
From the many herb cookbooks, magazine articles and suggestions of food editors there can be no doubt that herbs are again an important part of American cooking. Among the releases this year is a wide range of subjects illustrating the many facets of herbs. Among the books are those which deal with legends and early witchcraft uses of herbs, a book which may be used as a handbook for the naturalist in sustaining himself on native plants, and books on gourmet cooking to please the most discriminating cooks. And now a recently released book, Early American Herb Recipes, is a real Americana item. Over five hundred authentic herb recipes are given, reproduced as they appeared in early cookbooks such as — The Frugal American Housewife, Countrie Farme, The Closet Opened, Delights for Ladies and many others which are now collectors' items. These books are a part of the author's extensive collection of early cookbooks.

Early American Herb Recipes includes articles on many more subjects than the title implies. Chapter I deals with the early historical background of "Herb Gardens and Borders." Chapter II is a comprehensive account of the "Medicinal Uses of Herbs," and many early cures are discussed, such as Governor John Winthrop's cure for ague and the early family "doctor" books, such as Joseph Taylor's Nature the best physician (1818). A glossary of old Medicinal Herbs, the collection of Materia Medica and a list of diseases and remedial herbs are all most illuminating. Chapter III, "Toiletries, Perfumes and Pomatum," is a section which shows the ingenuity and skill of the early housewife in supplying the varied needs of her family. From materials at hand she made hair tonics, deodorizers, moth preventives, wig dressings and soap. "Vinegar of the Four Thieves" is a blend highly recommended for refreshing the sick room or sprinkled about the house in damp weather.

Chapter IV is titled "Culinary Uses of Herbs." This chapter covers all phases of food and its preparation by the early colonists, food mostly raised "on the place," since the first market was in New Amsterdam in the early 1700's. There is a fine list of recipes covering meats, soups, pickling, salads (how to raise your own greens quickly), "Liqueurs and Cordials." In all a generous use of herbs was included and by no means were they averse to the use of liqueurs to flavor their food. From The Closet Opened we have:
Beef Stew: Take very good Beef, and slice it very thin; and beat it with the back of a Knife [or beetle]; Put it to the gravy of some meat, and some wine or strong broth, sweet-herbs a quantity, let it stew till it be very tender; season it to your liking; and varnish [garnish] your dish with Marygold-flowers or Barberries. 1669.

And for extra good measure Chapter V has many items of interest and use, such as how to concoct a furniture polish, "which will leave a good gloss and not rub off." For the modern hostess who wishes to serve something delicate and different, there are candied flowers, Rose Drops, Calendula Conserves or Tansy Pudding. Many more intriguing recipes are given, to challenge our skill and vary our menus.

The author, Dr. Alice Cooke Brown, is a professor of American History at Green Mountain College in Poulney, Vermont. Her husband, John Hull Brown, compiler of a companion volume, Early American Beverages, is a nationally known portrait painter, writer and illustrator of children's books.

Illustrations are facsimile reproductions of the engravings that appeared in 1849 in Dr. W. Beach's The Family Physician.

Early American Herb Recipes is much more than a collection of illustrations and herb recipes. It affords a fine historical account of our early colonial housewife's duties and way of life. We can read it with interest, pleasure and benefit.

Valencia, Pennsylvania  

SIDNEY DUERR


As recently as a mere half century ago, had it been published then, this book doubtless would have been accepted as a canonical demonstration of the soundness and sanctity of the notion that historical materialism with all its involvements of Marxist dialectics explains the American Revolution. But now, in an era when socialism has been tried out and rejected in favor of militant capitalist nationalism, in the United States as well as in the Soviet Union, the experienced reader probably will be comfortably skeptical of the dogma of pounds and