Pobrane z czasopisma New Horizons in English Studies **http://newhorizons.umcs.pl**
Data: 11/01/2026 10:28:30

New Horizons in English Studies 3/2018

CULTURE & MEDIA

Anna Węgiel

Graduate School for Social Research
Institute of Philosophy and Sociology
Polish Academy of Sciences
an.wegiel@gmail.com

The British Origins of The First American Cookbook: A Re-evaluation of Amelia Simmons' *American Cookery* (1796)

Abstract. In 1796, the first American cookbook *American Cookery* by Amelia Simmons was published in Hartford, Connecticut. Although many scholars referred to it as "the second declaration of American independence" the cooking patterns presented in Simmons' book still resembled the old English tradition. The purpose of this paper is to explore the British origins of the first American cookbook and to demonstrate that it is, in essence, a typical eighteenth-century English cookery book.

Key Words: American Cookery, Amelia Simmons, cuisine, cookbook.

American Cookery by Amelia Simmons was published in 1796, twenty years after the Declaration of Independence. In *Feeding America – the Historic American Cookbook Project*, scholars have argued that *American Cookery* deserves to be called "a second Declaration of American Independence," as it was the first cookbook written by an American writer (Feeding America 2003). Most researchers point to certain features that make *American Cookery* an American cookbook. Karen Hess, one of the major food studies researchers poses a question: "what makes *American Cookery* so very American?" and answers that "it is precisely the bringing together of certain native American products and English culinary traditions" (Hess 1996, xv). *Feeding America* (2003) provides the following review, which stresses the American features of the cookbook:

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0930-074X DOI: 10.17951/nh.2018.3.150

Pobrane z czasopisma New Horizons in English Studies **http://newhorizons.umcs.pl**
Data: 11/01/2026 10:28:30

> Simmons' book attempted to recognize and use American products, specifically corn, cranberries, turkey, squash and potatoes, all uniquely indigenous to the New World . . . this book offers the first printed recipes using cornmeal - three for A Nice Indian Pudding and one each for Johnny Cake or Hoe Cake and Indian Slapjacks. Simmons also suggested using corncobs to smoke bacon and the pairing of cranberry sauce with turkey.

Andrew Smith (2007) acknowledges the same characteristics. In addition, he mentions the use of pearl-ash as a raising agent in dough. Simmons was to be the first one to use it in a household cookery. Keith Stavely and Kathleen Fitzgerald (2011) devote a long passage to describe Simmons' achievements in creating American food culture. Following in the footsteps of Mary Tolford Wilson, the first scholar to study *American Cookery*, they list the uniquely American culinary innovations: the use of new ingredients: cornmeal, crookneck squash, whortleberries, Jerusalem artichokes, and spruce beer; the introduction of American custard–style pumpkin pie, corncobs to smoke bacon, cranberry sauce with turkey, watermelon rids to make "American Citron", pearl-ash, and soft gingerbread (Stavely and Fitzgerald 2011, 42–3).

Although the book is, indeed, an American one, the recipes it provides are still deeply rooted in the British cuisine. Out of 119 recipes in *American Cookery,* only three do not have their correspondents in formerly published English cookbooks, which makes up for less than 3% of the book content. The other 116 recipes in Simmons' book come from the British tradition. Recipes from the first American edition of *American Cookery* (Simmons 1796a) have been analyzed for the purpose of this paper to prove that this cookbook still belongs to the British rather than to the American tradition. The American innovations from Simmons' book pointed to by the above-mentioned scholars are the basis of this research. Following in the footsteps of Karen Hess (1996), the analysis has been divided into two parts: the first one examines the British foodways and patterns in *American Cookery*, and the latter deals with the use of indigenous American products.

