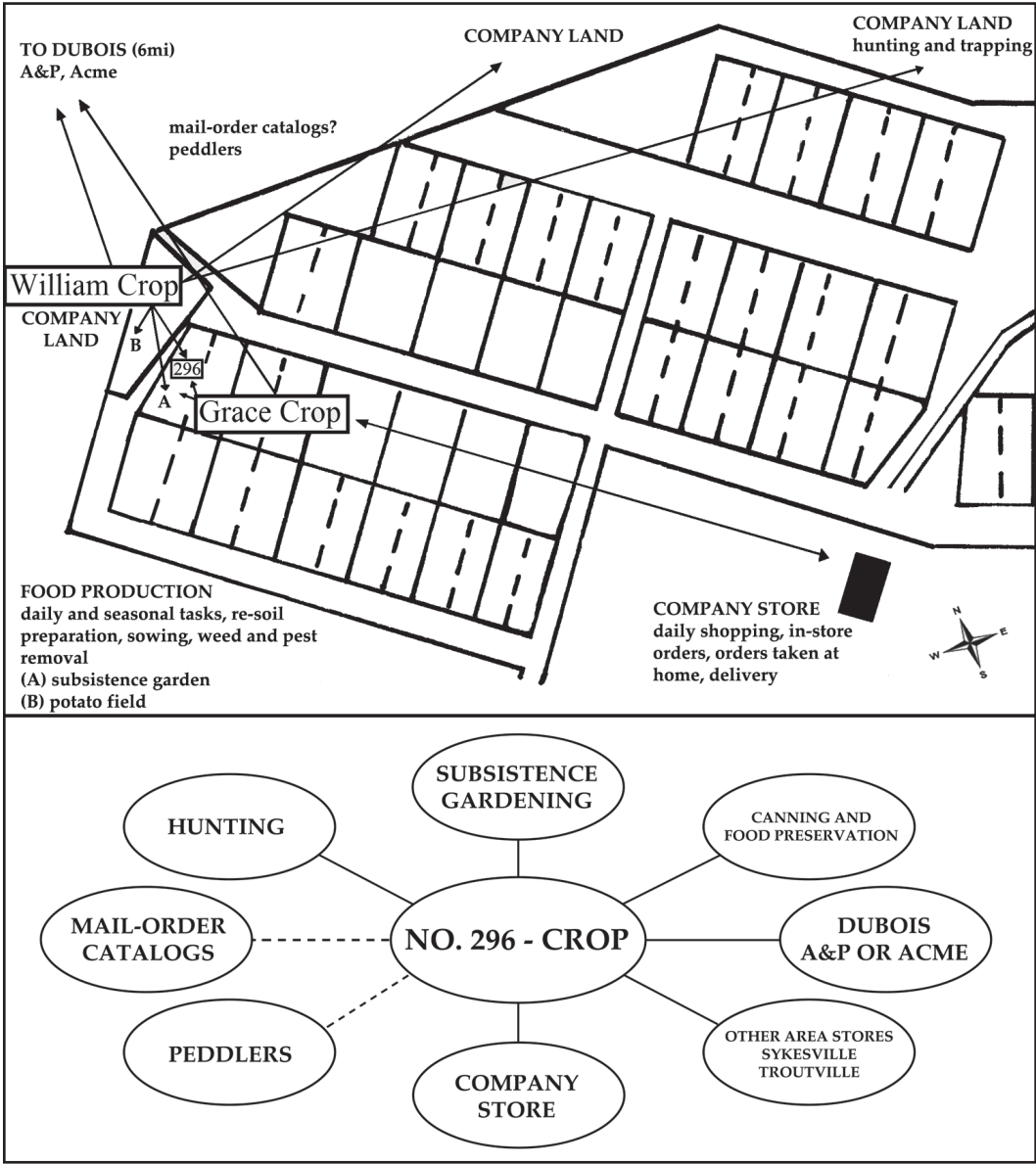


Figure 11. Food production and procurement for No. 296 (1928–1951). The map shows the activities of the Crop household as they moved through and across the town landscape. The chart offers an alternate visualization of food production and procurement to include sources that lack specific spatial references. Dotted lines indicate sources that were available, but their use has not been confirmed. (Figure by author, 2014.)

is unknown. Catalogs could be used to purchase basic foodstuffs (coffee, tea, cocoa, baking ingredients such as flour, salt, sugar, extracts, and spices, for example, but also canned vegetables, jellies and jams, condiments and pickled foods, preserved meats and fish) and, certainly, to purchase tablewares and flatware, kitchen utensils, and cooking vessels. Oral narratives from other mining communities suggest the presence of a variety of peddlers and hucksters (Hovanec 2001), and there is limited evidence for this form of economic exchange in Helvetia as well.

Hunting and trapping, although a documented food source for the occupants of No. 296, are also graphed in general terms because there are no specific spatial references with which to work. But, as shown in Figure 12, an alternate form of visualization could be used to graph the social relationships among family members, friends, or co-workers expressed or enacted through hunting or any other food procurement tasks. This figure shows the range of affective or economic ties created or maintained through such tasks, as well as tasks assigned by age or gender. This particular visualization is derived from the oral testimony of Thomas Crop. As a boy, he helped to put food on the table by hunting and trapping with his father or his friends; he indicated that

his mother helped him skin the animals, which were primarily smaller species like woodchuck and rabbit. As a young man, however, he preferred deer hunting, his hunting companions varied, and it is likely that he skinned the animals himself (T. Crop 1994).

To capture more distant procurement sources used by the Crops, another map is needed with different scales and visualization techniques (FIG. 13). Helvetia's proximity to area towns and the city of DuBois, only 6 mi. away, meant that with improvements to transportation—a link to the trolley system after 1900, and the increased availability and affordability of cars in the 1920s and 1930s—many of Helvetia's families, including the Crops, began to shop in other communities (Metheny 2007: 46, 62, 129). As noted previously, mining families often turned to these alternative sources out of necessity. In addition to depicting the locations of and distance to adjacent communities, this type of map could be refined further by adding the locations of specific businesses patronized by community residents (Poulsen 2011: 59–66). Business directories, published annually in many communities, and local advertisements will suggest availability (Mullins 2008; Praetzelis and Praetzelis 2009; Johnson 2010; for a study of butcher-shop density, see Stoyka 2009: 163–165).

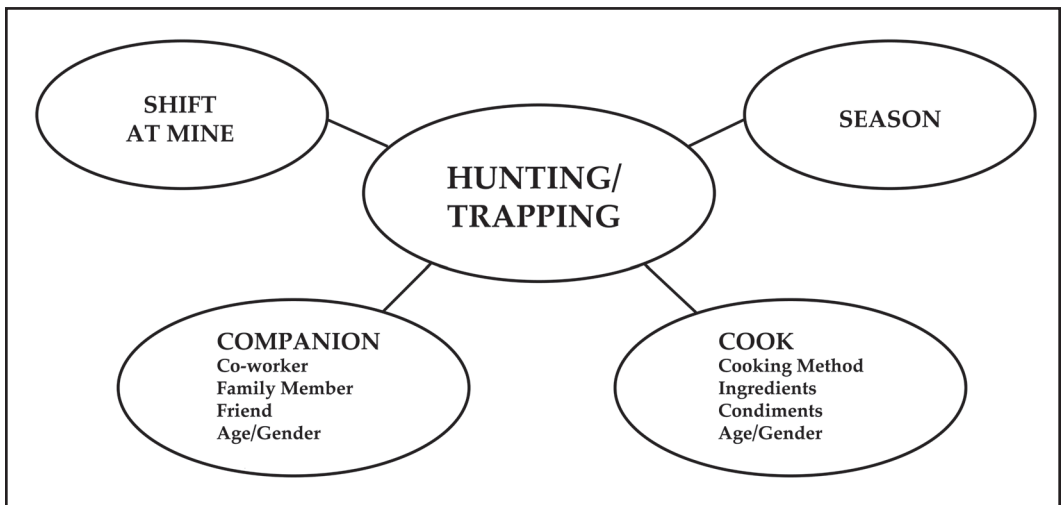


Figure 12. An alternate form of visualization may be used to graph the social relationships expressed or enacted through hunting (seen here) or other food procurement tasks, the affective or economic ties created or maintained through such tasks, as well as tasks assigned by age or gender that were associated with both procurement and preparation. (Figure by author, 2014.)



