Cooking Up American Politics
Author(s): nancy siegel
Source: Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Summer 2008), pp. 53-61
Published by: University of California Press
Accessed: 17/08/2011 20:05

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.
In August 1774 a set of “Rules by which a Great Empire may be reduced to a Small One” was printed in the Pennsylvania Packet. The author likened the lack of proper control over the American colonies to a crumbling cake: “In the first place gentlemen, you are to consider, that a great empire, like a cake, is most easily diminished at the edges….act like a wise gingerbread baker, who, to facilitate a division, cuts his dough half through in those places, where, when baked, he would have it broken to pieces.” The use of such similes linking food to politics became increasingly popular from the late eighteenth century on as a means to communicate caution or approval of political structures and ideologies in America. Whether the colonies were referred to as a cake or even a kettle of fish, the domestic language of food was easily understood. Protests, preparations, and presentations related to foodways and consumption reveal the discourse between politics and popular culture, which occurred to a certain degree in the gendered space of the kitchen, where hostesses created culinary delights for their guests in praise of the new and fragile nation, giving their sweet treats names such as Independence Cake and
Democratic Tea Cakes, to be served with cups of Liberty Tea. Through cookery, broad segments of American society could demonstrate their approval of the democratic experiment, and the very act of entertaining or dining often conveyed opinions about the American political system.

This article examines the ways in which women became culinary activists and furthered republican values through a domestic ideology that included tea boycotts in the 1760s; the development and naming of nationalist recipes like Independence Cake, Federal Pan Cake, and Election Cake in American cookery books after the Revolution; and the serving of homebrews and patriotic cakes on imported and domestically produced ceramics ornamented with nationalistic imagery. The recipes of these women, the communicators of social and cultural mores, can be read as sociopolitical documents that reveal a connection between culinary history and American political thought.

By the mid-eighteenth century women had entered the political arena, engaging where they could, in kitchens and parlors. As the colonists struggled with issues of taxation and political independence related to the consumption of tea, select groups of ladies gathered to form associations such as the Daughters of Liberty and the Society of Patriotic Ladies to combat tax inequities and organize tea boycotts. In an attempt to reduce the importation of foreign tea into the colonies, these women refused to serve imported tea and searched for local ingredients to fill their cups, thereby establishing their roles as both culinary activists and direct participants in the cause for independence from England.

Introduced to the colonies as early as 1672 by the Dutch East India Company, tea was initially a luxury item. But by the mid-eighteenth century it had become a necessity at the well-appointed table. It had also come to symbolize social refinement and proper domestic awareness; drinking

Above: “A New Method of Macaroni Making, as practised at Boston,” mezzotint on laid paper, October 1774, printed for Carrington Bowles. COURTESY OF THE WINTERTHUR MUSEUM AND COUNTRY ESTATE.
tea properly was a learned behavior. (Some early colonists had boiled tea leaves as though they were a vegetable, eating the tea and discarding the brew.) But the colonists soon adapted to the ceremony of tea drinking, and by the 1760s Americans were drinking over one million pounds of imported tea a year. British mandates required that all tea consumed in the American colonies be imported from England through the British East India Company (though some was smuggled in from Holland). In June 1767 the British Parliament passed the infamous Townshend Acts, which placed a duty of three pence per pound on all tea imported into the colonies. This move, following as it did a series of taxation measures, caused the colonists to begin their own series of movements against the purchase of imported goods, including cloth and tea. Although George III repeal most of these taxes, the duties on tea remained, and throughout the late 1760s and 1770s along the eastern seaboard the colonists demonstrated their grievances. Acts of defiance were encouraged through broadsides and pamphlets, the most notorious being the Boston Tea Party of December 16, 1773, at Griffin’s Wharf.

