Preserving the Culinary History of Virginia:
An Archivist’s Perspective

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Special Collections at Virginia Tech

- Houses Rare Books, Manuscripts, and University Archives
- Currently collecting materials in 6 major areas: Civil War, Local History, IAWA, Science/Technology, Speculative Fiction, and of course, Culinary History
- More than 47,000 publications and 1,800 manuscript collections
“Management is an art that may be acquired by every woman of good sense and tolerable memory.”

Introduction to 
The Virginia Housewife: or, Methodical Cook, 1820
Origins of the Collection

+ Ann Hertzler Children’s Literature and Nutrition Collection (2006-present)
+ Purchases (c.2000-present)
+ Donations (1999-present)

= Culinary History Collection at Special Collections
About the Culinary History Collection

• Currently contains more than 3,700 volumes
• 2,400+ of these are housed in Special Collections
• Also contains two dozen manuscript collections
  – Handwritten receipt (recipe) and home remedy books, household account ledgers, faculty papers, and product pamphlets/publications
A pocket-companion, containing things necessary to be known by all that values their health and happiness: being a plain way of nature's own prescribing, to cure most diseases in men, women and children, by kitchen-physick only. To which is added, an account how a man may live well and plentifully for two-pence a day

by Thomas Tryon, 1692 (Oldest publication in the collection—and the longest title!)
Collection Focus

- Recently revisited our **Collection Development** policy, originally created in 1999.
- **Emphasis on:**
  - Regional cookbooks and materials from dieticians, extension/home demonstration agents, chefs
  - Community cookbooks (Virginia and Appalachia)
  - Brand-name cookbooks and product publications
  - Menus, nutrition education, and kitchen planning
  - Books documenting social, domestic, and economic history; changes in food behavior; food-related processing and technology
  - Faculty papers
  - Manuscript receipt/recipe books
Donations

- Form the majority of the collection to date
- Method of acquisition the department is dependent upon
- Mostly books, but this is changing as word of the collection is spreading
- “Wish list” for the collection
Purchases

• No dedicated fund or endowment for general culinary materials in Special Collections

• Endowment for Children’s Literature and Nutrition Collection materials

• In spite of that, we have increased purchasing of culinary materials in the last 18 months
“Twenty years ago everybody ate pie and nearly everybody had dyspepsia. Jell-O had not been heard of. Now there is scarcely a housewife in America who does not make and serve Jell-O desserts, and stomach-ache is not so common as it used to be.”

Jell-O and the Kewpies: America’s Most Famous Dessert, 1915
Access

- Department Goals:
  - Getting materials into the hands of researchers
  - Introducing K-12 students to primary sources as soon as possible
  - Meeting the demand for 24/7 access to materials to the extent possible
  - Preserving fragile and rare materials for the future
Access

- Catalog Records
  - Books
  - Manuscripts
- Finding Aids
  - Posting collection guides for manuscript items/collections on a consortium website
  - Virginia Heritage project: [http://ead.lib.virgina.edu](http://ead.lib.virgina.edu)
  - Culinary Pamphlet Collection, Ms2011-002
Preservation

• What we can do
  – Keeping items out of circulation
  – Digitizing Manuscripts
    • Ms2008-023
    • Ms2008-024
  – Digitizing Books
    • Recipes from Old Virginia (1946)
    • Virginia Cookery Book (1884)
  – Conservation
“I would say to housewives, be not daunted by one failure, nor by twenty. Resolve that you will have good bread, and never cease striving after this result until you have effected it. If persons without brains can accomplish this, why cannot you?”

Housekeeping in Old Virginia, c.1879
Reference

• General Inquiries

• Recent Projects
  – Approaches to children’s nutrition through cookbooks in the mid-20th century
  – Preservation methodologies (pickling)

• The Future?
  – Getting to the departments and classes!
Potential Research Uses

• Changing approaches to cooking, nutrition, and health
• Depictions and expectations of gender roles
• History of food processes and technologies
• Relationships between food and economy
Outreach

• Why?
  – Under-utilized collection with great potential
  – We aren’t collecting for ourselves!

• How?
  – Exhibits
  – Special Events
  – In the Classroom/On Tours
Questions?

Contact Info

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