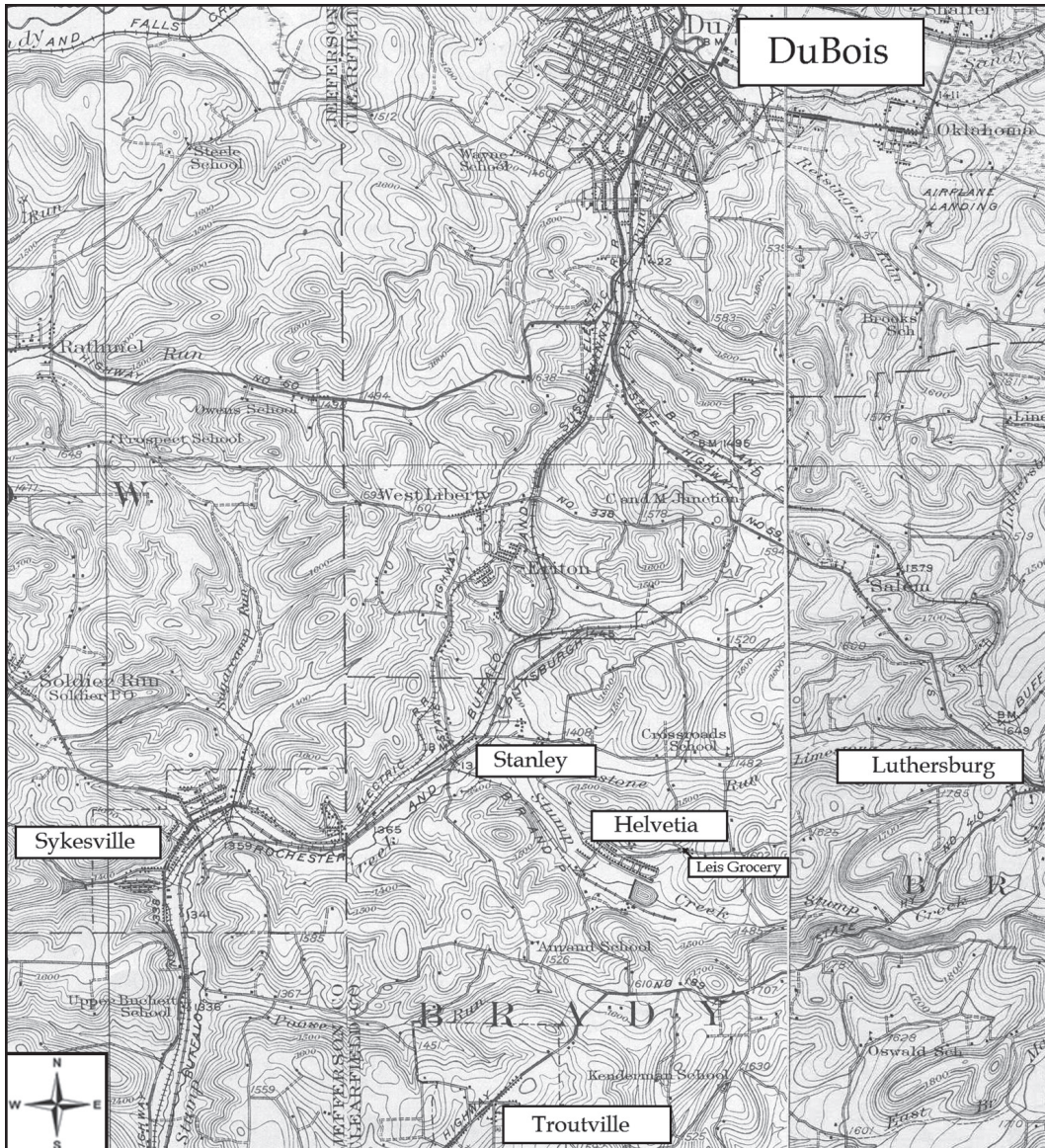


Figure 13. Topographic map showing Helvetia and surrounding communities (USGS 1924, 1932). Though heavily reliant upon the company store for goods and credit, Helvetia's mining families also could purchase supplies from Leis Grocery (a half mile or 0.8 km from the center of Helvetia) and from stores located in area communities like Troutville (2 mi., 3.22 km); Luthersburg (3 mi., 4.83 km.); Sykesville (3.3 mi., 5.31 km); and the city of DuBois (6 mi., 9.66 km). These communities could be reached on foot or, beginning in the 1920s, by automobile. A trolley ("Electric RR") also connected Stanley to both Sykesville and DuBois ca. 1906. (Figure by author, 2014.)

Food containers and food-related artifacts found in the archaeological record will be a more reliable indicator of such connections (Stewart-Abernathy 1992; Johnson 2010; Poulsen 2011). The sourcing of pharmaceuticals and patent medicines, as well as wine and liquor

bottles, has been shown to be an effective method of tracking the movement of consumers across cityscapes (for an example using GIS, see Poulsen 2011; cf. Bonasera and Raymer 2001) and could be used to study smaller communities such as Helvetia (Purser 1992a).

### Labor Pooling and Resource Sharing: Cooperative Food Production and Shared Meals in the Household

A study of food procurement begins to establish spatial relationships in the community, but the purpose of this inquiry is not to demonstrate the exercise of consumer choice or the manufacturing origin of bought goods, but, rather, to identify the associations made between individuals and groups within the community through the shared tasks of food procurement and preparation, and food sharing in the context of the meal. Though food connections and networks may extend outward geographically, choices about food procurement and consumption are most often made within the context of the household, making reconstruction of household membership and activity essential.

In Helvetia, much attention has been directed toward the household as the primary institution through which the family's entry into and continued presence in the industrial workplace was negotiated (Metheny 2007, 2010). Chain migration was a significant factor in the formation of immigrant communities in the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries (Bodnar 1977, 1985); those with contacts in Helvetia turned to their kinsmen and fellow countrymen in searching for work, housing, and community. Much of the process of assimilation was rooted in the household, with older members helping newer arrivals to begin the process of adjustment. This assistance included apprenticeships in the miner's trade and help in learning a new language. The household was also the locus for income generation, economic exchange, resource pooling, and shared labor. Through a range of economic and social strategies, including the varied and frequently multigenerational composition of its members and flexibility in the organization of its functions, households were able to mediate between the industrial, corporate regimen and traditional lifeways, and to mitigate harsh living and working conditions in this community.

Family reconstitution, using census data, tax records, and other archival material, shows that Helvetia's households varied from simple to complex forms that incorporated extended family members, boarders, and sometimes multiple wage earners (Metheny 2007: 94–100, 104–108, 126–128; for definitions of families,

households, and domestic groups from different disciplinary perspectives, see, for example, Laslett 1972; Hareven 1974, 1978; Goody 1978; Yanagisako 1979; Carter 1984; for archaeological studies of the household, or applications of family reconstitution, see also Yentsch 1975, 1988; Kramer 1982; Wilk and Rathje 1982; Beaudry 1984, 1999; Lawrence 1999; Groover 2001, 2004; Wilkie 2003; Rotman 2005). Flexibility in household structure allowed members to maximize income, pool resources, and share in household labor, much of which was directed toward the procurement and production of food. Reconstitution provides information regarding the composition and structure of the household (e.g., age, sex, and ethnicity of members, familial relationships, economic relationships), as well as the potential for labor sharing and resource pooling within and among households.