Political prints of the era satirized the ongoing turmoil. British engravers sympathetic to the American cause depicted the public’s dissatisfaction through images of corporeal gestures in which bodily functions became associated with the body politic. Scenes of public urination, defecation, and gaseous emissions aimed at political adversaries were a crude but popular form of iconography. British publisher John Bowles commissioned a series of pro-colonial, political satires including the October 1774 engraving titled “A New Method of Macarony Making, as practised at Boston.” The caption reads: “For the Custom House Officers landing the Tea / They tarr’d and feather’d him, just as you see / And they drench’d him so well both behind and before, / That he beg’d for God’s sake they would drench him no more.” The image depicts the Commissioner of Customs, John Malcomb, who in January 1774 was treated in this manner for attempting to collect customs duties in Boston. Malcomb was not only tarred and feathered but threatened with hanging and forced to drink huge quantities of tea, as suggested by the figure approaching him with a large teapot. In another version Bowles depicted jeering crowds and a protester urinating into a teapot in the foreground; anachronistically, a vignette of the Boston Tea Party appears in the background on the right. Bowles’s rivals, Robert Sayer and J. Bennett, published their own version of the subject, titled “The Bostonian’s Paying the Excise-Man, or Tarring & Feathering.” Reference to Malcomb, tarred and feathered and forced to down tea, was again made. Liberty’s Phrygian cap lay in the foreground, and an inverted Stamp Act was shown tacked to the trunk of the Liberty Tree. Such rough lampoons were considered justified in light of the offenses committed by Malcomb, who reportedly heckled his captors throughout his ordeal until they in turn threatened to cut off his ears.

In retaliation for the colonists’ acts of sedition, Lord North, who had imposed the Tea Act of 1773, closed Boston’s port in March 1774, and soon thereafter the image of North as a coercive figure became popular. “The able Doctor, or America Swallowing the Bitter Draught” first appeared in the English publication London Magazine in May 1774. Lord North is shown forcing tea down the throat of America, here personified as a Native American woman who attempts to spit the tea violently back into North’s face. Her arms and legs are restrained while the Earl of Sandwich lifts up her garment. Within a month of the print’s publication, other versions appeared, including an Irish engraving for the Hibernian Magazine. The sexual politics associated in this print with the violation of America, both literally and figuratively, are forceful.

Pro-colonial sympathies found their way into American publications as well. In June 1774 an engraving by Paul Revere depicted the same scene for Boston’s Royal American Magazine, except that Revere clearly labeled a pot as containing tea. In a later version of this print, erroneously attributed to Revere, the licentious act of America’s sexual violation was tamed by removing the voyeuristic action of the earl peering up the woman’s skirt. The female figure representing America was translated from a Native American woman into what became an iconic personification of Liberty, still female in gender but with European features. Like the British prints whose format they copied, the iconography of American satirical prints was intended to elicit strong reactions in a time of political and social change.

Such imagery encouraged the colonists to renew their resolve in the nonimportation movement. Domestic production of homespun garments and a refusal to drink tea, smuggled or otherwise, demonstrated defiance. Ladies were encouraged to drink Labrador tea, a brew made from a red-rooted bush found along the rivers in New England. The Boston Post-boy printed the following poem targeted at young women:

Throw aside your Bohea and your Green Hyson Tea,
And all things with a new fashion duty;
Procure a good store of the choice Labrador
For there’ll soon be enough here to suit ye;
These do without fear, and to all you’ll appear
Fair, charming, true, lovely; and clever;
Though the times remain darkish, young men may be sparkish,
And love you much stronger than ever. 13

Recipes for Liberty Tea, another homebrew named appropriately for the cause, were reproduced in American cookbooks well into the nineteenth century. Julia Andrews’s 1859 cookbook, Breakfast, Dinner, and Tea: Viewed Classically, Poetically, and Practically, included the following instructions:

During this [Revolutionary] struggle, “Liberty Tea” was adopted by some persons as a substitute. It was made from the four-leaved loose strife. This plant was pulled up like flax; its stalks, stripped of their leaves, were boiled; the leaves were then poured into an iron kettle, and the liquor of the stalks poured over them. After this process, the leaves were removed to platters and placed in an oven to dry. 14

The boycott of tea by colonial women moved the domestic realm into the political arena, and in a “revaluation of domesticity,” 15 women’s status rose as they participated in the cause of freedom. Boycotts occurred throughout the colonies, as when three hundred Bostonian women promised to “totally abstain from tea.” 16