American Cookery has two major parts: a guide to help people choose best products on the market, and the recipe part. Although it has been studied by many scholars, some issues are not very clear. The first interesting fact about *American Cookery* is that it was written by three authors. Amelia Simmons created most of the recipe part. However, some recipes were written by the British author, Susannah Carter: an entire chapter of *American Cookery* is plagiarized from Carter's *Frugal Housewife* (1765). Moreover, the whole market guide was written by an anonymous transcriber. In the Albany edition (1796b), Amelia Simmons gives a disturbing comment about the transcriber of her work: "Nearly the whole of 17 pages in the first edition, was filled with rules, and directions, how to make choice of meats, fowls, fish, and vegetables: this is a matter, with which, the Authoress does not pretend to be acquainted . . . this was done by the transcriber, without her [authoress] knowledge or consent" (Simmons 1796b, 5–6 of the preface). The recipe for bacon smoked on corn cobs comes from the unauthorized section of the book. A journalist Andrew Beahrs ironically states that, because

Pobrane z czasopisma New Horizons in English Studies **http://newhorizons.umcs.pl**
Data: 11/01/2026 10:28:30

of the precious guidelines and style, the market guide is the best part of *American Cookery* (*The Atlantic*, December 7, 2010).

Another interesting fact is that some scholars seemed to be oblivious to the fact that this part was not authorized by Simmons. In *America's Founding Food* (2004) Keith Stavely and Kathleen Fitzgerald frequently suggest that Simmons is the author of this part. Phrases like "she advised" or "she still wanted them" would suggest that the market guide was of Simmons' authorship.[1] However, in *Northern Hospitality* (2011) the same authors corrected themselves by stressing that the market guide part was not a work of Simmons. It is important to emphasize that the very existence of a market guide in a cookbook is a typically English feature. Adding such pages to cookbooks became popular in the late seventeenth century to prevent people from being cheated by vendors on the market (Wilson 1976). Some elements of a market guide are present in Markham's *English Huswife*[2] from 1623, which signaled the emergence of this new need.

American Cookery has a typically English layout. Important information is carried by the title page. The book presents "the art of dressing viands, fish, poultry and vegetables, and the best modes of making pastes, puffs, pies, tarts, puddings, custards and preserves, and all kind of cakes from the imperial plump to plain cake" (Simmons 1796a, title page). As Stavely and Fitzgerald (2011) point out, nothing American can be read from this short description of the contents of the book. All the listed dishes are rooted in English cookery and resemble descriptions from other English cookbooks.

After a thorough analysis of British seventeenth and eighteenth century cookbooks, it can be stated that the characteristic types of dishes in English cuisine are: meat dishes, fish dishes, pottages, puddings, custards, fricassees, pies and tarts, syllabubs, cakes, and preserves.[3] The traditional system of dishes is reflected in the layout of Amelia Simmons' book. The book is divided into the following parts, the titles of which are: "Meat dishes and Pies," "Puddings," "Custards," "Tarts," "Syllabubs," "Cake," and "Preserves." It is easy to notice that all of these types of dishes are typical for the traditional British cuisine elements listed above.

The first section of the recipe part is devoted to the English favorite: roast meats. The typical seventeenth-century English combination of meat with oysters is presented in

[1] Stavely and Fitzgerald, *America's Founding Food* (2004). Example from page 84: "With directions for 'how to choose the best in market,' Amelia Simmons seemed to expect most readers to purchase rather than to fish for the eels they would consume. Nevertheless, she still wanted them to know how to catch the best eels, should they choose to do so."

[2] Original 17th and 18th century spelling appears in all quotations, titles, and names.

[3] Based on a study of four British seventeenth and eighteenth-century cookbooks: Gervase Markham, *Countrey Contentments or The English Housewife* (London: Printed for R. Jackson, 1623); Eliza Smith, *Compleat Housewife: or, Accomplish'd Gentlewoman's Companion* (London: J. Pemberton, 1727); Susannah Carter, *The Frugal Housewife, or Complete Woman Cook* (London: Printed for E. Newbery, 1765); Francis Collingwood and John Woollams, *The Universal Cook, and City and Country Housekeeper* (London: Printed by R. Noble, 1792). The analysis was supported by C. Anne Wilson's *Food and Drink in Britain: From the Stone Age to Recent Times* (Aylersbury: Peregrine Books, 1976).

Pobrane z czasopisma New Horizons in English Studies **http://newhorizons.umcs.pl**
Data: 11/01/2026 10:28:30

a recipe "To smother fowl with oysters." Stuffed leg of veal and pork or round of beef alamode, are examples of old, traditional English cookery. The choice of meat types is also an indicator of English practice. There are recipes for roast beef, mutton, veal, lamb, fowl, goslin, turtle, and calf's head in the recipe section. Amelia Simmons included a classic English recipe for roasted beef, extremely popular on the British Isles.