The reconstitution of the Haddow family (FIGS. 14*a*, *b*), residents of No. 294 from ca. 1921 to 1939, reveals kinship ties with other households in Helvetia that are suggestive of resource pooling and shared labor over several decades and multiple generations (Hamilton 1971; Betty Haddow Hamilton 1995, pers. comm.; Metheny 2007: 126–128). Despite oral accounts recalling a division among Helvetia's residents based on ethnicity and religion, Figures 14*a* & 14*b* show a family network that crossed both geographic and ethnic barriers within the community. Sources indicate that this was not a unique occurrence, despite the perception among informants that intermarriage was rare before the 1940s (T. Crop 1994; McKee 1994; W. Crop and S. Crop 1995; Gray 1995; see Metheny 2007: 100–102, 139–142). The reconstitution chart reveals the potential intersection of food tasks and meals among related households. The significance of these intersecting networks lies in the construction of a stronger safety net and the increased ability to overcome hardships, such as language barriers and economic and social discrimination, associated with working and living conditions in a company town.

The community of Helvetia was characterized by the presence of numerous households that combined food tasks and consumption. In cases where extended families occupied both halves of a doublehouse, they often cut a door through the partition wall to simplify meal sharing and domestic chores (T. Crop 1994; Gray 1995; for a discussion of the alteration and



use of interior space within the doublehouse, see Metheny 2007: 188–190). The Duda and Liptac households were residents of adjoining units (Nos. 243 and 241), for example, and while it is not certain that the two halves were physically linked by a door in the partition wall, food sharing undoubtedly occurred between the two families, as it had when both lived in the same half of No. 243 in 1920 (USBC 1920, 1930, 1940). This type of reciprocity and task sharing among extended family members would have been especially important following Peter Negrey's injury in a rock fall in 1938 (*Indiana Evening Gazette* 1938). Negrey's back was broken, and it is logical to assume that Helen Duda Negrey (No. 38) relied heavily on her extended family for assistance after her husband was disabled.

Whether households were linked through kinship to those in adjacent units or to other individual households, or members were connected simply through coresidence as boarders, formal and informal acts of food sharing and shared food tasks would have been integral to household structure. A food map could reflect the movement within and between these households. Since there were other forms of complex households in Helvetia in which family members, boarders, and coresident tenants ate communally, food mapping would help to delineate cooperative food tasks, as well as internal household boundaries.

It is important to note that the mapping of the tasks surrounding food procurement and consumption will reflect a range of inter- and intra-household relationships. While the preparation of daily meals reinforced gender

roles and household hierarchy, the shared meal reinforced kinship ties and encouraged social exchange, reciprocity, and bonding among the diners. But mealtime could equally be the scene of conflict based on family tensions, generational differences, and varied responses to the pressures of immigration, assimilation, and industrialization (Appadurai 1981; Kalcik 1984; Diner 2001; Cinotto 2004). The specificity of family reconstitution charts provides information that allows a researcher to envision relationships, hierarchies, and even tensions within the household that may have influenced the daily meal (i.e., a father- or mother-in-law, a brother- or sister-in-law, adult siblings, children by a previous marriage, adoptive children, non-family members, varying marital statuses, as well as age and sex distinctions).

### Formal and Informal Contexts of Meal Sharing

A study of food sharing associated with daily subsistence activities in Helvetia includes regular meals at the dinner table, as well as food sharing that was more informal in nature (e.g., snacks, which Douglas and Gross [1981] separate from meals in terms of the rules that guide them; snacks are informal, unstructured, and outside the domain of meals). Formal dinners were generally associated with holiday gatherings and celebrations among family and extended family members. These occasions held more ritual- and feast-like qualities than the daily meal, although oral histories suggest these events were not always marked by the presence of special foods

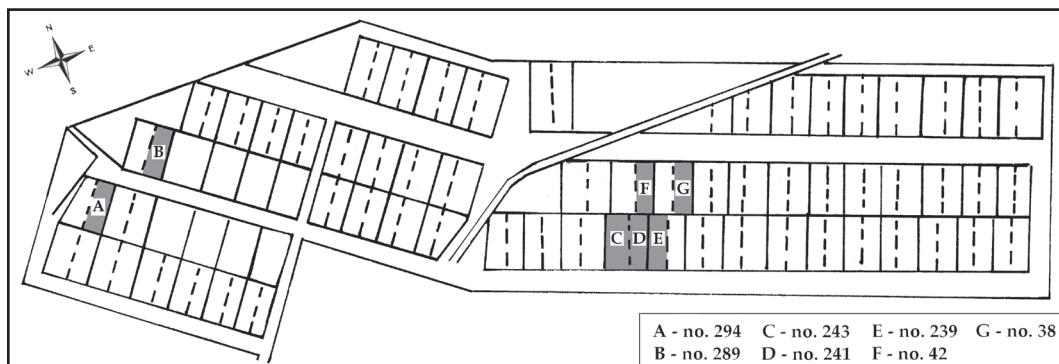


Figure 14a. Locations of households linked through the marriage of John Haddow and Anna Duda. The presence of multiple wage earners, multiple generations, and coresident kin in the same unit, an adjoining unit, or in an adjacent doublehouse allowed families to pool their resources, to share tasks associated with food preparation, and to share meals. (Figure by author, 2014.)

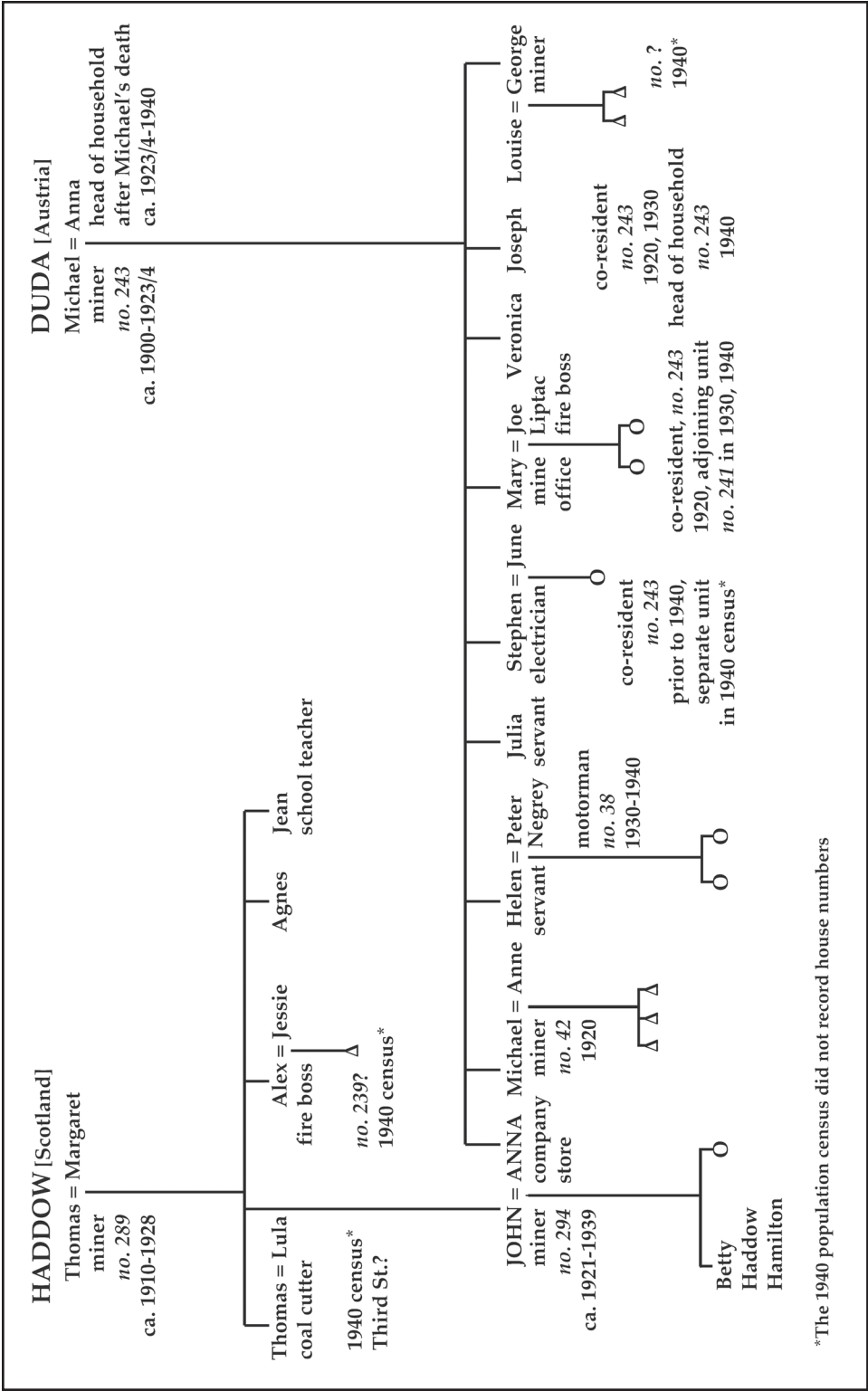


Figure 14b. Family reconstitution of the Haddow and Duda families. At least nine households were linked through the marriage of John Haddow and Anna Duda. (Figure by author, 2014.)