From the 1760s to the 1780s women became increasingly active politically, publishing their own tracts and penning their commitment to liberty in their diaries. Milcah Martha Moore of Philadelphia wrote in 1768 “That rather than Freedom, we’ll part with our Tea, And well as we love the dear Draught when adry, As American Patriots,—Our Taste we deny.” 17 Nine-year-old Susan Boudinot of New Jersey reportedly curtsied when taken to see the Tory governor William Franklin. Then, when offered a cup of tea, she summarily threw the cup out the window. 18 John Adams’s wife, Abigail, wrote in her diary: “We are like to have plenty of sause. I shall have fat Beaf and pork enough, make butter and cheese enough. If I have neither Sugar, molasses, coffee nor Tea I have no right to complain. I can live without any of them and if what I enjoy I can share with my partner and with Liberty, I can sing o be joyfull and sit down content.” 19 As for her husband, one account relates how John Adams stopped at a tavern and requested a cup of tea. Refused by the landlady, he apparently replied, “I must be weaned, and the sooner, the better.” 20

In addition to such singular acts, numerous collective efforts strengthened the cause. In the South, North Carolina women pledged their abstention from imported tea in growing numbers. They not only “renounced the baneful Herb” but also burned it. 21 Not wanting to be wasteful, the ladies “delayed however until the sacrifice was not considerable, as I do not think any offered above a quarter of a pound.” 22 Perhaps the most well-documented act of defiance in North Carolina occurred in Edenton on October 25, 1774, when fifty-one members of the Ladies’ Patriotic Guild, at the home of Elizabeth King, signed a resolution not to drink any more imported tea or wear British cloth. The agreement was published in the Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser; British artists were quick to lampoon the ladies’ activity. 23 A widely disseminated engraving by Sayer and Bennett from March 1775 depicts the signing of the pact. Buffoonish in character, the women are shown variously engaged in acts of protest. The women in the left background are shown dumping their tea leaves into a gentleman’s hat, while to their right ladies toast the occasion with a ceremonious drink from a punch bowl. The inclusion of a punch bowl may also refer to the passing of the bowl, a male gesture at the elite clubs where men gathered for “intellectual” exchange. 24 By lampooning the actions of women who mimicked the behavior of men, the print calls their respectability into question. As one woman leans forward to sign the document, a small child in the foreground is cared for by a faithful dog, who simultaneously licks the child’s face while urinating on a tea caddy. Here is an implicit criticism of colonial women who have forgone their motherly duties for the sake of liberty, itself a questionable concept, since an African slave serves the women in their quest by bringing additional pens and ink on a tray. Under different circumstances the tray would have held cups of tea for this afternoon gathering.

Boycotting tea and developing homebrews were simply the beginning. While colonial women had once seemed relegated to kitchens and parlors, they now tasted freedom through their political acts and developed their domestic powers of culinary influence and persuasion. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, cookbook authors increasingly included recipes that reflected a growing awareness of national identity. For example, Amelia Simmons, who is credited with writing the first American cookbook, American Cookery (1796), claimed that her recipes were particularly “adapted to this country” through the use of ingredients such as cornmeal in American Indian Pudding, Johnny Cake, or

Hoe Cake, and in her instructions for “pumpkin.” She also offered basic recipes for cakes with names like Plain Cake. However, in a second printing of her book from the same year, she added recipes for Independence Cake, Election Cake, and Federal Pan Cake. Although Simmons, who claimed to be an “American orphan,” actually adapted many of her recipes from English cookbooks, cookery and patriotism overlap in the names of her recipes. Within the domestic sphere her book represents a widespread commitment to the ideals of independence so necessary for the new nation to prosper.

Following the popular response to *American Cookery*, Simmons’s cookbook was reissued under new titles, such as *The New American Cookery or Female Companion By an American Lady* (1805). Although Simmons’s name was omitted, these books are clearly her work, as the recipes were copied verbatim from her 1796 publication. Whether instructed by an “American orphan” or an “American Lady,” women could demonstrate their patriotism and virtuous character by culinary means. The preparation of food allowed women to partake in the democratic experiment, even if their ability to participate in public displays of patriotism, such as dinners and parades, was limited. For instance, recipes for Election Cake date from as early as 1771 in Connecticut. Simmons’s version calls for thirty quarts of flour, ten pounds of butter, fourteen pounds of sugar, twelve pounds of raisins, three dozen eggs, a pint of wine, a quart of brandy, four ounces of cinnamon, four ounces of fine colander [sic] seed, and three ounces of ground alspice [sic].