Simmons copied some recipes from English cookbooks. Two recipes in the meat section "To dress a Turtle," and "To dress a Calve's Head, Turtle fashion" are good examples of plagiarism. The first recipe is a verbatim copy of a recipe from *Frugal Housewife* by Susannah Carter (1765). Although the second recipe, "To dress a Calve's Head, Turtle fashion," is not plagiarized from *Frugal Housewife*, it uses the same typically British seasoning as in the "To dress a Turtle" recipe. This way of dressing calf's head was not Simmons' idea. In another British cookbook, Hannah Glasse's *Art of Cookery* (1751) a recipe for "Mock turtle" is present, which essentially was calf's head spiced and stewed in gravy, and served in an empty turtle shell. The combination of typical English seasoning from *Frugal Housewife* and the calf's head as the main ingredient makes the dish a typical English proposition.

An entire chapter from Simmons' book called "Syllabubs" is rewritten from *Frugal Housewife.* In Carter's book (1765), chapter XVI is called "Of Syllabubs, Creams, and Flummery" and has nine recipes. Simmons "borrowed" seven of them, leaving behind the two last recipes for "Flummery" and "Oatmeal flummery." All the other recipes for syllabubs are copied word-for-word from Carter's book. Although plagiarism was not uncommon in the eighteenth century, the fact of using English recipes supports the claim that *American Cookery* is English in its nature.

As for the dishes described in this cookbook, fish and seafood are described at length in the market guide. It reveals that salmon, shad, hannah hill (sea bass), black fish, lobster, oyster, flounder, bass, cod, haddock, eel, perch, roach, and salmon trout were America's most popular. As the Atlantic Ocean is common for the USA and Great Britain, people ate the same seafood, which is confirmed by many British cookbooks.

Pottages, puddings, and custards have been typical for English cuisine since medieval times. Their names started to lose their original meaning in the late eighteenth century in both Britain and the USA. Before that period, the names "pottage," "pudding," "custard" were used interchangeably without strict definitions (Olver 2015). In Simmons' book, 16 recipes for puddings are presented in the recipe section called "Puddings."

Pies and tarts are separated in Amelia Simmons's book (1796a). A similar practice was used in other English cookbooks; for example, in *Universal Cook* (Collingwood and Woolams 1792). Simmons' pies were made of meat. Poultry, like turkey, chicken, and pigeon, veal, beef, as well as giblets, like neat's feet and tongue, were the ingredients of pie fillings. The last three, of the total of nine pies presented by Simmons, were made of fruit: two apple pies and one currant pie. Mixing savory and sweet tastes in one chapter was also a common English feature, known from the period of popularity of the *English Housewife* (Markham 1623). Like in other English cookbooks, six recipes for "puff

Pobrane z czasopisma New Horizons in English Studies **http://newhorizons.umcs.pl**
Data: 11/01/2026 10:28:30

pastes" (pastries) and three recipes for other pie/tart pastries are presented. Later chapter of the cookbook called "Tarts" contains four recipes for fruit tarts – they are "Apple Tarts," "Cranberries," "Orange or Lemon Tart," and "Gooseberry Tart."

Cakes and preserves are another part of *American Cookery* (Simmons 1796a). A section called "Cake" consists of 26 recipes for cakes, cookies and biscuits. Some cakes have typically English names, like "Queens cake," and "Imperial Plumb cake." There are three recipes for "Gingerbread," a traditional English dish. Some recipes, indeed, call for using pearl-ash as a leavening agent. It was a predecessor of today's baking powder, which was invented in America. Some researchers claim that pearl-ash was inspired by Native Americans who used wood ashes in a process called "nix-tamalization" (Stavely and Fitzgerald 2004). In the following chapter, "Preserves," 31 recipes are featured, including various recipes for fruit and a recipe for codfish. Typical English products like quinces, mulberries, gooseberries, damsons, peaches, apricots, cherries, raspberries, currants, plums, and cucumbers occur in this section.

