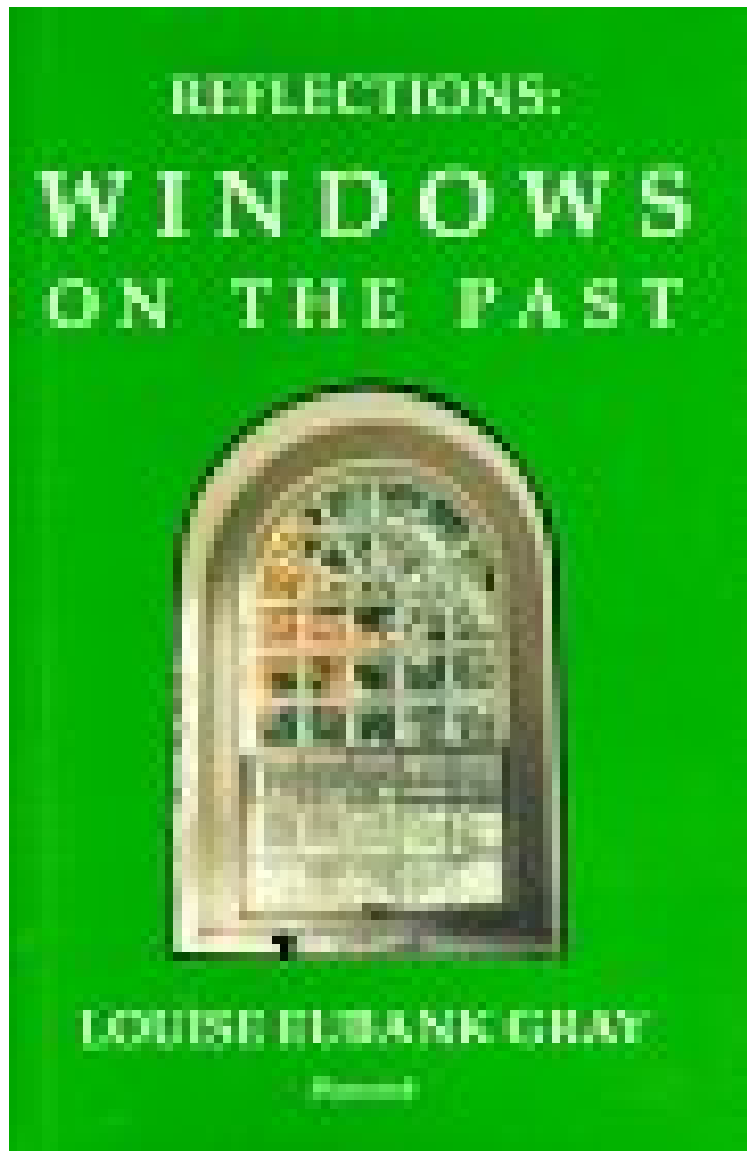


[Read free ebook] Reflections: Windows on the Past

Reflections: Windows on the Past

Louise Eubank Gray

*audiobook / *ebooks / Download PDF / ePub / DOC*



DOWNLOAD



+

READ ONLINE

#13733311 in Books 1995-01Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.25 x 6.25 x .50l, #File Name:
1556181469178 pages | File size: 43.Mb

Louise Eubank Gray : Reflections: Windows on the Past before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Reflections: Windows on the Past:

An engaging, illustrated collection of essays and articles dealing with Virginia local history, customs, and life styles. With several exceptions, they first appeared in her monthly column, "Reflections," which she has been writing since

1990 for the Middle Peninsula section of the Daily Press, Newport News, Virginia.

