

America's Historic Cookbooks
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Cookbooks give us a glimpse into the kitchens of our great country through the years. They reveal the rich variety of food that Americans have enjoyed as well as their tastes, cooking, and eating habits. The early cooks who migrated to this continent brought the cuisine of 16th and 17th century England with them. But, they found different kinds of vegetables and fruits in this country and had to adjust their style of cooking and their tastes. For over 200 years their cooking was done over an open fireplace and their baking in a brick oven. Iron cook stoves were not in common use in American homes until the mid 1800s.

There were 3 cookbooks published in America during the mid-to-late eighteenth century, but they were English cookbooks that had first been published in London years earlier. It was not until 1796 that the first American cookbook, *American Cookery*, was written by Amelia Simmons who described herself as an American orphan, and published in Hartford, Conn. It was not only a first in cookbook literature but is an historic document of colonial society. Miss Simmons put in print the first uniquely American recipes. She offered the first corn meal recipes for Indian Pudding, Indian Slapjacks, and Johnny Cake as well as the first recipes for pumpkin pudding, winter squash pudding, soft gingerbread, election cake and independence cake, watermelon pickles, and spruce beer. She suggested serving cranberries with roast turkey and gave the first recommendation for Pearlash, the forerunner of baking powder, for leavening. The use of such terms as "cookie", "slaw", and "shortening" first appear in her book. *American Cookery* went through a dozen reprints by 1830.

The next important cookbook to be written was *The Virginia Housewife or Methodical Cook* by Mary Randolph in 1824. This contains the first recipes for Southern fare such as okra soup, hominy, curry of catfish, barbecued shoat (a fat young hog), and beaten biscuits. She also had 14 tomato recipes and 22 flavors of ice cream in her cookbook. It provides a fascinating look at the food and customs of the antebellum South and shows the influence of African and West Indian slave cooking methods for the first time. *The Virginia Housewife* went through 19 printings before the Civil War

In 1829 Lydia Maria Child wrote *The American Frugal Housewife* which was so popular that it was reprinted 35 times. She offered simply written recipes for roasting a pig as well as fixing corned beef, potato cheese, raspberry shrub, carrot pie and even

wedding cake. He advice for non-culinary matters included suggestions for removing grease spots, cleaning pearls and white kid gloves, relieving dysentery and educating one's daughters. In 1845 she also wrote the famous Thanksgiving poem "Over the River and Through the Woods."

However, first and foremost among the culinary authors of the mid-nineteenth century was Eliza Leslie who wrote her first cookbook in 1828 of *75 Receipts for Pastry, Cakes, and Sweetmeats* which went through 20 editions and included mince pie, cheesecake, Lafayette gingerbread and gooseberry jelly. But, it was her classic *Miss Leslie's Directions for Cookery* which passed through 60 editions from 1837 until 1870. In it she offered concise recipes for beef-steak pudding, catfish soup, Federal cake, oyster pie, apple dumplings and fricasseed chickens.

In 1841 Sarah Josepha Hale wrote *The Good Housekeeper*. This early Victorian cookbook offers instructions on how to preserve health and stresses frugal household management as well as recipes for such savory dishes as lobster stew, old pease soup, rich apple pudding, squash pie and cream short cakes. Mrs. Hale was the editor of Lady Godey's magazine from 1827-1877 as well the author of many other cookbooks and novels. She was also very influential in the public celebration of Thanksgiving.

All of the previous cookbooks included recipes for beers and cordials. Lydia Child promoted Spruce beer, ginger beer or molasses beer as good family drinks. The first temperance cookbook was written by Catherine Beecher in 1846 called *Miss Beecher's Domestic Receipt-Book*. Born into the brilliant Beecher family of New England, she became a pioneer in the women's education movement. She includes detailed instructions for making everything from rice griddle cakes and sassafras jelly to codfish relish and mutton hash. And, she encourages drinks made from sarsaparilla, tea, chocolate and lemonade.

After the Civil War cookbooks were compiled and published by women's charitable organizations as fundraising projects to aid victims of the war such as orphans, widows and wounded veterans. And, cookbook projects continue to the present day by many churches and community groups for charitable purposes with participants including their family's favorite recipes.