Another feature of *American Cookery* is the use of typical British ingredients and spices. Not counting the "Preserves" chapter, a characteristic combination of at least two of the most typical British spices (nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves, mace)[4] appear in 21% (19 out of 88) of recipes for meat, fish, pies, puddings, custards, tarts, syllabubs, and cakes. At least one of those spices appears in 43% of all the recipes (38 out of 88). The use of local English herbs is also explicit: thyme, rosemary, sage, and parsley were basic seasonings for most meat and fish dishes. Dried fruit and nuts – typically British ingredients – are still featured in typical dishes like puddings, custards, or meat pies: for example, "Bread Pudding," "Loaf Cakes," "Apple pudding," "Rice pudding," and more. Almonds, characteristic for English cuisine, are featured in recipes like "Almond pudding" (which is a classic British dish) or "Plumb cake." More than 80% of the recipes are made with some kind of dairy (butter, cream, or milk). Amelia Simmons frequently mentions orange-flower water and rose-water, which were widely used in the seventeenth and eighteenth- century British cookbooks. Sour liquids that are used in the cookbook are wine, Madeira wine, claret wine, cyder, and ketchup. These also have their origins in the British cuisine.

The use of ketchup is an important feature of some of Simmons' recipes like "To stuff a Leg of Veal" and "To alamode a round of Beef." This condiment, although associated with American cuisine, was invented at the beginning of the seventeenth century in Britain. The recipe from 1727 *Compleat Housewife* is known to be the first written recipe for this famous sauce. It calls for a "pint of the best white-wine vinegar," cloves of eschalot, the best white wine, and anchovy (Smith 1727). It is then spiced with typical British spices: mace, ginger, cloves, pepper, nutmeg, and lemon peel. Finally, it was enriched with horseradish and marinated for a week. In another variation of the

[4] According to the analysis of A. Wilson *Food and Drink in Britain*; Markham, *English Housewife;* Smith, *Compleat Housewife;* Carter, *The Frugal Housewife;* Collingwood and Woollams, *The Universal Cook.*

Pobrane z czasopisma New Horizons in English Studies **http://newhorizons.umcs.pl**
Data: 11/01/2026 10:28:30

recipe, the author advised to add some water from soaking mushrooms. This version later became fashionable and known as the "mushroom ketchup." It was commonly used as an addition to various dishes, as can be seen in *Frugal Housewife,* which was published a couple of decades after the first "katchup" recipe had appeared.

The next important issue to be addressed is the use of indigenous American ingredients in *American Cookery*. Most of the spices and plants native to America were imported to Europe by French and Spanish merchants and traders. It is a misconception that Englishmen were introduced to the New World ingredients by the Indians. Ironically, in the seventeenth and eighteenth- centuries it was the Europeans who re-introduced native foods to America (Olver 2015). After the journeys of the Spanish to the New World, a lot of native ingredients came to European markets. For a long time these products were familiarized, sold, traded, and cooked in Europe. In the late seventeenth century, most of the New World ingredients were familiar to British cooks. According to Anne Wilson (1976), sweet potatoes are listed among the common foods of Tudor and Stuart times in Britain. They were introduced to the Old Continent in the sixteenth century and the first British recipe featuring sweet potato appeared in 1596. Kidney beans, Jerusalem artichokes, allspice, and cayenne were already known to Europeans in the seventeenth century and used in British recipes as well. Because of a long tradition of preparing artichokes in England, it was easy for English cooks to adapt another variety of this plant. Cayenne pepper, in turn, was introduced to Europe by the Spaniards in the late Middle Ages and allspice came to Britain from the West Indies, a British colony (Wilson 1976).

These examples show that the colonists who arrived in the New World already had the knowledge of how to cook using the New World ingredients. Although not every plant that we know today was then considered edible (for example tomatoes), British cooks were aware of American novelties. The British colonists came to the New World with the knowledge, abilities, techniques, and, most importantly, the resources and cookbooks from their motherland.

Although according to some scholars Amelia Simmons was to be the first cookbook author to acknowledge the existence of native American ingredients in the recipes, most foods indigenous to America were widely used in contemporaneous British cookbooks. Among the native American ingredients that are used in Amelia Simmons' book (1796a) are turkey, cranberries, pumpkin, potatoes, corn (maize/Indian meal), Jerusalem artichokes, beans, cayenne, allspice, winter squash, and sweet potatoes.[5] These ingredients will serve as the basis for the following analysis.