or beverages. Some informants mentioned birthday parties as a special meal, though not all households observed such occasions (T. Crop 1994; W. Crop and S. Crop 1995). One local newspaper mentioned a birthday party with seating and refreshments for 15 couples, suggesting the uniqueness of the gathering (*DuBois Express* 1898a). These contexts for food sharing varied in scope from a small circle of family and extended-family members to a larger network incorporating non-family and outside guests; in each context, a range of social and economic relationships could be constructed or reinforced by host and participant.

The majority of meals in Helvetia occurred in other contexts of dining, however, and it is important to maintain focus on the daily forms of commensality. Such acts, as seen below, were also performative, with participants enacting a range of important social and economic relationships, thereby contributing to the creation and maintenance of group and individual identities, familial and community networks, and cohesion, friendship, and trust among co-workers.

### Commensality Underground

In the workplace, the miner's meal would reflect informal food sharing; meals occurred when time permitted and followed the rhythm of mine work. The miner and his partner (who might be father, brother, son, or in-law, close companion, or co-worker) ate while waiting for the cutting machine or the shot firer, or while they waited for a turn (the rotation of cars used to haul coal to the surface). The dinner bucket, previously described, would be stored nearby in a "dog hole" or "dinner hole," and taken out as time allowed (FIG. 15). Its contents—water or coffee, bread or a sandwich, with some condiments or vegetables (Tom Crop, for example, ate onion-and-ketchup sandwiches), perhaps a slice of pie—would be consumed by the miner and sometimes shared with his partner (FIG. 16). The meal, taken together, provided a respite from labor and a sense of camaraderie (one oral narrative dwelt on a prank involving the disappearance of a slice of huckleberry pie) (Brown 1991; T. Crop 1994). Despite its informality, this meal reinforced bonds of friendship and mutual concern. As partners, these men depended on one another

for their safety in the mine. The commensality of the miner's meal sustained that bond.

### Baking Bread

Meals eaten outside the home were part of a web of enfolding social relationships linking kinsmen, co-workers, and friends. A food map focused on bread also draws attention to the range of social and economic relations embodied in the preparation of the miner's meal (FIG. 17). Meals needed to be filling and provide sustenance for the long workday. Thus, bread making was one of the most important of household chores. According to Tom Crop, his mother Grace baked 13 loaves



Figure 15. Thomas Crop leaving for the mine, dinner bucket in hand, ca. 1939. (Photo courtesy of Thomas Crop.)

of bread every week, and much of that went to the mine with Tom, his father William Sr., and sometimes with his uncles, Jim and Sandy Maughan, his father's half-brothers who at times resided with the family. Bread also was used to make lunches for William Jr. and his two sisters, Ellen and Elizabeth, all of whom worked at the company store (T. Crop 1994). Finally, bread was used for lunch at home. Here, food sharing supported members of the nuclear family, but also expanded at times to include temporarily coresident extended family members. Food sharing in the household also provided emotional support and sustenance to the Crops' newly widowed daughter, Elizabeth Crop Smyers, and her daughter Jane, when Elizabeth returned home to No. 296.

### Home Brew and Tobacco

Food mapping also can be used to graph informal food-sharing activities that originated in the household but extended outward into the community. For example, a food map depicting the production of beer or "home brew" in No. 296 reflects the purchase of Blue Ribbon malt extract from the company store (or its delivery to the house by a store employee or household member), the preparation of home brew by William Crop, its storage in the crawlspace, and its consumption by the male

members of the household (FIG. 18).<sup>3</sup> To Tom Crop, the phrase "Mom's baking cookies" meant not only that his father was brewing beer, but also that William Sr. would share this beverage with family, neighbors, co-workers, visitors, and even the deliveryman from the company store—a member of the company hierarchy. Oral narratives suggest that this act of hospitality was not limited to brewing day or to festive occasions (Brown 1994; T. Crop 1994). Rather, beer drinking and tobacco smoking were the most frequent forms of commensality in this mining community.

Even the most informal of visits or gatherings could involve a form of food sharing (Metheny 2007: 137–143). William Brown recalled that during the three years he loaded coal for the R&P (1930–1933) and played for the Helvetia baseball team, he was often invited to supper or to sit on the porch to have a beer (Brown 1991, 1994). These gestures resonated with Brown long after the event. A map of Brown's food connections in Helvetia, based on his oral narratives, shows intersecting lines between the ballfield, Bethel Union Church, the company store, and numerous households in both the uptown and downtown sections (FIG. 19). This

3 The Pabst Brewing Company began to manufacture malt products at the beginning of Prohibition (Premier Malt Products, Inc. 2008). Malt extract had a variety of uses for baking, as well as for brewing, providing both leavening and flavor. This product could also be used to make vinegar (Premier Malt Products, Inc. 1951).

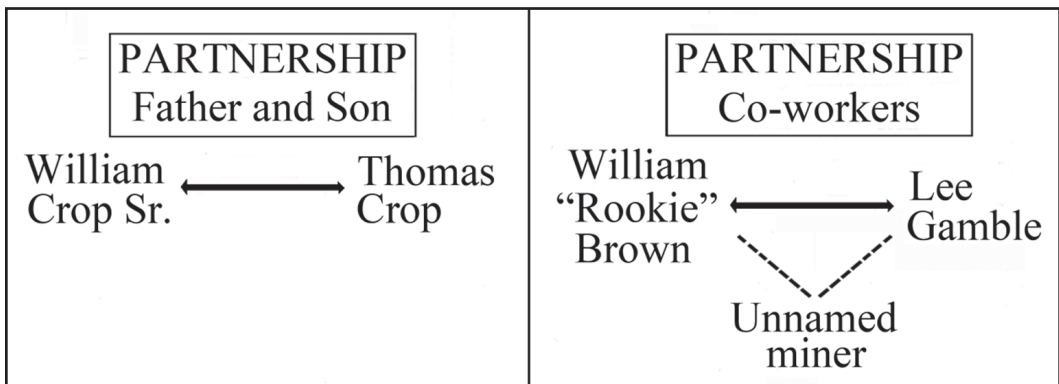


Figure 16. Commensality through the miner's meal. Two types of partnerships in the mine are illustrated here: father and son, and co-workers. William Crop Sr. was partnered with his son for two years; his mining experience saved son Tom's life on one occasion. William Brown and Lee Gamble were partners for three years and experienced several harrowing incidents together. "Two men to one place. One man couldn't work alone because the other guy was part of his safety," said William Brown. Brown and Gamble often brought with them a third miner who was too old and too hard of hearing to work alone (Brown 1991, 1994; T. Crop 1994). Shared meals, however informal, strengthened the bonds between partners. (Figure by author, 2014.)