During the last half of the nineteenth century there was also great interest in food and the management of households. Young women were expected to learn these things in preparation for marriage and cooking schools were opened in large cities. Mary Johnson Lincoln opened the Boston Cooking School in 1879 and published the *Boston*

Cooking School Cook Book in 1884. She was a pioneer of household economics who provided lessons on all forms of cooking, baking and household management. In 1946 the Grolier Club, a distinguished bibliophilic society, mounted an exhibition of the 100 most influential American books published before 1900 and Mrs. Lincoln's *Boston Cooking School Cook Book* was selected for display.

Fannie Merritt Farmer became a student of Mrs. Lincoln's and after graduating became the assistant director and eventually took over the school. In 1896 she published her version of the cookbook and it is the coldest standard cookbook still in print. *Fannie Farmer's Boston Cooking School Cook Book* was the first to use terms now considered standard in American cooking such as a level cupful, teaspoonful or tablespoonful. It relied on simple directions and gave step-by-step instructions for preparing an enormous array of dishes including such early American fare as fried corn meal mush, baked cod with oyster stuffing and tipsy pudding.

And, the waves of immigrants began to influence the kinds of foods prepared and served in this country as ethnic cookbooks began to emerge. Also, books for immigrant cooks learning a new language and a new way of life in this country began to appear. The 1903 *Settlement Cookbook* by the Milwaukee Settlement House is such an example. The *Settlement Cookbook* has since sold over 2 million copies as a classic collection of American ethnic recipes.

In the first decades of the 20th century, technology started to influence the kind of cooking done in homes. The invention of the electric range created a whole new way of food preparation. And, refrigeration made life a great deal easier for the homemaker. Also processed food began to make an appearance such as Jello and Campbell's Condensed Soups. People began to rely more on the corner grocer than on raising their own gardens, hogs and cattle. After World War I gas stoves started to appear in American homes.

There were three major cookbook authors of the 20th century who were the most influential on American cooking. The first was Irma Rombauer who turned her personal collection of recipes and cooking techniques in the *The Joy of Cooking* 1931. When the St. Louis widow self-published her first cookbook, it boasted 500 tested recipes as a "compilation of reliable recipes with a casual culinary chat." Her cookbook has now sold over 14 million copies. *Joy* has become an American institution and was the only cookbook chosen by the New York Public Library during its centennial celebration in 1995 as one of the 150 most influential books of the twentieth century.

The next was James Beard who wrote the first of his many cookbooks in 1940 and appeared on television's first cooking show on NBC in 1946. He published his classic, *The James Beard Cookbook* in 1959 which is now in its 3rd edition. He brought his message of good American food prepared with fresh, wholesome ingredients to a country just becoming aware of its own culinary heritage.

And last, but not least, is Julia Child who first published *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* in 1961, and her television series *The French Chef* started in 1962. She spiced up the American diet with exotic ingredients and expanded the expertise of many home cooks. In 2002 she was honored by The Smithsonian National Museum of American History when they opened an exhibit of her kitchen from the television series.

The twentieth century also saw many popular cookbooks published by corporate kitchens. Two of the most popular are, first, the *Better Homes and Gardens Cookbook* by the magazine of the same name, which was first published in 1930. And, second, *Betty Crocker's Picture Cookbook*, by General Mills, which was first published in 1950. These cookbooks were published as new convenience foods and new appliances became available to consumers.

Good food does more than just sustain us. It encourages hospitality, good conversation and memorable occasions. Our recipes have changed over the years but continue to reflect the times in which we live. Today cookbooks of every imaginable variety are available to us.

The recipes and cookbooks which have been handed down to us from our mothers and grandmothers makeup our American heritage. Our recipes and cookbooks that we use today are our legacy to our descendants. In closing, I would like to take a moment to ask you to think about collecting your special recipes in a scrapbook, a box or an album for you to hand down to your children and grandchildren. Martha Washington passed along 500 of her recipes to her granddaughter in 1799, which were dearly treasured and have since been published as an historical document. My memories of my Mother's apple pudding cake or my Grandmother Searcy's green tomato picallilli are priceless. I feel blessed to have their recipes to share and have put them in a book along with my favorite recipes that I shared with my family. I would like to ask you to please take some time to think about how you can share your American heritage and pass on your favorite recipes so they can be enjoyed by your family for generations to come.