The majority of recipes implying approval of the democratic process are for celebratory foods—cakes and sweetbreads. Large crowds gathered to celebrate events such as Election Day or the Fourth of July, and recipes for Independence Cake, for example, suggest that the social act of gathering to eat together could be patriotic as well as familial. Simmons’s recipe for Independence Cake calls for twenty pounds of flour, fifteen of sugar, ten of butter, four dozen eggs, a quart of wine and brandy, in addition to nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves, mace, citrons, currants, raisins, and a quart of yeast. This is a lavish and expensive cake, especially if Simmons’s directions for frosting it with loaf sugar and dressing it with gold leaf are followed. Such extravagance suggests the special meaning attached to this cake, not to mention the economic ability to purchase such ingredients.

By the early nineteenth century recipes with patriotic names were plentiful in both published cookery books and handwritten receipt books. In addition to Election Cake, Independence Cake, Election Loaf Cake, Federal Cake, and Democratic Tea Cakes, we find reference to important political figures in President Cake, Washington Cake, Washington Pound Cake, Washington Pie, Franklin Gingerbread, Franklin Buns, Madison Cake, Lafayette Cake, Lafayette Gingerbread, and Jackson Jumbles, to name just a few. In important ways, women’s culinary activity codified and spread the themes of nationalism, engraining them in the public consciousness more powerfully than presidential addresses or ratified documents could. These ideals were not only understood but quite literally consumed.

Significantly, hostesses could demonstrate their patriotism not only in the preparation of food but in its presentation by serving Liberty Tea and slices of Independence Cake on ceramic ware adorned with symbols of American identity and pride. Between roughly 1750 and 1775 tea services imported from China by the British East India Company replicated British taste. After the Revolution, however, when tea was associated with the successful struggle for independence, a new style emerged, spurred by the desire to flaunt symbols of freedom, such as the American eagle, adopted as a national symbol in 1782. Examples from the Early Republic include cups and saucers decorated with emblems of a spread-winged eagle holding an *e Pluribus Unum* banner beneath a circle of fifteen stars. The direct trade between America and China in 1784 coincided with the American desire to create a national style, and such tableware contributed to the developing national iconography. Wealthy consumers often commissioned personalized emblems on hand-painted tea services. A saucer from circa 1795, part of a set given to Martha Washington from a Dutch merchant living in Philadelphia, depicts the rising sun of the Republic and is decorated with a wreath of peace. A banner in Latin translates as “honor and defense come from it,” and a chain link bearing the names of fifteen states is surrounded by a snake swallowing its tail—a symbol of eternity. Such complex iconography on a mere saucer is further accentuated by its association with tea, now a beverage with political status. In this way political messages were conveyed within the private domain.

Ceramics were also imported from England. Just as sympathetic publishers had commissioned prints in support of the colonial cause, so too did English potters produce wares designed specifically for export. Teapots from the 1760s protesting the Stamp Act and others in celebration of its repeal were as much signs of support as products of potential revenue. After the Revolution, ceramic ware from Staffordshire was imported in increasing amounts. English potters produced wares that were more affordable than the hand-painted porcelain from China, which therefore reached a
wider audience. A large percentage of the population could now afford to demonstrate their political affiliation and pride in affordable and useful ways. Since the accoutrements necessary for a full tea service could number as many as eighty pieces, by the early nineteenth century imported ceramics from Staffordshire reached into the millions annually.

