

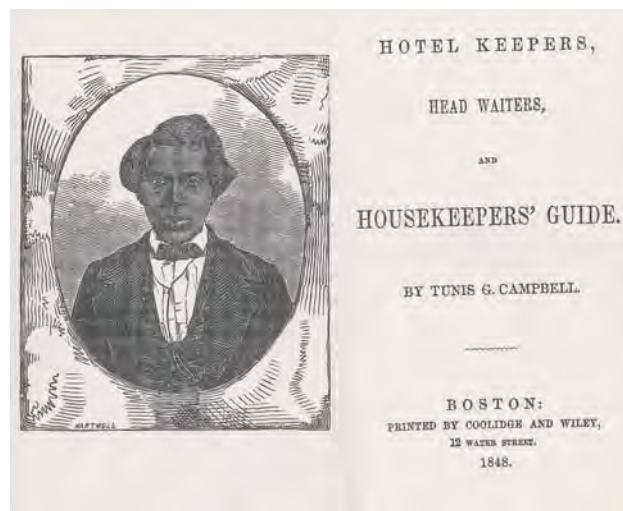
Early Black-Authored American Cookbooks

FROM THE INVENTION OF the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century to the beginning of the third millennium, books on and about food and drink have appeared in great abundance and from all corners of the world. From agriculture handbooks to etiquette guides, from cookbooks to winemaking manuals written by philosophers, artists, writers, scholars, professional chefs, charlatans, celebrities, amateurs, and unknown housewives—the subject of food and our relationship to it has been of enduring interest.

Knowledge of the early literature is fundamental to any study of culinary history. From time to time in this column we intend to introduce and discuss older printed works, particularly those well known in title but infrequently examined because of rarity; those whose culinary relevance is little recognized; and on occasion, as in the present case, works totally unknown.

Our subject now is nineteenth-century Black-authored American culinary works. The generally accepted wisdom is that only three were published before 1900.¹ We can now add a fourth. The first book of *any* kind by a Black American printed by a commercial publisher in America was one of major gastronomic importance and influence. *The House Servant's Directory* by Robert Roberts was first published in Boston by Monroe & Francis in 1827, with two additional printings in 1828 and 1843. It is generally known in the culinary literature, cited in major gastronomic bibliographies, and available in facsimile editions.

Roberts was butler in the household of the Honorable Christopher Gore, Senator and Governor of Massachusetts. He was first employed there in 1825, having previously served in several other notable New England households. His book is remarkable for several reasons. It offers one of the most detailed discussions on the proper management of a fine, upper-class New England household. It gives advice to servants on how to behave, how to perform their work, and how to utilize the variety of new household utensils and equipment then becoming increasingly available. Roberts comments on the responsibilities of the employer but is generally more interested in teaching other servants how to act. His work is one of the first to help encourage young Black men to become the finest of professional house servants. He



Frontispiece and title page of Tunis Campbell's *Hotel Keepers, Head Waiters, and Housekeepers' Guide*.

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offers specific and detailed suggestions to them to insure their advancement and tenure. In addition to his influence on Black employment patterns, Roberts was active in various organizations promoting Black interests.

Among dozens of topics, the book offers advice and instruction on the benefit to servants of early rising, and on how to clean boots, shoes, silver and plated articles, decanters, lamps, steel grates, mahogany furniture, tea and coffee urns, and gentlemen's hats. There are sections on regulations for the dinner table, laying the cloth, setting out the sideboard, and "placing on the dessert." Household recipes (receipts) are given for furniture oil, varnish, stoveblack, mastic for mending China and glass, and a shampoo (*A Wash for the Hair Most Superb*) that utilizes egg yolks, rum, and rose water. The culinary recipes include *Currant Jam*, *Raspberry Vinegar*, *A Cod's Head*, *A Haunch of Venison*, and *A Leg of Mutton*. In addition, there are instructions for how to market, how to carve, and how to preserve.

One indication of the influence of *The House Servant's Directory* is its inclusion as one of the handful of cookbooks in the library at the Hermitage, President Andrew Jackson's home in Tennessee. It shared honors with Mary Randolph's *The Virginia Housewife*, the first southern cookbook.

Of the books that followed, Tunis Campbell's *Hotel Keepers, Head Waiters and Housekeepers' Guide* (1848) is least

known because of its rarity. The author is better known to American historians for his non-culinary contributions.² Campbell was born in New Jersey in the early nineteenth century. His apparent talents prompted White friends of the family to help him enroll in an Episcopal school in Babylon, New York, which he attended, as the only Black child, until he was eighteen. He was being trained for missionary work in Liberia, but became increasingly opposed to the planned removal of Blacks from America to Africa, “having long since determined to plant our trees on American soil.” He further determined to spend the remainder of his life trying to lift his race to equal participation in American society. Prior to the Civil War, he became a social worker, a reformer, an abolitionist, and an active participant in anti-slavery causes. During this time (1832–1845) he worked in New York as a hotel steward, the last three years as the principal waiter at the Howard Hotel. Then, for an undetermined period, he worked at the Adams House in Boston. While there he wrote his *Guide*, one of the earliest manuals written by any American on the supervision and management of first-class restaurants and hotel dining rooms.

