

# Preface

The year was 1989. I had rented a corner of shared office space in a building a block west of the Campbell House Museum. I had never visited the Campbell House before, which at the time was unusual considering I had been interpreting historic foodways at most of the historic sites within St. Louis City and County since 1978. It was an oversight I corrected with a walk down Locust Street and a knock on the Campbell House door.

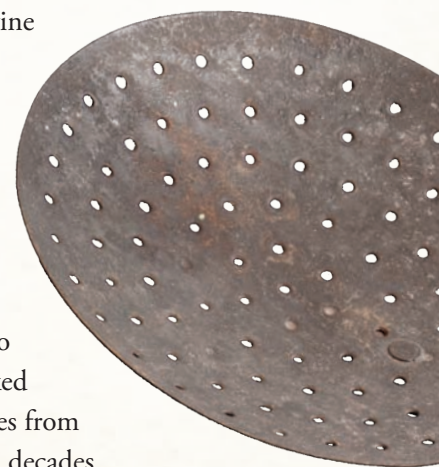
Campbell House Curator Theron Ware opened the door and invited me inside. Once inside I was awestruck. Little did I realize at that time my work as a food historian would be forever changed—for if there could have been an equivalent of a Disneyland for food historians and foodie/history buffs I had found it.

I discovered Campbell House was a glittering jewel. Its gilt-trimmed parlor remained elegantly appointed. The dining room remains formally set in anticipation of a magnificent dinner party that embraces the luxuries of the Victorian age. Beyond the Campbell's dining finery is the modern kitchen of its age and the butler's pantry contains the most complete original culinary collection I had seen. Campbell House has been one of the few if not the only museum house I know of whose collections significantly interprets its story told through its table traditions, which binds the Campbell's story together with the era's foodways and its documented history of lavish dinner parties, entertaining, and charity banquets.

Making the Campbell story even more exciting was the fact it's filled with the majority of its furnishings and original items, including everything from kitchen tools, whiskey and wine corks to the original china, crystal, and collections of silver and linens. Items that were all used to cook for and serve the likes of presidents and generals to socialites and American Indian chiefs.

I soon became one of Theron's volunteers who helped in the production of the museum's recreated Victorian dinner parties that were based on Virginia's receipts as well as those of the era. Soon after I found myself committed to helping bring Theron's and the Campbell board's dream of a cookbook to life. The original goal was to simply update Virginia's recipes for the modern cook. During this time volunteers cooked and recorded their own interpretations of recipes, which would vary wildly in some cases from Virginia's original recipes that appeared in the partial facsimile of her cookbook printed decades earlier as a fundraiser. The project stalled in the early 1990s as more urgent needs for general renovation were addressed.

Twenty years later, after the Campbell House's extensive renovation was completed, I ran across my Campbell cookbook files. It served as the spark that inspired me to call Campbell House Executive




Director Andy Hahn. We gathered over lunch to revisit the possibilities of resurrecting the cookbook project. After a few more conversations the decision was made that the time had finally come to move ahead with the cookbook, the dream of so many for so long at Campbell House.

The result became *The Gilded Table: Recipes and Table Traditions from the Campbell House*. The research reflects over three years of work centered on Virginia's collection of 226 recipes—with special focus on the 141 recipes selected and printed in the earlier facsimiles of her original cookbook/notebook. The final recipe count now numbers 178, which includes thirty classic Gilded Age recipes such as Cherries Jubilee and Beef Chasseur, dishes the Campbell's would have enjoyed that appeared on countless hotel banquets and restaurants of the time.

Beyond the recipes perhaps the most interesting part of this project was exploring the changes in table traditions and dining decorum and accounting the Campbell family history. History that includes Hugh Campbell's generous and lavish Thanksgiving dinners he provided to Father Dunne's Newsboys Home, which served orphaned boys along with boys who were forced to work on the streets selling papers to help support their families. One of those newsboys who sold the *St. Louis Star Times* on St. Louis' downtown streets and as an adult spoke fondly of Papa Dunne's home, and was touched inadvertently by Hugh Campbell's generosity through meals and no doubt gifts of boxes of Busy Bee Candy was my own father, George Traxel.

The Campbell family's culinary legacy has touched many St. Louisians—from the city's poor children to Virginia's high-society dinner guests to today's visitors that tour the grand old home who discover its unique culinary history and table history that defined who we once were.



*The Gilded Table* celebrates that history and the Campbells, whose story helped define the age and transcends the recipes that fill a plate. It's a story underscored with culinary history that continues to fuel my passions for great table traditions and kitchens, and, of course, glorious plates of food.

– **Suzanne Corbett**  
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