Depictions of political figures remained popular, and Staffordshire potters such as Enoch Wood and Sons created a series showing George Washington standing at his own tomb, an image that appeared on teapots as well as waste bowls.36 Foreign allies were also worthy of attention. Lafayette, in particular, graced many a plate destined for American tables as he contemplated Washington’s tomb on plates and Benjamin Franklin’s tomb on saucers and cups. Pitchers commemorating Lafayette’s return to America in 1824 display medallion portraits of Washington and Lafayette flanking the American eagle, with inscriptions such as “Republicans are not always ungrateful.”37 The popularity of such imagery reveals the enthusiasm of the middle class to join and support the growing national fervor.

By the 1830s and 1840s regional interests, along with widening differences in the economic and social status of various populations, resulted in the promotion of local, not just national, identity by individual states, and cookbooks published before the Civil War increasingly offered regional recipes. For example, Miss Leslie’s The Indian Meal Book of 1847 utilized cornmeal as the basis for her recipes for Virginia Griddle Cakes, Kentucky Sweet Cake, Missouri Cakes, and Nantucket Pudding. Some cookbooks were written and published for a specific regional audience. Mrs. Philomelia Hardin’s book, Every Body’s Cook and Receipt Book: but more particularly designed for Buckeyes, Hoosiers, Wolverines, Corncrackers, Suckers, and all Epicures who wish to love with the present times (Cleveland, 1842), would have been of particular interest to those in the Ohio region (thanks to her recipes for Buckeye Pudding, Wolverine Junkets, and Hoosier Cakes). However, many cookbook authors combined recipes from the North, South, East, and West as the market for cookbooks grew. Regional recipes abounded for items such as Vermont Sugar Cake, New England Wedding Cake, Boston Crème Cake, Bridgeport Cake, Hartford Cake, Philadelphia Cream Cakes, Maryland Corncakes, Virginia Cherry Pudding, Alabama Rice Cakes, Charleston Pudding, Missouri Cakes, Ohio Tea Cakes, and Dayton Drop Cakes.

Presidential cakes continued in the tradition of Washington Cakes and Jackson Jumbles, but as new presidents were elected, cookbook authors responded with recipes to praise the administrations of William Henry Harrison, Zachary Taylor, and James Buchanan. Even presidential campaigns capitalized on the production of goods that would reinforce the connection between domestic life and politics. A cookie tin from the 1824 presidential campaign of John Quincy Adams depicts the candidate surrounded by the words “Home—Industry—Peace—Liberty.” In 1841 slices of William Henry Harrison Cake (“5 ½ cups flour, 2 cups butter, 4 eggs, 2 cups molasses, one cup milk, 2 lbs. raisins, tea-spoon saleratus, spice to your taste. Bake it in two middling size forms”) could be served on plates adorned with Harrison’s portrait.38 The Harrison plate, in particular, demonstrates how quickly English potters responded to demand, as Harrison holds the dubious distinction of having served the shortest term in office of any American president (less than one month). As Manifest Destiny spread and the Civil War approached, cookbooks from the 1850s began to include recipes for Railroad Cake, Ratification Cake, and Union Pudding—meant to be shared with friends and family in celebrations both public and private. It is important to note that politically inspired recipes had a limited lifespan. While recipes for Election Cake endured for decades, Madison Cake and Taylor Cake came and went. However, during times of patriotic reinvigoration, such as the Centennial of 1876, cookbook authors once again praised the Washington Cake.

As political tastes changed, so too did decorative tastes, and with the rise of regional recipes in the nineteenth century, dinnerware and tea services were adorned ever more frequently with local scenes from the American landscape.39 Between 1820 and 1850 Staffordshire potters increased their production and export of ceramics decorated with American landscape scenes for the American market. A soup plate made by the firm of William Adams & Sons, part of a dinnerware series called “American Views,” features a scene from central Pennsylvania called “Headwaters of the Juniata.” Perhaps slices of Lancaster gingerbread were served on this pattern, while plates depicting the Catskill Mountain House and platters depicting Lake George appropriately held New York Cup Cakes, Albany Breakfast Cakes, or New York Plum Pudding. The decorative embellishments found on tea tables and in parlors were visual partners of the baked goods they contained. As consumers, women could choose to buy objects that expressed their nationalist beliefs; these items of beauty not only embellished their households but also revealed their political and social awareness.