Even before the Civil War ended, Campbell began his life’s work in rehabilitation and reconstruction, first in South Carolina, then in Georgia, where his efforts were to have a lasting impact on the history of race relations in that state. In coastal Georgia, from the end of the Civil War until his downfall—brought about by the resurgent reactionary White Power movement—Campbell forged a political machine that controlled county elections for years. He served in a number of offices, including the Georgia State Senate. Judged to have become too powerful, at the age of sixty-four he was charged with political corruption, removed from his various offices, and sentenced to Georgia’s hire-out convict labor program, all over the protests of President Ulysses S. Grant and others. However, his labor bore fruit for a time as the Black political machine he helped develop continued to play a major role in Georgia politics until 1907, when the General Assembly of the state disenfranchised Blacks and thereby destroyed the remnants of his work. Campbell left Georgia in 1882; his life thereafter remains veiled in obscurity. He died in Boston in 1891.

Campbell’s book is evocative of a military manual. Detailed, exacting instructions for the dining table service brigade are given and illustrated in a series of ten plates:

Select men of good appearance, as near of a height as possible. Let the tallest be placed on the right. When they are formed in a line, divide them at every fifth man, and let your selection be made as before stated for lieutenants, or file leaders. Then make all mark the time, by bringing the left foot to the right heel. At the word “mark time,” each man will begin; and at the word “halt,” each will stop at once. Then make them divide into squads, by the file-leader placing himself by the side of the last man of his squad, the first man standing fast, and marching round until he comes in front of the last man, who faces to the front also, which will form the men into a column, four deep. Then make them mark the time and march in column by the right flank and the left, to teach them how to keep the ranks; after which halt the columns and drill the squads. ...Waiting-men should be drilled every day, except Saturday and Sunday. Saturday should be used as a general cleaning day; and Sunday we should, if possible, go to church.

It is a remarkable document. As careful as Campbell is to instruct and train his waiters for their responsibility, he is equally voluble in telling the employers that *they* also have a responsibility to treat their help with respect and dignity.

The cooking recipes in the volume include *Corn Bread*, *Buckwheat Pancakes*, *Brown Celery Sauce*, *Lobster Sauce*, *Roasted Eel*, *Wild Duck*, *Wigeons or Teal*, *Larks*, *Sweetbreads and Kidneys*; *Soups of Sorrel*, *Asparagus*, *Craw-fish*, and *Turnip*; *Tarts of Almond*, *Apple*, *Pear*, *Lemon*, and *Orange*; *Artichoke Pie*, *Apple Dumplings*, and *A Trifle*. This book deserves to be better known, but only a few copies of the original exist, and at this time there is no facsimile in print.

The third book of the century, Abby Fisher’s *What Mrs. Fisher Knows About Old Southern Cooking*, was printed in San Francisco by the Women’s Co-operative Printing Office in 1881. It is perhaps the earliest California culinary imprint of importance beyond the confines of the state. Because of its scarcity it had been little known, but several recent facsimiles have made the book more widely available.

Mrs. Fisher, an ex-slave, could neither read nor write. Her collection of recipes, with origins in the plantation

kitchens of the pre-Civil War South, was published with the assistance of named benefactors in San Francisco and Oakland. Born in South Carolina, Mrs. Fisher was to achieve fame in San Francisco, where she had a business of pickles and preserves manufacture. Her cookery was awarded medals and diplomas at several California fairs, including two medals in San Francisco (1880) for “best pickles and sauces and best assortment of jellies and preserves.”

This book is the simplest of the three. There is a one-page Preface and Apology, in which Mrs. Fisher discusses her life and thanks the friends who helped her publish the book and then, the heart of the matter—the fine old southern recipes. These include *Maryland Beaten Biscuits*, *Fried Chicken*, *Oyster Gumbo Soup*, *Ochra Gumbo*, *Creole Chow-Chow*, *Boiled Turkey*, and *Jumberlie—A Creole Dish*.

We can now add a fourth book to this survey, one heretofore unknown: Malinda Russell’s *A Domestic Cook Book: Containing a Careful Selection of Useful Receipts for the Kitchen*. To our knowledge this is the earliest unequivocally Black-authored American work devoted solely to cookery. It was published by the author and printed at the “True Northerner” Office in Paw Paw, Michigan, in 1866. We recently acquired our copy and find that it is a title unrecorded in culinary and other compilations consulted.

