



# Kentucky's Cookbook Heritage: Two Hundred Years of Southern Cuisine and Culture

*John van Willigen*

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Food is a significant part of our daily lives and can be one of the most telling records of a time and place. Our meals -- from what we eat, to how we prepare it, to how we consume it -- illuminate our culture and history. As a result, cookbooks present a unique opportunity to analyze changing foodways and can yield surprising discoveries about society's tastes and priorities.

In *Kentucky's Cookbook Heritage*, John van Willigen explores the state's history through its changing food culture, beginning with Lettice Bryan's *The Kentucky Housewife* (originally published in 1839). Considered one of the earliest regional cookbooks, *The Kentucky Housewife* includes pre--Civil War recipes intended for use by a household staff instead of an individual cook, along with instructions for serving the family. Van Willigen also shares the story of the original Aunt Jemima -- the advertising persona of Nancy Green, born in Montgomery County, Kentucky -- who was one of many African American voices in Kentucky culinary history.

*Kentucky's Cookbook Heritage* is a journey through the history of the commonwealth, showcasing the shifting priorities and innovations of the times. Analyzing the historical importance of a wide range of publications, from the nonprofit and charity cookbooks that flourished at the end of the twentieth century to the contemporary cookbook that emphasizes local ingredients, van Willigen provides a valuable perspective on the state's social history.

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