



# Manuscript Cookbooks Survey

## Building A Research Portal for Manuscript Cookbooks and Kitchen Artifacts

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[manuscriptcookbookssurvey.com](http://manuscriptcookbookssurvey.com)

### Team

- Szilvia Szmuk-Tanenbaum, Director
- Stephen Schmidt, Principal Researcher and Writer, Culinary Historian
- William Keogan, Reference Librarian
- Alyse Hennig, Cataloger

### Project Origin

The Manuscript Cookbooks Survey began with a 2011 conversation between Szilvia Szmuk-Tanenbaum, a retired university librarian, and Stephen Schmidt, a food professional and culinary historian. Szilvia and Steve realized it was extremely difficult to locate manuscript cookbooks in public and academic libraries, and even more so at historical sites and societies. What could be done about this?

They decided to create an **online database** of all manuscript cookbooks held in U.S. public institutions, which would be freely available to all researchers. In order to reach a wider audience, the database would be embedded in a comprehensive website that included a **blog on historical cooking**, **modern adaptations of historical recipes**, and a **glossary of historical culinary terms**. A separate **database of kitchen artifacts** in use at the time the cookbooks were written was also added.

### What to Include?

- **English-language** manuscript cookbooks held in U.S. public institutions;
- which contain a substantial body of **culinary recipes**—as opposed to recipes for household products and home remedies;
- and only books begun by the year **1865**, the effective end point of the long transition from hearth cooking to stove cooking—and from America's original English-based cuisine to a more multicultural, distinctively American cuisine.

### Participating Institutions

Collections of manuscript cookbooks and historical kitchen artifacts from **43 + libraries, archives, museums, historical societies, and historic sites** have been added to the Manuscript Cookbook Survey website, with the assistance of many generous librarians, archivists, and curators. **Any institution that has a collection they would like to include is welcome to contact the project team.**

### New Features

The newest version of the website features improved, faceted browsing, a map of objects (by location of origin), a timeline, and hundreds of kitchen artifacts with photographs whenever available.



### Challenges

- Manuscript cookbooks rarely have titles;
- their author(s) are usually unknown;
- inscriptions, which are rare, often reflect only one of many authors;
- the cookbooks were often compiled over many decades;
- recipes were typically copied from published recipe books or from the recipes shared by family and friends;
- many recipes resist being dated or classified by type;
- recipes were sometimes recorded in diaries, commonplace books, account books, or penmanship exercise books;
- the level of cataloging and description varies widely among institutions;
- may be found in **library MARC records**, within an **archival finding aid**, or entirely **uncataloged** but identified by a librarian;
- of those cataloged items, few are digitized for wider access.

### Manuscript Origins



A page from an 18<sup>th</sup> c. manuscript cookbook, and an historical kitchen artifact, a one-burner stove used in the late 18<sup>th</sup> – early 19<sup>th</sup> c.



### Future

The goal is to keep adding manuscript cookbooks (estimated at 2,000+) and kitchen artifacts from as many U.S. institutions as we can find. Perhaps then we will be able to give more attention to manuscripts whose descriptions are minimal. As more manuscripts are digitized or transcribed, it may even be possible, someday, to index these volumes at the recipe level. We also hope to see increased scholarly output from the now more discoverable items in the Manuscript Cookbooks Survey database.