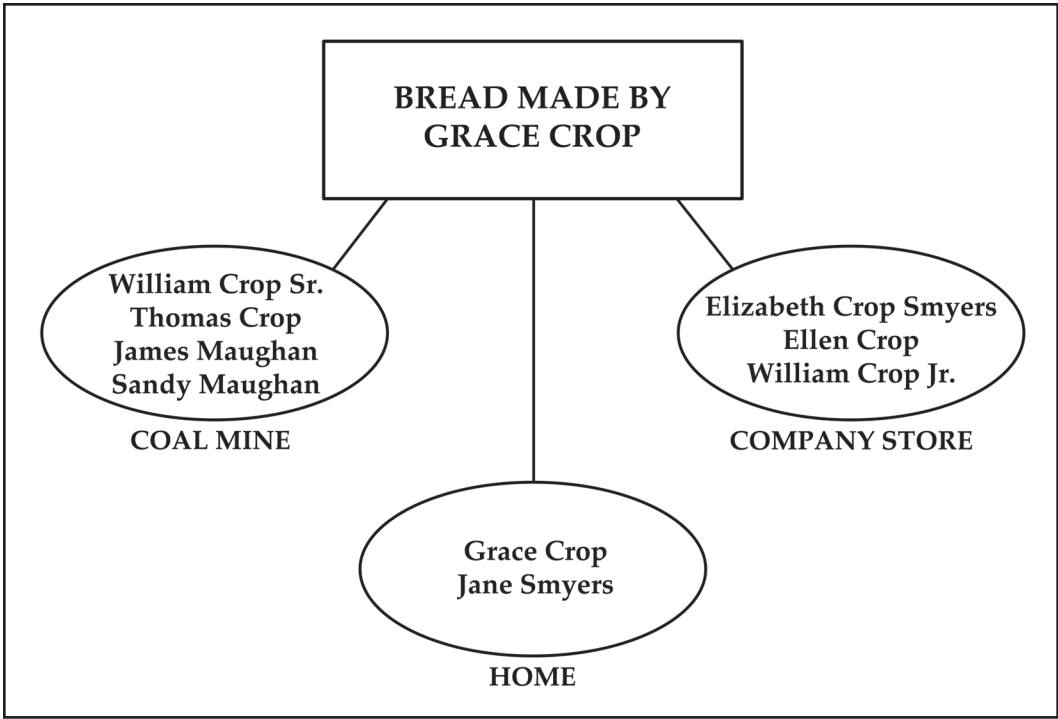


Figure 17. The loaves of bread made each week by Grace Crop were distributed to family and extended family members, reflecting household strategies that enabled additional wage earners to live with the family and provided the flexibility to incorporate additional members as needed. (Figure by author, 2014.)

kind of informal hospitality is an inclusionary form of food sharing that cemented the bonds between Brown and his fellow miners, his teammates, and their families. These bonds were so strong that most of the informants for this project remembered Brown 60 years later, if only by name, even though he only worked in Helvetia Mine for 3 years.

Informal contexts for food sharing can be examined through the lens of age, gender, ethnicity, or other variables. Food maps suggest that snacking was commonplace among the younger generation, for instance (e.g., homemade ice cream and candy consumed by informants in their youth) (FIG. 20), while informal beer drinking was largely an adult male activity (FIG. 18). In Helvetia, the spatial aspects of such informal gatherings tend to reflect the ethnic differences in the town's population, but there was also a middle ground between uptown and downtown—the company store, the ballfield, the park—where ethnicity was not as strong a marker. In this context, it may be noted that the youngest generation had

little difficulty in crossing perceived ethnic boundaries, and that the meeting places of Helvetia's youth—the ballfield, the Three Trees (a cluster of three large elms), the dam, a shack erected across the street from one of the houses—reflect this lack of boundaries. Or, rather, boundaries based on generational differences and gender were of greater significance to these young men than ethnicity. Food maps charting interaction at both formal and informal meeting spots reflect networks and associations that varied by age, gender, and economic status, then, as well as ethnicity (FIGS. 20, 21). A comparison with perceived boundaries in Helvetia (FIG. 8) shows that these boundaries were frequently crossed or ignored by members of the community.

### **Food Sharing within the Community**

#### **Religious and Fraternal Contexts**

Community events also served to build networks and links among households, often

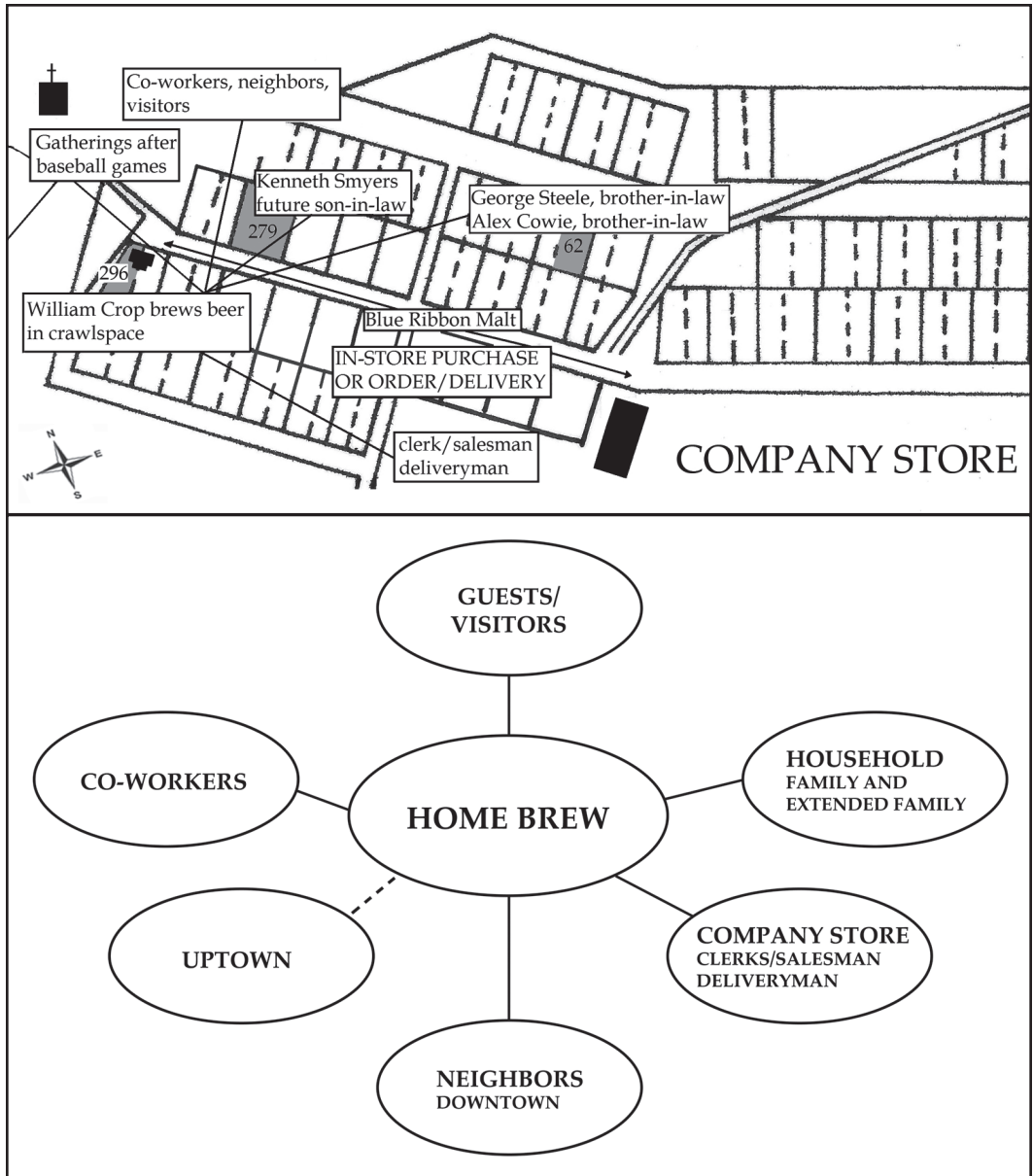


Figure 18. Drinking commensality. William Crop Sr. made home brew in the crawl space beneath No. 296 and offered it to family, co-workers, and individuals throughout the community. The inset suggests the range of possible food connections. A dotted line suggests a potential but unconfirmed connection. (Figure by author, 2014.)

on the basis of ethnicity, gender, and religion. Archival sources show that Helvetia's residents maintained their ethnic traditions well into the 20th century. Religious and ethnic festivals were important venues for cultural practice and performance, providing residents with an opportunity to build and maintain important

social and economic networks and affiliations within the town. Many events involved feasting and other forms of food sharing.