Amelia Simmons (1796a, 18) provided her readers with famous recipes called "To stuff a Turkey" and "To stuff and roast a Turkey, or Fowl." Here is the second recipe:

[5] See: Lynne Olver, "'New World' foods," *Food Timeline*, last modified 2015, accessed July 10, 2018 http://www.foodtimeline.org/food2a.html#newworld.

Pobrane z czasopisma New Horizons in English Studies **http://newhorizons.umcs.pl**
Data: 11/01/2026 10:28:30

> To stuff and roast a Turkey, or Fowl.
> One pound soft wheat bread, 3 ounces beef suet, 3 eggs, a little sweet thyme, sweet marjoram, pepper and salt, and some add a gill of wine; fill the bird therewith and sew up, hang down to a steady solid fire, basting frequently with salt and water, and roast until a steam emits from the breast, put one third of a pound of butter into the gravy, dust flour over the bird and baste with the gravy; serve up with boiled onions and cranberry-sauce, mangoes, pickles or celery.
> 2. Others omit the sweet herbs, and add parsley done with potatoes.
> 3. Boil and mash 3 pints of potatoes, wet them with butter, add sweet herbs, pepper, salt, fill and roast as above.

In the popular view, Amelia Simmons' book provided the first printed recipe for a Thanksgiving turkey. However, the Thanksgiving tradition was not yet followed in the times of *American Cookery.* Amelia Simmons herself does not mention Thanksgiving in any part of the book. The holiday that is today called "Thanksgiving" and all the accompanying traditions did not emerge until the second half of the nineteenth century, when Lincoln proclaimed it official. According to Stavely and Fitzgerald (2004, 166), even the connection between the present Thanksgiving tradition and the event described by Bradford and Winslow in 1621 "exists only mythically, not historically."

Many scholars claim that turkey was the first American native food product adopted in Europe (Stavely and Fitzgerald 2004). The first European encounter with turkey is dated for the year 1518, when Juan de Grijalva led the Spanish expedition on the Mexican coast (Smith 2006). The first mention of the turkey in an English source goes back to 1541. Paradoxically, turkeys were bred in England and then sold and exported from British Isles to the New World (Wilson 1976). They appeared on the list of goods to be sent to Massachusetts Bay in 1629 (Stavely and Fitzgerald 2004). In the seventeenth century, not only were turkeys well-known to the English society, but also treated as a regular house-fowl. In two of the *English Huswife* (1623) recipes, the turkey is listed among many typical house animals: "if you will boile Chickens, young Turkies, Pea-hens, or any house-Fowle daintily, you shall after you have trimmed them, drawne them, trust them, and washt them, fill their bellies with as full of Parsly they can hold" (Markham 1623, 77). Amelia Simmons' recipe is called "To stuff and roast a Turkey or Fowl." This title implies that turkey was not an unusual dish for late eighteenth-century Americans, as it places the bird among other poultry. Stavely and Fitzgerald (2004) point to the fact that Simmons did not favor turkey. As they put it, "Simmons lumped together the roasting of 'fowl' with that of turkey" in a typical late eighteenth century fashion (Stavely and Fitzgerald 2004, 159).

According to previously mentioned scholars, the most important thing that constitutes the American spirit of *American Cookery* is the combination of turkey and cranberry sauce that nowadays is a traditional Thanksgiving dish. Cranberry sauce also has its origins in the English cuisine. According to Karen Hess, similar sauces were used as early as in Tudor times, when cooks combined red, acidy and hard sweetened barberries, or other sour wild fruit with roasted game. This fashion has its origins in Ar-

Pobrane z czasopisma New Horizons in English Studies **http://newhorizons.umcs.pl**
Data: 11/01/2026 10:28:30

abic countries where cooks used pomegranates to garnish their meat (Hess 1996, xv). Recipes for roast turkey appear in each of the analyzed British cookbooks. Moreover, serving turkey with vegetables, like celery in Amelia Simmons' recipe, is a standard English practice, for example, in the *Universal Cook* recipe "To roast a Turkey."