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Historic American Recipes

To Make A Great Cake

Take a peck of flowre, 4 nutmeggs grated, halfe an ounce of cloves & mace, & as much cinnamon, & as much caraway seeds beaten, 3 quarters of A pound of sugar mingled with 7 pound of currans pickt clean & rubd clean with a cloth, A pinte of good ale barme, & allmoste A pinte of lukewarm water, 3 pound of butter melted, first strow in a little salt upon y flowre. Then mingle all y spice together & strow into y flower, & mingle all y spice together, & strow into y flowre, & strow in y water, barme, & butter. When all is well mingled, knead it up & let it ly an houre by y fire covered close with a cloth, mingle y currans & sugar with y dow. 2 hours will bake it. Martha Washington's Booke of Cookery and Booke of Sweetmeats: being a Family Manuscript, curiously copied by an unknown hand sometime in the seventeenth century, which was in her keeping from 1749, the time of her marriage to Daniel Custis, to 1799, at which time she gave it to Eleanor Parke Custis, her granddaughter, on the occasion of her marriage to Lawrence Lewis, transcribed by Karen Hess, published by Columbia University Press, NY 1995.

Election Cake

Thirty quarts flour, 10 pound butter, 14 pound sugar, 12 pound raisins, 3 doz eggs, one pint wine, one quart brandy, 4 ounces cinnamon, 4 ounces fine colander seed, 3 ounces ground alspice; wet the flour with milk to the consistence of bread over night, adding one quart yeast; the next morning work the butter and sugar together for half an hour, which will render the cake much lighter and whiter; when it has rise light work in every other ingredient except the plumbs, which work in when going into the oven. American Cookery, second edition by Amelia Simmons, originally printed by C. R. Webster, Albany, NY, 1796. Reprinted by Applewood Books, Bedford, MA, 1996.

Christmas Cookey

To three pound of flour, sprinkle a tea cup of fine powdered coriander seed, rub in one pound of butter, and one and half pound sugar, dissolve one tea spoonful of pearlash in a tea cup of milk, kneed all together well, roll three quarters of an inch thick, and cut or stamp into shape and size you please, bake slowly fifteen or twenty minutes; tho' hard and dry at first, if put in an earthen pot, and dry cellar, or damp room, they will be finer, softer and better when six months old. American Cookery, second edition by Amelia Simmons

Pumpkin Pudding

Stew a fine sweet pumpkin till soft and dry; rub it through a sieve, mix with the pulp six eggs quite light, a quarter of a pound of butter, half a pint of new milk, some pounded ginger and nutmeg, a wine glass of brandy, and sugar to your taste. Should it be too liquid, stew it a little drier. Put in a paste round the edges, and in the bottom of a shallow dish or plate—pour in the mixture, cut some thin bits of paste, twist them, and lay them across the top, and bake it nicely. . The Virginia Housewife or Methodical Cook by Mary Randolph originally published in Washington, D.C. 1824. Reprinted by Dover Publications, Mineola, NY 1993.

Indian Meal Pudding

Rub a tablespoonful of butter round the bottom and sides of a smooth iron kettle, granite or porcelain will do; when melted, add half a cup of boiling water. This will prevent the milk from burning. Add one quart of milk. Let it boil up, and almost over the kettle; then sift in one pint of fine yellow granulated corn meal, sifting with the left hand, and holding the meal high, that every grain may be thoroughly scalded. Stir constantly; add half a teaspoonful of salt, and set away till cold. Then add half a pint of New Orleans molasses and one quart of cold milk. Put into a well-buttered deep pudding-dish, cover with a plate, and bake very slowly ten or twelve hours. Put it in a "Saturday afternoon oven," where the fire will keep low nearly all night. Let it remain overnight, and serve for a Sunday breakfast. (Mrs. Barnabas Churchill) Boston Cooking School Cook Book by Mrs. D. A. Lincoln originally published by Roberts Bros., Boston, MA 1884. Reprinted by Dover Publications, Mineola, NY 1996.