Religious holidays were frequent among Catholic miners from Eastern Europe, who traditionally observed more than two dozen religious holidays each year (Bodnar 1977;



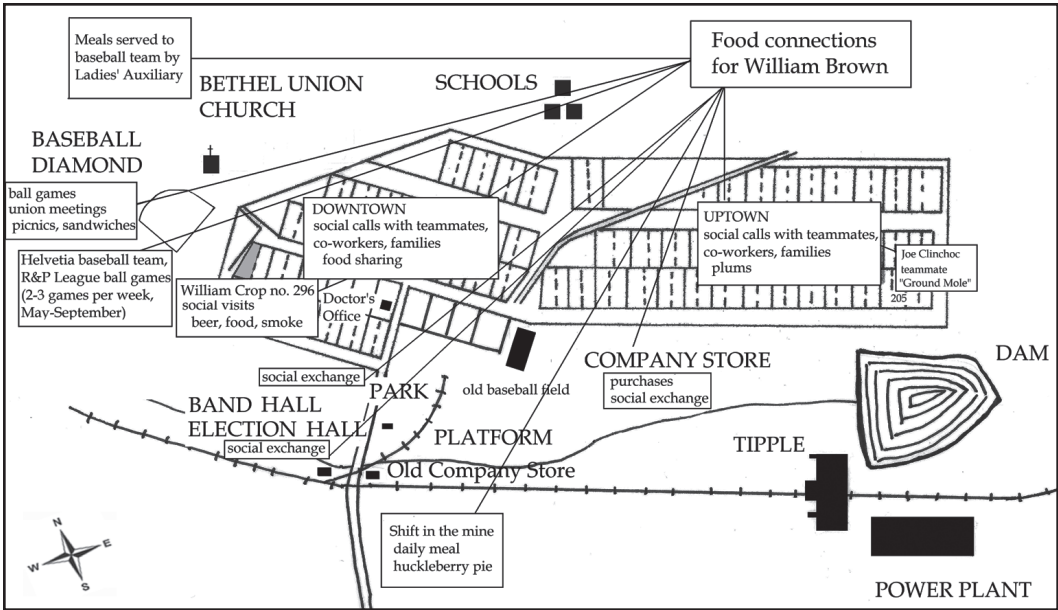


Figure 19. Food connections made by William Brown, a nonresident miner and a member of Helvetia's baseball team, extended across the community. Brown stated that the Ladies' Auxiliary of Bethel Union Church began to prepare meals for the team after complaints about too many spaghetti dinners. His narratives included numerous references to food, most often in the context of invitations from friends, co-workers, and families to partake of refreshments at their homes (Brown 1991, 1994). (Figure by author, 2014.)

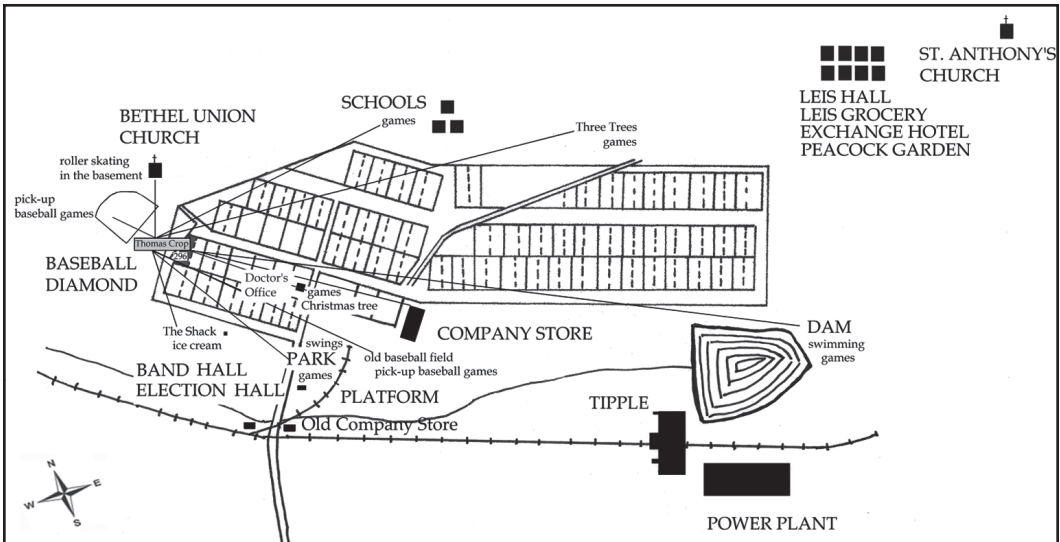


Figure 20. Meeting places for Thomas Crop and his boyhood friends. Commensal dining at informal gatherings in Helvetia can be characterized as snacking. Crop had strong memories of one particular gathering. The boys, who had formed their own club, used their dues money one Christmas or New Year's Eve to purchase ingredients to make ice cream. The ice cream was ruined when salt was accidentally added instead of sugar (T. Crop 1994). Many informal gatherings in Helvetia took place in areas unmarked by or independent of ethnicity or religion. For Helvetia's youth, such gatherings would have reflected age or gender as primary markers of identity. (Figure by author, 2014.)

Miller and Sharpless 1985: 207; Hovanec 2001). Fast days, feast days, and meatless days, as well as celebrations and rituals centered on the life cycle (birth, first communion, marriage, death) incorporated specific food practices (e.g., Romanová and Bencko-Maras 1995). Immigrant communities often celebrated with drinking, dancing, feasting, and card playing—activities that would have set them apart from Protestant mining families, particularly on Sundays (*DuBois Express* 1895; Miller and Sharpless 1995: 183). The considerable variation among Eastern European immigrant groups meant, however, that customs and traditions differed not only by language and ethnic affiliation, but also by village, and one would expect the enactment of traditional practices, foodways, and religious celebrations and festivals to vary as well. Despite this variation, the observance of traditional practices would have affirmed ties with kinsmen and communities in the Old World even as it helped to forge and maintain shared identities among new arrivals and residents of this community. A food map based on a more detailed exploration of ethnic foodways in the community would make concrete that which is depicted only in the abstract in Figure 21.

Religious gatherings and socialization among members of a church served spiritual and social functions. But communal values also were expressed and enacted through fraternal and women's organizations, many of which were affiliated with churches in the community and the surrounding area. These organizations often sponsored activities that involved food sharing. It was noted, for example, that the women of the Missionary Society of the Reformed Church of DuBois traveled to Mrs. John Kelly's home in Helvetia for their annual picnic; 100 members "sat down to tables, laden with good things to eat and needless to say, enjoyed the repast to the fullest extent. Covers were laid for one hundred" (*DuBois Express* 1930) (FIG. 22). Local newspapers also reported on the activities of the Ladies' Aid Society of the Bethel Union Church, which frequently hosted community suppers and festivals (*DuBois Express* 1898b). Both ladies' aid societies and missionary societies were common women's organizations, whose members exchanged recipes, compiled cookbooks (e.g. Ladies' Auxiliary 1922), and shared food. Research indicates that new dishes and ways of preparing food spread through informal channels maintained by these women (Bower 1997; Yentsch, this volume), suggesting