Bread stuffing for roasted birds, as presented in Simmons' book, and popular in today's Thanksgiving feasts was a basic type of stuffing for fowl in English seventeenth and eighteenth- century cookbooks. A typical English turkey stuffing consists of breadcrumbs, egg yolks, suet, spices, dried fruit, and sometimes forced meat.[6] Amelia Simmons (1796a, 18) proposed a simple stuffing made from a wheat loaf, butter, salt pork pieces, eggs, marjoram, summer savory, parsley, sage, pepper, and salt. As Stavely and Fitzgerald (2004, 167) observe, "The recipes for roast turkey found in New England cookbooks were all derived from standard English practice." Another recipe for turkey (and other birds) from Simmons' book, "To smother Fowl with Oysters," calls for filling the bird with oysters and then boil. A similar recipe, called "A Fowl Forced, with a ragoo of Oysters" is featured in the English *Universal Cook*.

Other scholars have pointed out to Simmons' pumpkin pie (1796a, 28) as the first printed example of this Thanksgiving dish. The instructions are as follows:

> Pompkin
> No.1. One quart stewed and strained, 3 pints cream, 9 beaten eggs, sugar, mace, nutmeg, and ginger, laid into paste No. 7 or 3, and with a dough spur, cross and chequer it, and baked in dishes three quarters of an hour.
> No.2. One quart of milk, 1 pint pompkin, 4 eggs, molasses, allspice and ginger in a crust, bake 1 hour.

John and Karen Hess (2000, 83), in their "Taste of America," write: "Miss Simmons gives two recipes for that great American dessert, pumpkin pie; they seem to be the earliest of their kind in print." Similarly, Abigail Carroll (2013) explains:

> Not until the 1796 appearance of Amelia Simmons's *American Cookery*, the first printed American cookbook, did colonists have access to published recipes for the "pompion," or pumpkin, which seventeenth-century observer John Josselyn called an "ancient New England Standing Dish." Because pumpkins have a consistency similar to apples, cooks often put them to use in traditional apple dishes such as pies or sauces.

Rachell A. Snell (2014) and Sandra Louise Oliver (2005) share the opinion that the idea of a pumpkin pie was born in America and it derived from the need to substitute apples. Since a pumpkin has a consistency similar to apples, supposedly it served as a good replacement.

[6] See: Carter, *Frugal Housewife* (1765), 19.

Pobrane z czasopisma New Horizons in English Studies **http://newhorizons.umcs.pl**
Data: 11/01/2026 10:28:30

This might have been possible only at the very beginning of the settlement when apple trees were not yet common. However, according to Stavely and Fitzgerald (2004), apple trees were planted immediately after coming to the New World, even before the first settlements appeared. Such events are well documented in chronicles. In 1625, a clergyman, William Blaxton, planted an apple tree on Beacon Hill in Boston. In the 1640s, Peregrine White, the first English child born in America, planted an apple orchard in Massachusetts. Apple seeds came onboard the ships among other imports from England. However, according to Stavely and Fitzgerald (2004), in places where English apples and pears were unavailable, pumpkins might have served as a poor substitute. Anne Wilson (1976) gives another possible explanation for the creation of a pumpkin pie. One can conclude from her research that the idea of using pumpkin as a pie filling is associated with the late sixteenth- century English practice of putting vegetable puddings into shells of other vegetables. Indeed, the first pumpkin pies were made in England when apples were put into seeded pumpkin shells and baked.

Sandra Louise Oliver (2005, 23) elaborates on the issue writing that "Pumpkin was another native American ingredient that colonists prepared as they had prepared similar foods at home, particularly apples . . . colonists came with no recipes for how to use pumpkin." Actually, the first known pumpkin pie recipe comes from a book well-known to the colonists. It appeared in *Complete Cook,* which is essentially a part of a book titled *The Queens Closet Opened* (1674). This book was among the first British cookbooks to be imported from Britain to America at the beginning of the settlement (Stavely and Fitzgerald 2011). The original recipe instructs one to mix ten eggs with sugar, pumpkin and spices, and then to close them in a pastry shell along with apples, currants, and "a good deal of sweet butter." After it is baked, a sour sauce of eggs, white wine or verjuice is made as a condiment. The spices in the pumpkin pie are: thyme, rosemary, parsley, marjoram, cinnamon, nutmeg, pepper, and cloves, similar to the ones introduced in *American Cookery*. The original recipe comes from 1655, so it seems that Amelia Simmons was not the author of the first printed recipe for a pumpkin pie. The claim that colonists did not have access to printed recipes also seems doubtful, for there are records that the first settlers used *The Queen Closet Opened* in the New World (Stavely and Fitzgerald 2011). Moreover, there are records of preparing pumpkin pie in the 1760s in New England (Stavely and Fitzgerald 2004). According to Anne Wilson (1976), the early settlers introduced pumpkin pies to the New World where they became very popular.