The language of kitchen culture extended beyond the kitchen. Derogatory political attacks from the 1830s and 1840s referenced political figures and events by means of a
vocabulary linking food, politics, and humor. For instance, detractors of Andrew Jackson’s administration mockingly referred to his cadre of political advisors as a “kitchen cabinet.” Creative engravers gave visual form to that image, disseminating pictures to an audience for whom such references were accessible and humorous. Even William Henry Harrison was represented as a scullery maid chasing his opponents with a buttermilk dasher. This food-and-kitchen-related imagery parodies the gendered space of kitchens to create an association between domesticity and political weakness. In such prints, male political figures are shown in compromised or weak positions (literally and figuratively) as they assume the role of cook or, in some instances, are themselves cooked.

The consumption of food is clearly linked to larger cultural, social, and political issues, and it is easy to find examples into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Cookbooks from 1918 provided recipes for Liberty Cake, War Bread, and Woodrow Wilson Herrnits; World War II-era books offer the Victory Loaf, the Democratic Fricasse, and Chicken à la President. And how can we ridicule the World War I shift in semantics from “victory cabbage,” when in recent years we have witnessed the renaming of French fries to “Freedom fries” in the cafeteria of Congress? The significance ascribed to the naming of food tells us not only that we are what we eat, but that what we eat can reflect popular beliefs, mores, and ideologies. The recipes and artifacts discussed in this article are more than mere remnants of a culinary past. They represent a course of action taken by women of the Revolutionary era and beyond to equate their awareness of the body politic with their knowledge in the kitchen. The naming of dishes demonstrates their desire to be part of a larger historical moment, a gesture broadly understood as a reflection of national identity and political change.

NOTES
This article is part of a larger book, An Acquired Taste: Patriotic Imagery in the Home and the Shaping of a National Culinary Culture, forthcoming from the University Press of New England, in which the domestic environment is addressed more fully than space permits here. I have benefited from research fellowships in support of this project from the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; Wintertthur Museum and Library, Winterthur, Delaware, and the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. I would like to thank the staff and librarians of these institutions for their assistance. Additional gratitude is due to Eleanor Harvey, Kasey Grier, Barbara Clark Smith, Cate Cooney, Jeanne Solensky, and, of course, Phillip Earenfight.

1. “To the Printer of the Pennsylvania Packet,” Dunlap’s Pennsylvania Packet or the General Advertiser, August 8, 1774, 46, supplement 1.
2. Allusions to food and animals as symbolic representations of the colonies are numerous. For a rich discussion of early American symbols, see David Hackett Fischer, Liberty and Freedom (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
6. Major port cities such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston dealt separately with nonimportation issues, as each was suspicious of the others’ motives. See Larabee, The Boston Tea Party, 23.
7. Ibid., 141, Ukens, The Romance of Tea, 39.
9. The word macaroni refers to the term for eighteenth-century British gentlemen who, after returning from the Grand Tour, affected Italian style in their manner of dress. In this print the term is an ironic commentary on Malcomb’s “style” of dress in tar and feathers. The number 45 noted on one of the hats is a reference to issue number 45 of John Wilkes’s anti-Tory newspaper, the North Briton, in which Wilkes challenged the king. See In Pursuit of Independence: An Exhibition of Prints from the Collection of the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum (Winterthur, Delaware: Winterthur Museum, 1976), 16–17.
11. This version incorrectly attributed to Revere, in which the act of brutality has been stripped of its erotic sexual content, implies that such brutality was deemed less offensive when committed against a Native American figure instead of a Europeanized female figure. The cultural notion of “taming the savage” and disregard for cultural identity are clear undertow and here.
18. Ibid., 79.
22. Fowble, Two Centuries of Prints, quoting from Janet Schaw.
23. This well-documented event has been discussed in numerous texts. See, for example, Inez Parker Cumming, “The Edenton Ladies’ Tea-Party,” Georgia Review VIII (1954): 350–354, in addition to Depauw, Founding Mothers, 159 and Norton, Liberty’s Daughters, 163. A large colonial-style cannon marks the site of the signing in Edenton, North Carolina.
24. Although women consumed alcohol in private spaces—unlike men who could imbibe in the gendered spaces of taverns—the punch bowl may contain the remains of their tea and not a more potent beverage. Sharon V. Salinger, Taverns and Drinking in Early America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 77, 223.
Much has been made of the fact that the cover of Simmons’s first edition of American cookery, or, The art of dressing viands, fish, poultry, and vegetables, and the best modes of making puff-pastes, pies, tarts, puddings, custards and preserves, and all kinds of cakes, from the imperial plumb to plain cake, adapted to this country, and all grades of life (Bedford, Va., Applewood Books, 1996, reprint of the 1796 Albany edition), with an introductory essay by Karen Hess.