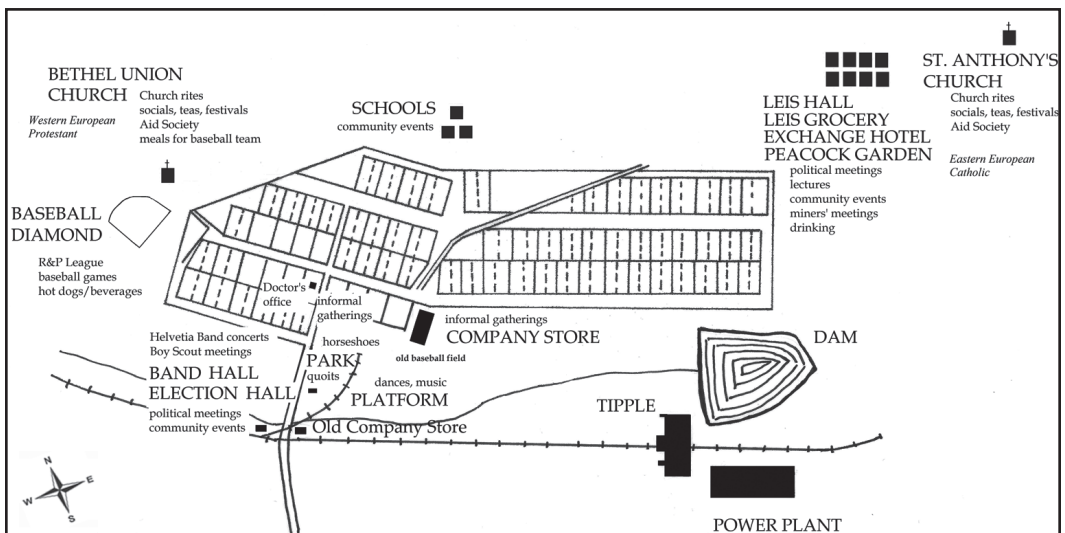


Figure 21. Formal and informal community gatherings frequently involved food sharing, creating connections that brought residents and visitors to locations throughout the town. Gatherings could be inclusionary or exclusionary. Many worked to define or maintain boundaries and group membership, while some involved the crossing of perceived boundaries based on ethnicity, religion, and language. Others occurred in a middle ground, between uptown and downtown, and at the ballfield, where social and cultural differences were less marked. (Figure by author, 2014.)

another possible subject for a relational food map. Few details are known about these organizations in Helvetia, but it can be inferred that membership in these groups was based on gender and religious affiliation. And whether their aim was spiritual, social, missionary, philanthropic, or to provide material relief, these organizations were a constant and steady presence within the community.

### Commensal Drinking

Company records documented the frequency of both religious holidays and public celebrations, and cited the negative impact of such events on productivity in all of the R&P's mines (Robinson 1900, 1913, 1914, 1916). The correspondence of Lucius W. Robinson, president of the R&P from 1899–1919, contains many references to such activities, including the State Firemen's Convention, the annual Punxsutawney Fair, and Fourth of July and Labor Day celebrations (Robinson 1902e), as well as warnings of low production "due to the frequency of religious and public celebration" (Robinson 1902f). In one letter, Robinson advised that production levels would once again not meet expectations because of worker absenteeism on "five Sundays and several Holidays, all of which are observed among the different nationalities, all being idle to some extent when there is any holiday, either religious or National" (Robinson 1913).

The consumption of alcohol was characteristic of such celebrations and a particular source of complaint for the company. Robinson noted that carousing was especially problematic

when the mines were idled (Robinson 1914). Helvetia's superintendent, J. Harvey, informed his superiors, in August 1916, that the mine was not likely to meet its production goals because the "foreigners are drunk and celebrating today and will be for several day [sic] as is their usual custom at this time of year" (Harvey 1916). The role of drinking practices in this context is complex. While alcohol consumption undoubtedly reinforced the bonds between workers and among miners with a shared ethnicity, drinking also served as a direct challenge to company policies about worker behavior and to the prejudices of a general public that marginalized Eastern European immigrant groups and denigrated the customs of "ethnics."

Alcohol was readily available in Helvetia, even during Prohibition (Brown 1991; T. Crop 1994). Oral narratives also suggest that the company looked the other way when miners brewed their own beer unless someone tried to sell it, or its consumption led to violence in the community. Local newspapers complained about the presence of speakeasies outside the company town and of wholesale liquor dealers who ensured that alcohol was both accessible and plentiful in the town's early days. In colorful language, the papers described fighting, rioting, and arrests, the result of "certain parties [who] desired to paint the town red" under the influence of "King Alcohol" (*DuBois Express* 1894a, 1894b, 1895).

Dietler (2006) argues that rituals, practices, and beliefs associated with alcohol are more emotionally charged than those associated with most types of food sharing because of

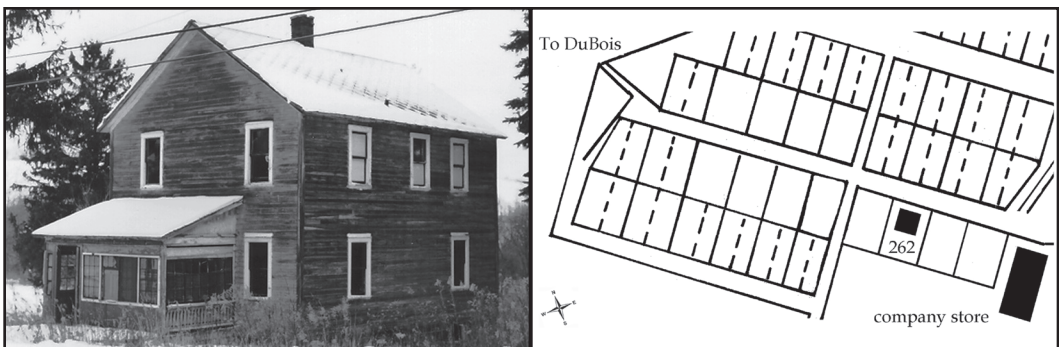


Figure 22. A picnic and business meeting for the Ladies of the Missionary Society of the Reformed Church of DuBois were held at the home of Mrs. John Kelly. Many women would have traveled 6 mi. or more to attend. The single house in which the Kellys lived (No. 262) was one of only four extant structures in Helvetia in 1994. (Figure by author, 2014; photo by author, 1994.)



alcohol's psychoactive properties; thus, drinking may be a more powerful context than the meal for group negotiation, boundary creation, and identity formation (see also Sexton 2001). As a consequence, relations enacted through commensal drinking tend to be highly marked, more emotive, and more powerful.

Alcohol consumption in Helvetia frequently led to disruptive behavior and alcohol-fueled violence. Such incidents reflect both conflict and competition in the context of drinking practices. A consideration of the broader context of alcohol consumption suggests, however, that commensal drinking was also an important element of community building. With home brew in the cellar of nearly every doublehouse, Tom Crop recalled that offers of beer were prolific, joking that the deliveryman from the company store could be quite inebriated by the end of his run—"you didn't know if [the delivery man] was writing down meat or groceries," he said (T. Crop 1994).

The significance of alcohol consumption among the miners is situated in the context of consumption, then—that is, the sharing of beverages in the context of the household or in various public settings. Drinking in Helvetia among family, neighbors, and co-workers suggests commensality that mediated the transition to the industrial workplace and helped miners to cope with the stress of working in a dangerous industry. Such practices could be inclusionary or exclusionary, opening outward to others in the community or restricting social exchanges to group members. Public drinking with companions and co-workers also provided a context for the negotiation of identity and place within the company town, whether a medium for debate, competition, and the exchange of gossip, or for expressing discontent or conflict in response to the company's hierarchy and corporate policies. The mapping of spatial relationships seen in commensal drinking, though largely dependent on the availability of oral informants and detailed documentary sources, is likely to reveal the presence of both cooperative and competing networks, and offer insight into their construction and significance within the community.