Thus, the logic behind the common saying "As American as Apple Pie" is often challenged by scholars. Even though Amelia Simmons' (1796a) recipes such as "Apple Tarts," "Apple pie," "Apple pudding," "A Foot Pie," "Tongue Pie," "Minced Pie of Beef," use apples as an ingredient, their origin is English. In her essay, "As North American as Pumpkin Pie" Rachell A. Snell (2014) clearly states that apple pies should not be treated as a typically American dish. According to her, "there is very little uniquely 'American' about apple pie." Indeed, recipes using apples, including pies, puddings, tarts, sauces, and cakes are common in all English cookbooks.

Pobrane z czasopisma New Horizons in English Studies **http://newhorizons.umcs.pl**
Data: 11/01/2026 10:28:30

Apples, in many varieties, have been a staple of an English diet since the Roman times (Wilson 1976).

Feeding America lists potatoes as an innovative ingredient used by Amelia Simmons in *American Cookery* (1796a). Potatoes, however, were also one of the first American native ingredients that gained popularity in Europe. Like most American native foods, they were introduced to England through Spain in the sixteenth century (Smith 2004). There are already some recipes for potatoes in Markham's *English Huswife* (1623). They are referred to as "potato roots" and are featured in recipes "To make an excellent Olepotrige" and "To make a Marrow bone pie." It implies that the British were already familiar with the use of potatoes in colonial times.

An interesting example from *American Cookery* (Simmons 1796a, 40) is a recipe for "American Citron." It instructs to boil watermelon rind with sugar for four hours. Watermelon has been known in Europe from ancient times. Records show that it was consumed in Egypt and Persia 6.000 years ago. Later, it was grown by the Greeks and then it came to Northern Europe through Spain (Kiple and Ornelas 2001). It was introduced to America by the Spanish explorers in the sixteenth century. The first notes of using watermelon in the colonies come from 1629 (Smith 2004). It was so popular in America that Amelia Simmons called it "American Citron" in her book. This name may have been commonly used in the American colonies (Olver 2015).

Three recipes in *American Cookery* (Simmons 1796a) do not have their direct equivalents in British cookbooks of late-eighteenth century period. "A Nice Indian Pudding," "Johny Cake, or Hoe Cake," and "Indian Slapjack" are pointed out by scholars to be distinctively American. They are indeed a good indicator of early national American cuisine in development. The recipes are characterized by using "Indian meal" as a substitute for English wheat flour, or oatmeal in the case of pudding. But again, apart from the use of cornmeal, these recipes resemble a typical English fashion of preparing puddings and cakes. Eggs, molasses, suet, raisins, butter, and milk were used for centuries in English recipes. Recipes for "A Nice Indian Pudding" and "Indian Slapjack" much resemble English recipes for baked puddings or cakes like, for example, "A plain baked Pudding" from Carter's *Frugal Housewife* (1765). There is, however, one difference: the flour. In Carter's version, flour most probably meant wheat flour, whereas "Indian meal" in Simmons' recipe means Indian corn (maize). Corn is indigenous to North America. It was a staple of diet for the Incas, Aztecs, Maya, and North American Indians. It was first discovered by the Spanish in the fifteenth century, and in 1500 Christopher Columbus brought maize to Spain along with his ship (Kiple and Ornelas 2001). Some scholars point to the fact that since that time maize was widely cultivated in Europe. Stavely and Fitzgerald (2004) claim that corn was adopted as a dietary staple in Europe by the sixteenth century. In the seventeenth century, it was a staple of diet for poor countries like Romania, Slovenia, Serbia, and Bulgaria, and also for some African regions (Kiple and Ornelas 2001). Karen Hess noticed in her introduction to the facsimile of the second edition of *American Cookery*: "What is little appreciated is that the use of maize as a staple had very early spread like

