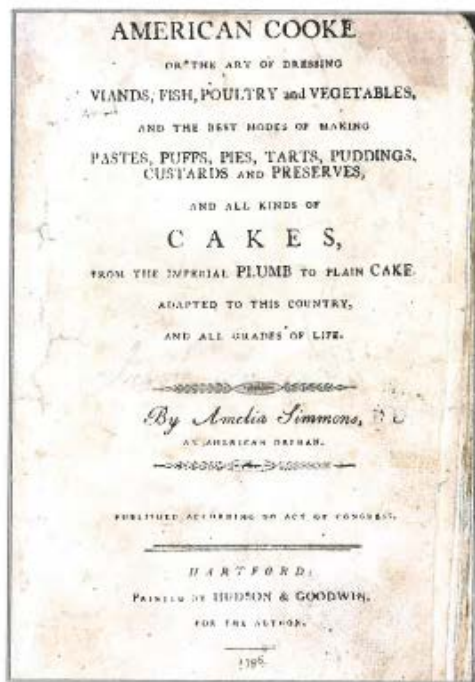




Amelia Simmons, An American Orphan: Preface to American Cookery (1796)

Not much is known about Amelia Simmons beyond the assumption that she lived in or around Hartford, Connecticut, where her cookbook was originally published. Some have speculated that Amelia Simmons was a pseudonym, but it is just as likely that as an unmarried female she did not leave a paper trail of legal documents, such as a will, or deeds to land. This is the first cook book both written and published in the United States, meaning some uniquely American recipes, such as pumpkin pie, are first published here. Unlike most eighteenth-century cookbooks, Simmons includes a preface which offers advice for young women in the new nation.



As this treatise is calculated for the improvement of the rising generation of Females in America, the Lady of fashion and fortune will not be displeas'd, if many hints are suggested for the more general and universal knowledge of those females in this country, who by the loss of their parents, or other unfortunate circumstances, are reduced to the necessity of going into families in the line of

domestics, or taking refuge with their friends or relations, and doing those things which are really essential to the perfecting them as good wives, and useful members to society. The orphan, tho' left to the care of virtuous guardians, will find it essentially necessary to have an opinion and determination of her own. The world, and the fashion thereof, is so variable, that old people can not accommodate themselves to the various changes and fashions which daily occur; they will adhere to the fashion of their day, and will not surrender their attachments to the good old way – while the young and the gay, bend and conform readily to the taste of the times, and fancy of the hour. By having an opinion and determination, I would not be understood to mean an obstinate perseverance in trifles, which borders on obstinacy – by no means, but only an adherence to those rules and maxims which have stood the test of ages, and will forever establish the female character, a virtuous character—altho' they conform to the ruling taste of the age in cookery, dress, language, manners, &c.

It must ever remain a check upon the poor solitary orphan, that while those females that have parents, or brothers, or riches to defend their indiscretions, that the orphan must depend solely upon character. How immensely important, therefore, that every action, every word, every thought, be regulated by the strictest purity, and that every movement meet the approbation of the good and wife.

The candor of the American Ladies is solicitously treated by the Authoress, as she is circumscribed in her knowledge, this being an original work in this country. Should any future editions appear, she hopes to render it more valuable.

Recipe for Election Cake as found in American Cookery

Thirty quarts flour, 10 pounds butter, 13 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 allspice; 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 lighter and whiter; when it has rise light work in every other ingredient except the plumbs which work in when going into the oven.

Name: _____

Questions to Consider

1. Why do you think Amelia Simmons highlights that she is an American orphan?

2. According to Simmons, why are cooking skills so important to young women?

3. What are three things you notice about the recipe for Election Cake?

4. What generalizations can you make about life in the 1790s United States based on those observations?