



# Colonial Virginia's Cooking Dynasty

*Katharine E. Harbury*

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More diverse in scope than their modern counterparts, the cookbooks of colonial and antebellum America contained recipes, medical cures, and housekeeping information that women of that time deemed necessary for family life. The keepers of these "domestic" manuals recorded recipes and cures for their own use and the use of friends, daughters, and extended families. Because they reflect a range of daily living practices, such manuscript cookbooks serve as important social history documents. In *Colonial Virginia's Cooking Dynasty*, Katharine E. Harbury brings to light two cookbooks from eighteenth-century Virginia. Notable for their early dates and historical significance, these manuals afford previously unavailable insights into lifestyles and foodways during the evolution of Chesapeake society. One cookbook is an anonymous work dating from 1700; the other is the 1739-1743 cookbook of Jane Bolling Randolph, a descendant of Pocahontas and John Rolfe. In addition to her textual analysis that establishes the relationship between these two early manuscripts, Harbury links them to the 1824 classic *The Virginia House-wife* by Mary Randolph. Harbury provides an introduction to and analysis of the manuals. She compares them with others from the period, offers new insight into "old myths" of southern foodways, and contrasts three generations of culinary practice. She explains how these two cookbooks shed light on the practices of upper-class colonial society and how the recipe collections changed over time. Harbury finds that while colonial cooks did continue British culinary traditions, these manuals demonstrate that the emergence of Virginia foodways had begun as early as 1700.

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