MUCH has been made of the fact that the cover of Simmons’s first edition gives her name with “An American Orphan” underneath. See, for example, Jan Longene, “Amelia Simmons and the First American Cookbook,” American Bookseller, August 12, 1996, and Janet Theophano, Eat My Words: Reading Women’s Lives Through the Cookbooks They Wrote (New York: Palgrave, 2002). However, further investigation is required. Although Simmons states in her preface that she was left in the care of “virtuous guardians,” it is curious that she would boast of her socially compromised position so readily. By suggesting her low but rising status, she appeals creatively to her target audience—young women of a middling but rising class. I posit that her reference to orphan status was self-conscious and calculated. This argument is considered in depth in my forthcoming book, An Acquired Taste: Patriotic Imagery in the Home and the Shaping of a National Culinary Culture. See also Glynn Ridley, “The First American Cookbook,” Eighteenth Century Life 23, no. 52 (May 1999), 115. Ridley equates Simmons’s use of the word “orphan” to an anti-British relationship between the former parent, Britain, and the orphan child, America.

My thanks to Ellen Shea, Head of Public Services at the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, for this reference to Hartford Election Cake served during the May 1776 election ceremonies.

Food itself sometimes served the cause of patriotism. On January 1, 1802, in celebration of Thomas Jefferson’s election as president, a Baptist minister, John Leland, presented Jefferson with a widely publicized “mammoth cheese.” Made from nine hundred cows milked by Leland’s congregation in Cheshire, Massachusetts, the giant 1,215-pound Cheddar was loaded onto a wagon in the fall of 1801, taken by boat as far as Baltimore, and delivered by wagon to the President’s house while crowds gathered and cheered along the way. The cheese was inscribed with the phrase, “the Greatest Cheese in America for the Greatest Man in America,” but after one year, only sixty pounds had been consumed, and the cheese slowly decomposed. It is rumored that the remains were ultimately dumped into the Potomac River. A large wheel of cheese was apparently considered an appropriate presidential gift, since Andrew Jackson also received a huge Cheddar from well-wishers in 1829. For a wonderful discussion of the Mammoth Cheese, see Jeffrey Pasley’s chapter, “The Cheese and the Words,” in Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic, eds. Jeffrey Pasley, Andrew Robertson, and David Waldstreicher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

8. See also Amelia Simmons, American cookery, or, The art of dressing viands, fish, poultry, and vegetables, and the best modes of making puff-pastes, pies, tarts, puddings, custards and preserves, and all kinds of cakes, from the imperial plumb to plain cake, adapted to this country, and all grades of life (Bedford, Va., Applewood Books, 1996, reprint of the 1796 Albany edition), with an introductory essay by Karen Hess.

Much has been made of the fact that the cover of Simmons’s first edition gives her name with “An American Orphan” underneath. See, for example, Jan Longene, “Amelia Simmons and the First American Cookbook,” American Bookseller, August 12, 1996, and Janet Theophano, Eat My Words: Reading Women’s Lives Through the Cookbooks They Wrote (New York: Palgrave, 2002). However, further investigation is required. Although Simmons states in her preface that she was left in the care of “virtuous guardians,” it is curious that she would boast of her socially compromised position so readily. By suggesting her low but rising status, she appeals creatively to her target audience—young women of a middling but rising class. I posit that her reference to orphan status was self-conscious and calculated. This argument is considered in depth in my forthcoming book, An Acquired Taste: Patriotic Imagery in the Home and the Shaping of a National Culinary Culture. See also Glynn Ridley, “The First American Cookbook,” Eighteenth Century Life 23, no. 52 (May 1999), 115. Ridley equates Simmons’s use of the word “orphan” to an anti-British relationship between the former parent, Britain, and the orphan child, America.