### **Inclusionary and Exclusionary Commensality**

Inclusionary and exclusionary acts by their nature may extend across a range of subgroups,

making it a challenge to map the impact of group-boundary maintenance or community building through food sharing, but we can nonetheless find ample documentary and oral evidence for events where such acts likely occurred. Contemporary newspapers describe dances, band concerts, parades, lectures, political meetings and rallies, prayer meetings, birthday parties, receptions, picnics, and musical entertainments in Helvetia (*DuBois Express* 1892a, 1892b, 1892c, 1893a, 1893b, 1893c, 1894b, 1898a, 1898c; *DuBois Morning Courier* 1903). Newspaper columnists wrote of receptions for newlyweds, as well as funerals, christenings, and other important family occasions. Many families hosted events and gatherings in their homes; others occurred in public venues—the platform, the park—or in Leis Hall, just outside town (FIG. 21). The latter structure was frequently used for community events, miners' meetings, and political rallies (*DuBois Express* 1894b; *DuBois Morning Courier* 1903, 1904).

Many gender- and age-specific events would have involved a form of food sharing, encompassing a range of social and economic relations. Pie socials are an exceptional example of this, suggesting a gendered activity (from baking to organizing the event) that allowed residents to form new relationships independent of gender, ethnicity, or religion. According to William Crop, during these events "you'd take the people home that you bought the pie from. You didn't know who you was going to get or what kind of pie it was before you brought it [home]" (W. Crop and S. Crop 1995).

Oral and written accounts of such gatherings may contain information on food alliances, food exchange, or food sharing. They may also reveal conflict and the use of food alliances as inclusionary or exclusionary instruments. Boundaries were drawn most often on the basis of perceived ethnic divisions within Helvetia, but also would reproduce differences in age, gender and sex, and religion. Events sponsored by the Catholic and Protestant churches would tend to emphasize group membership based on religious values and draw or reinforce boundaries within the community. The foods that were served could also be inclusionary or exclusionary; new flavors,

unusual ingredient combinations, and different preparation techniques would work to draw tighter boundaries and maintain group distinctiveness. Yet meals prepared for the Helvetia baseball team by the Ladies' Auxiliary of Bethel Union Church were offered to all players, regardless of ethnicity or religious belief. Baseball was an immensely popular form of recreation in mining communities, and the R&P sponsored its own league. As William Brown noted, his teammates were selected to play (and often were hired) for their athletic abilities regardless of ethnicity. Games drew hundreds of spectators; at times there were over a thousand in attendance (Brown 1991; W. Crop and S. Crop 1995; see Metheny 2007: 143–148). Commensality on game days shows that the community was able to transcend ethnic divisions at such times in support of the team.

### **Food Sharing as Mutual Aid**

Different forms of food sharing occurred during periods of work stoppages or strikes. Limited food sharing took place between the R&P and the residents. The butcher at the company store gave away soup bones or other waste products to those who asked (Gray 1995; Lafko 2010). Oral testimony suggests that aid from the miners' union was occasionally forthcoming, generally in the form of flour and slabs of bacon, but was infrequent and unreliable (Gray 1995). Fraternal and women's organizations and religious associations may have also provided relief. Informal networks within the community, whether based on kinship, ethnicity, or other relationships, were a more significant source of aid, however, and served as a vehicle through which to distribute foodstuffs, meals, and other forms of assistance (Metheny 2010: 327–331) (FIG. 23). These gestures, which provided physical relief as well as emotional support, helped to shore up a tenuous safety net within a community that daily confronted the hazards of work in the mining industry and the difficulties of earning a living wage.

The impact of these networks cannot be overstated. Both kin networks and ethnic affiliations within Helvetia were key to finding work and housing, and, for many, these ties

were central to the process of assimilation; for all, they provided a means to cope with industrialization, most often through emotional support and material aid. These support networks contributed to the process of group formation and definition, as well as the maintenance of familial or communal associations and networks (Metheny 2007: 129–130, 234–240, 2010: 327–331). As with household structures, food sharing was integral to their operation. There are few spatial references to use in mapping such networks in Helvetia, but their existence and importance can be inferred from oral testimony and newspaper accounts. As Figure 23 shows, mutual-aid networks could be quite extensive. These connections—often made through the act of food distribution and shared meals—provided stability to the community as a whole.

### **Conclusion**

The daily meal has received comparatively little attention in historical archaeology, yet, as demonstrated here, numerous social and economic relationships are enacted through food sharing. The connections created through cooperative food tasks and day-to-day acts of commensality should be recognized as important elements in the functioning of households and communities. As described, the webs of networks and associations constructed through food sharing potentially reveal information about the construction and negotiation of individual and group identities based on economic or social status, gender, age, ethnicity, and other variables. Food maps may also help to trace the workings of competing interest groups, and the conflicts or alliances that were forged, maintained, challenged, and negotiated daily through food practices. The spatial and visualization techniques described here lend themselves to this type of analysis and suggest a number of avenues for further research. This approach also moves archaeologists beyond economic models of consumer choice to address foodways as a complex and highly symbolic cultural system. It compels closer scrutiny of these practices, contextualization of the physical and material remnants of the meal, and investigation of the cultural and social significance of activities associated with its procurement, preparation, and consumption.

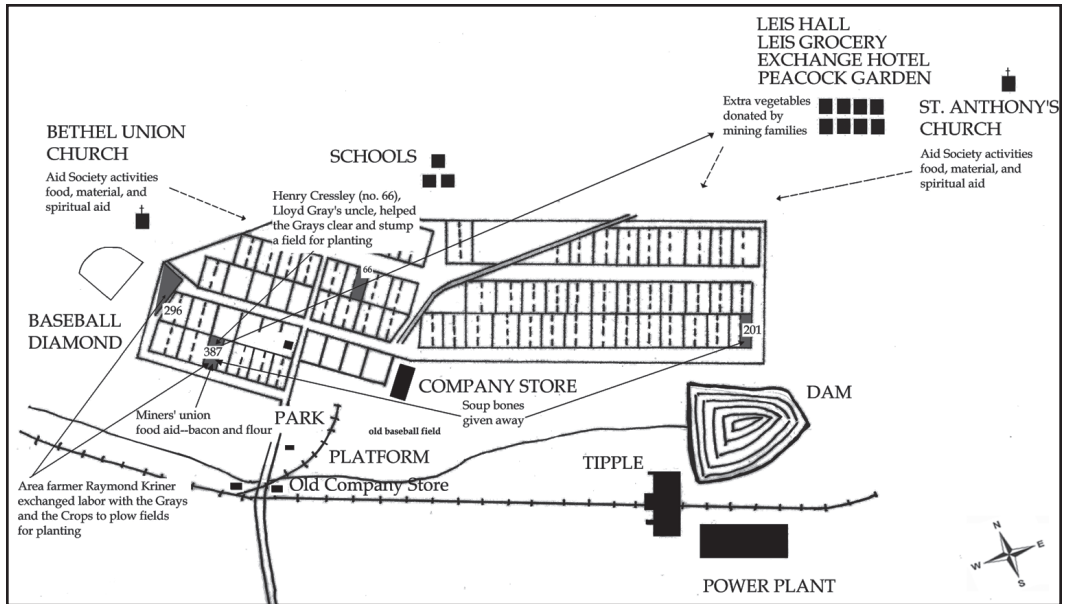


Figure 23. Mutual-aid networks. Formal institutions such as the company store and the miners' union provided help only infrequently. Informal networks in the community were more important, providing jobs, housing, and material assistance, often in the form of food sharing. This map depicts known labor exchanges and specific offers of aid associated with the households in No. 296 (Crop), No. 387 (Gray), and No. 201 (Lafko) (T. Crop 1994; Gray 1995; Lafko 2010), but also suggests a broader set of networks operating in the community. (Figure by author, 2014.)

It also helps archaeologists to recognize the importance of ordinary meals in the lives of past communities.

### Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Anne Yentsch for reading many versions of this paper, for her keen insight into foodways and households, and for her helpful advice as I refined the food maps presented here. I also extend my deep thanks to Mary Beaudry for focusing my interest in foodways and for her continued support and mentorship, and to Rebecca Alssid for the opportunity to teach courses in food studies that contributed so much to my scholarly research. Thanks also to two anonymous reviewers who offered helpful suggestions for improving this article. The research upon which this study is based was funded by a grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research (#5941). The grant was used to fund a six-week field investigation in 1995, as well as several weeks of archival research and oral history interviews.

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