About the Author
The author grew up in the warm atmosphere of her family's farm, "Lewisville," in King and Queen County near Ino. Her mother was well known for her cooking and hospitality, and family and friends visited often. An only child, she had nearby cousins as playmates; she also remembers enjoying the company of her pet geese, "Jack and Jill," and her dog, "Prince." Since retirement in 1973, Mrs. Gray has pursued interests in history and writing, and has been active in church and civic affairs. In 1981 she was presented the Distinguished Alumna Award by Westhampton College. As board member (and former chairman) of the Middlesex County Museum, she is often called on to answer questions on genealogy and assist persons researching courthouse records that go back to 1673. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

Making Sorghum Molasses
A ritual of fall which I still miss is the making of sorghum molasses. The mingled scent of wood smoke and boiling cane syrup and the picture of the horse plodding in endless circles around the mill were colorful accents to a crisp autumn day. Sorghum, a relative of sugar cane, was widely grown in Tidewater Virginia for the delicious molasses which formed a staple of diet on most farms. Those who did not cultivate a crop bought a few gallons of molasses from those who did. The molasses pitcher was put on the table at each meal along with the butter, cream and sugar. Breakfast usually ended with one or two hot biscuits and molasses and also other meals if dessert was not provided. Molasses made delicious cookies and gingerbread, or molasses pudding. Served warm with lemon sauce it was a company dessert; cold with a glass of milk, it was a wonderful after school snack. Molasses was the main ingredient for candy-pulling, once a popular social activity for young people. Molasses would be cooked down to a very thick syrup, then poured into a buttered dish or pan. When it was cool enough to handle, the mass was rolled into a ball, then pulled out into a heavy rope. A boy and girl with buttered hands would pull it back and forth as far as it would stretch. After five or ten minutes the candy would change color to a rich golden shade. When it became too hard to pull it was laid out in a long rope to cool completely and then broken into bite-sized pieces. The cane was planted in late May or early June. The seeds produced handsome plants which resembled corn except that they grew ten to twelve feet tall with a cluster of seeds at the top which turned dark red and attracted blackbirds and crows. Sorghum, harvested just before frost, was grown for the juice extracted from the stalks. Someone who owned a sorghum mill would appear to grind the stalks and cook the syrup for a toll of the crop. The mill consisted of three rollers and it was operated by a horse hitched to a long pole, or sweep, which turned the rollers as it walked around the mill in a circle. The stalks were fed into the mill and crushed between the rollers. A bright green juice ran from the crushed stalks. It was strained through several layers of cloth as it ran into a barrel. When enough juice had collected to make a batch of molasses, the cooking began. The boiler, or evaporator, was an open, shallow, galvanized pan about four by eight feet long and six inches deep. A fire was built under the pan and kept burning during the process. As soon as the watery juice began to boil a dark foam appeared on top. This had to be skimmed off with a handmade strainer. The stirring, cooking, and skimming went on for three or four hours with a man constantly in attendance to keep the fire burning and to see that the syrup did not burn as it thickened. It was, therefore, important to control the heat; too hot a fire might scorch the syrup or overcook it. At last the man cooking the syrup would begin to test it to see if it was the right consistency. If not cooked enough it would be "runny." The syrup thickened as it cooled. If it was thick when it was hot, in winter it would be almost semi-solid. "Slow as cold molasses in the winter-time" was a homely comparison understood by anyone who had ever waited for the syrup to pour from a barrel or even a molasses pitcher on a cold morning. It is said that molasses was once even sold in a paper bag at the grocery stores; in its semi-solid state it was carried home without difficulty. When the syrup had been cooked to the peak of perfection, it was thick, amber, shining and smelled delicious. The average farmer paid the operator of the mill one gallon for every four gallons which had been made. For his own use he kept a sufficient quantity to meet the needs of his family and sold the remainder. Few people in eastern Virginia grow or mill sorghum today. Latane Trice of Walkerton acquired an old sorghum mill a few years ago and with some difficulty found parts to put it in working condition. With even more difficulty, he found seeds to raise a crop of sorghum! Apparently moved by nostalgia, he grew the cane, used the mill to crush the stalks and cooked the syrup to his satisfaction. The product was up to standard and his old friends, I among them, enjoyed the rare treat of King Queen homemade molasses. However, I believe he did not mill a second crop. Commercial products are easily available but do not compare with the "real stuff."