26. See also Amelia Simmons, American cookery, or, The art of dressing viands, fish, poultry, and vegetables, and the best modes of making puff-pastes, pies, tarts, puddings, custards and preserves, and all kinds of cakes, from the imperial plumb to plain cake, adapted to this country, and all grades of life (Bedford, Va., Applewood Books, 1996, reprint of the 1796 Albany edition), with an introductory essay by Karen Hess.

27. Much has been made of the fact that the cover of Simmons’s first edition gives her name with “An American Orphan” underneath. See, for example, Jan Longene, “Amelia Simmons and the First American Cookbook,” American Bookseller, August 12, 1996, and Janet Theophano, Eat My Words: Reading Women’s Lives Through the Cookbooks They Wrote (New York: Palgrave, 2002). However, further investigation is required. Although Simmons states in her preface that she was left in the care of “virtuous guardians,” it is curious that she would boast of her socially compromised position so readily. By suggesting her low but rising status, she appeals creatively to her target audience—young women of a middling but rising class. I posit that her reference to orphan status was self-conscious and calculated. This argument is considered in depth in my forthcoming book, An Acquired Taste: Patriotic Imagery in the Home and the Shaping of a National Culinary Culture. See also Glynn Ridley, “The First American Cookbook,” Eighteenth Century Life 23, no. 52 (May 1999), 115. Ridley equates Simmons’s use of the word “orphan” to an anti-British relationship between the former parent, Britain, and the orphan child, America.

28. My thanks to Ellen Shea, Head of Public Services at the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, for this reference to Hartford Election Cake served during the May 1776 election ceremonies.

29. Food itself sometimes served the cause of patriotism. On January 1, 1802, in celebration of Thomas Jefferson’s election as president, a Baptist minister, John Leland, presented Jefferson with a widely publicized “mammoth cheese.” Made from nine hundred cows milked by Leland’s congregation in Cheshire, Massachusetts, the giant 1,215-pound Cheddar was loaded onto a wagon in the fall of 1801, taken by boat as far as Baltimore, and delivered by wagon to the President’s house while crowds gathered and cheered along the way. The cheese was inscribed with the phrase, “the Greatest Cheese in America for the Greatest Man in America,” but after one year, only sixty pounds had been consumed, and the cheese slowly decomposed. It is rumored that the remains were ultimately dumped into the Potomac River. A large wheel of cheese was apparently considered an appropriate presidential gift, since Andrew Jackson also received a huge Cheddar from well-wishers in 1829. For a wonderful discussion of the Mammoth Cheese, see Jeffrey Pasley’s chapter, “The Cheese and the Words,” in Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic, eds. Jeffrey Pasley, Andrew Robertson, and David Waldstreicher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

29. Food itself sometimes served the cause of patriotism. On January 1, 1802, in celebration of Thomas Jefferson’s election as president, a Baptist minister, John Leland, presented Jefferson with a widely publicized “mammoth cheese.” Made from nine hundred cows milked by Leland’s congregation in Cheshire, Massachusetts, the giant 1,215-pound Cheddar was loaded onto a wagon in the fall of 1801, taken by boat as far as Baltimore, and delivered by wagon to the President’s house while crowds gathered and cheered along the way. The cheese was inscribed with the phrase, “the Greatest Cheese in America for the Greatest Man in America,” but after one year, only sixty pounds had been consumed, and the cheese slowly decomposed. It is rumored that the remains were ultimately dumped into the Potomac River. A large wheel of cheese was apparently considered an appropriate presidential gift, since Andrew Jackson also received a huge Cheddar from well-wishers in 1829. For a wonderful discussion of the Mammoth Cheese, see Jeffrey Pasley’s chapter, “The Cheese and the Words,” in Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic, eds. Jeffrey Pasley, Andrew Robertson, and David Waldstreicher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).