There is more we hope to learn about Malinda Russell and her cookbook beyond what our research to date has provided. For now, the printed work itself offers a fascinating first-person chronicle of the life of a free woman of color in mid-nineteenth-century America. Malinda Russell was born and raised in Washington and Green Counties, eastern Tennessee. Her mother was a member of one of the first families set free by a Mr. Noddie of Virginia. “My mother being born after the emancipation of my grandmother, her children are by law free.”

When Russell was nineteen, she set out with others for Liberia, but her money was stolen by a member of the party, forcing her to remain in Lynchburg, Virginia. There she began working as a cook and companion, traveling with ladies as a nurse. While in Virginia, she married a man named Anderson Vaughan, who lived for only four years. She was called by her maiden name for the remainder of her life. At the time of writing *A Domestic Cook Book*, 1866, she was still a widow with one child, a son who was crippled. In Virginia she also kept a washhouse, advertising in a local newspaper:

Malinda Vaughan, Fashionable laundress, would respectfully inform the ladies and gentlemen of Abingdon, that she is prepared to wash and iron every description of clothing in the neatest and most satisfactory

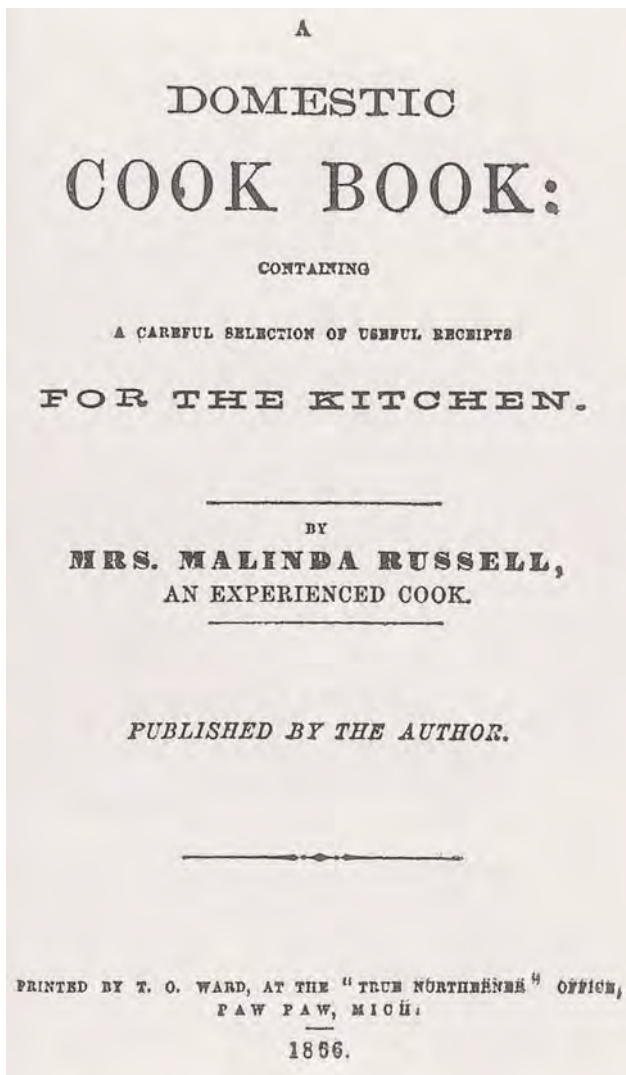
manner. Every article washed by her, she guarantees shall pass unscathed through the severest ordeal of inspection, without the remotest danger of condemnation. She can conscientiously boast of a proficiency in her business, and all clothing committed to her charge shall be neatly executed and well taken care of. She hopes to receive, as she shall exert herself to deserve, a sufficiency of patronage to insure her a permanent location. Her charges shall correspond with the times.

At some point after the death of her husband, Russell returned to Tennessee and kept a boarding house on Chuckey Mountain, Cold Springs, for three years. She informs us that her visitors and boarders were from almost every state of the Union who came to the Springs for their health. After leaving the boarding house, she kept a pastry shop for six years and “by hard labor and economy, saved a considerable sum of money for the support of myself and son, which was taken from me on the 16th of January 1864, by a guerrilla party, who threatened my life if I revealed who they were. Under those circumstances, we were obliged to leave home, following a flag of truce out of the Southern borders, being attacked several times by the enemy.”

Yes, for the second time in Russell’s life a robbery forced a change in her existence. At this point, “hearing that Michigan was the Garden of the west,” she moved to Paw Paw “for the present, until peace is restored, when I think of returning to Greenville, Tennessee, to try and recover at least a part of my property.”

Russell indicates that she has published this cookbook in hopes of raising enough money to return to Tennessee. She mentions that she has been employed as a cook for the last twenty years in the first families of Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, and Kentucky. She explains that she was compelled to leave the South because of her Union principles. Now advanced in age, she recalls that she learned her trade from Fanny Steward, a colored cook of Virginia, and that she cooks after the plan of the “Virginia Housewife.”

Interesting though not surprising, considering Russell’s diverse background, the recipes in the book are not distinctly southern. They do not appear to be taken from Mary Randolph’s *Virginia Housewife*, which was the standard of its day. I have been unable to uncover any information on Fanny Steward, the cook from whom Russell claims she learned her trade. Most of the recipes could come from any part of the contemporary eastern United States, although there are a few southern touches: *Sweet Potato Baked Pudding*, *Sweet Potato Slice Pie*, *Fricassed Catfish*. Most recipes are for sweets, desserts, and baked items. A few of the more interesting recipes are *Sally Dough Cake*, *Elizabeth Lemon Cake*, *Fried Rice Cakes*, *Conell Rising* (a bread),



Title page of Malinda Russell's *A Domestic Cook Book*.

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White Sugar Crackers, Dried Ripe Mulberries, Carvies' Plum Pudding (using Boston Crackers), and *Burst-up Rice*.

Clearly, this singular work provokes additional inquiry into the life of Malinda Russell, particularly following the publication of her cookbook in 1866. I suspect there are additional early Black-authored cookbooks awaiting discovery and recognition. I would be pleased to hear from readers who can add to our list. ☺

BOOKS DISCUSSED

Roberts, Robert. *The House Servant's Directory*. Boston: Monroe & Francis, 1827.

Campbell, Tunis G. *Hotel, Head Waiters & Housekeepers' Guide*. Boston: Coolidge and Wiley, 1848.

Fisher, Mrs. Abby. *What Mrs. Fisher Knows About Old Southern Cooking*. San Francisco: Women's Co-operative Printing Office, 1881.

Russell, Mrs. Malinda. *A Domestic Cook Book: Containing a Careful Selection of Useful Receipts for the Kitchen*. Paw Paw, Michigan: Printed by T.G. Ward, at the "True Northerner" Office, 1866.

NOTES

1. In a recent publication, Doris Witt's *Black Hunger: Food and the Politics of U.S. Identity* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), the author suggests that there might be another book eligible for inclusion in this list. E.T. Glover's *The Warm Springs Receipt Book* was published in Richmond, Virginia, in 1897. There have been questions raised as to the race and gender of the author of this work. After numerous discussions with local historians in Bath County, Virginia (where Warm Springs is located), and others, I conclude that there is no clear evidence of the author's race or gender.

2. Russell Duncan, *Freedom's Shore: Tunis Campbell and the Georgia Freedman* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1986). This book offers the fullest investigation of Campbell's life and contributions.

Recipes from Malinda Russell

ROSE CAKE

Three-fourths lb sugar, half lb butter. 3-4ths lb flour, whites of fifteen eggs beaten to a froth; cream the sugar and butter together; add the flour and whites of eggs, half gill brandy, flavor with lemon; one tablespoon cochineal with a small piece of alum tied in a bag soaked in warm water one hour. Grease paper your pan, spread a layer of dough; dip your bag in a solution of warm soda water, then squeeze the bag over the dough; add another laying of dough and cochineal alternately; bake with moderate heat.

MINCE PIES

Five lbs beef, four lbs suet, five lbs raisins, five lbs sugar, one lb citron, eight crackers pounded fine, two lemons chopped fine, three pints cider, one quart molasses, one quart wine, one quart brandy, one gill rose water, one quince boiled and chopped, two tablespoons salt, eight teaspoons cloves, thirteen do. cinnamon, four do. mace; grate nutmeg on the top of the pie; add bits of sugar before baking. Mix molasses, crackers, cider and spice together, heat to almost a scald, then mix it with the remainder of the ingredients. Mix the sugar with the wine. If you like them richer, add fruits, sugar and spice.

ONION CUSTARD

Pare and boil twelve large onions; mash when cooked soft, and strain through a sieve; stir in, while hot, 1-4th of a lb of butter; beat half a lb sugar with the yolks [*sic*] of six eggs, stir into the sugar three tablespoons flour, one pint rich cream; stir all together until smooth; one tablespoon cinnamon, half spoon cloves; stir well; beat the whites of the eggs, and stir it in last; paste your pans with rich pastry; bake in a quick oven.

FRICASSED CATFISH

Boil in water with a little salt until done, then drain off the water, and turn over the fish rich cream, butter, pepper, and a little flour, and simmer slowly.