Pobrane z czasopisma New Horizons in English Studies **http://newhorizons.umcs.pl**
Data: 11/01/2026 10:28:30

wildfire in the poorer parts of the world, all but displacing earlier millets and chestnuts in various breads and porridges – *mealies, polenta, mammaliga,* etc." (Hess 1996, xii). According to her, Europeans were already using corn in the eighteenth century in some French recipes.[7]

Not much is known about the use of corn on the British Isles. Some researchers defend the statement that English settlers came to New World without any knowledge of this ingredient. Stavely and Fitzgerald (2004) believe that the Indians were the ones who taught the first English settlers how to grow and prepare corn. However, other researchers claim that signs of using maize were found in some English gardens already in the sixteenth century (Kiple and Ornelas 2001). Even if the English were not growing corn (maize) on a regular basis, they were familiar with the existence of such ingredient. Therefore, it was easier to adopt it in an everyday diet. In 1640, Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island noticed that Indian method of corn preparation, called "Nasaump," was very similar to preparation of English pottage (Stavely and Fitzgerald 2004). The switching from one ingredient to the other (in this case, oatmeal/rye/barley to maize) in a recipe for "A Nice Indian Pudding" might not have been a ground-breaking invention. According to Karen Hess, the need to substitute an ingredient in new conditions was usually easy and took place naturally: "the ease of adoption by a people of a new product depends on the ease with which it can be substituted for a familiar one in traditional recipes" (Hess 1996, xiii). Stavely and Fitzgerald (2004) confirm that the adoption of corn by English cuisine happened naturally at the beginning of the settlement.

Things look different when it comes to "Johny cakes". The name "Johny cakes" derives from an English name "Journey cakes" which refers to a specific type of food that was eaten by travelers and soldiers on their voyages: "In the fourteenth century the chronicler Sir John Froissart noted that Scottish soldiers, on their raids into England, came equipped with flat stones and bags of oatmeal. They would mix the oatmeal with water, form it into small cakes, and cook the cakes on the stones in the embers of their campfires" (Stavely and Fitzgerald 2004, 31). In late eighteenth century the name was changed due to legislative action. Because the cakes were a very simple dish, they did not require a recipe. Therefore, no recipes for this type of food can be found in written sources. Amelia Simmons was, indeed, the first one to describe the procedure and, moreover, to add a North American ingredient to it. According to scholars, Simmons' recipe is a combination of the traditional English journey-cake and Indian bread made from maize (Stavely and Fitzgerald 2004).

It is also important to acknowledge the discourse of Simmons' book. One cannot dispute with the fact that the cuisine proposed by Simmons is essentially English. The title page description also suggests that the dishes are English. However, the words that are used in these recipes are meaningful. The very title "American Cookery" is an important piece of cultural information. The identity of the author is expressed in

[7] For example, Antoine Augustin Parmentier, *Le Parfait Boulanger*, 1778.

Pobrane z czasopisma New Horizons in English Studies **http://newhorizons.umcs.pl**
Data: 11/01/2026 10:28:30

the preface of the book. Simmons refers to herself as "an American Orphan" – she thinks of herself as an American. Her birthplace and therefore her national and cultural identity is American. Her recipes and cuisine are "adapted to this country and all grades of life" (Simmons 1796a, preface). This means that Americans applied British food patterns to their own culinary culture, which is reflected in the cookbook under analysis. The names of some dishes are also a part of this discourse – the name "American Citron" is a very important statement. The recognition of ingredients and dishes from Native American culture is also meaningful. Names like "Nice Indian Pudding" and "Indian Slapjack" derive from American culture because Native Americans are inalienably connected with the North American land. Moreover, these recipes had not appeared, at least under such names, in any earlier British cookbooks.

In conclusion, Amelia Simmons' book was a step towards an emerging American national identity. Whether Simmons' recipes were an invention or not, it is necessary to state that she, indeed, was the first one to openly call these dishes "American." The recognition of meals that probably had already been consumed by the settlers for more than 150 years before is a culture-building factor. Most probably all these recipes were present in the American food culture long before Simmons described them in her book and therefore their paper record is an important cultural artifact. Later, after the American Revolution, such recognition of dishes contributed to the creation of the national American identity. However, twenty years after the Declaration of Independence, the reminiscences of colonial way of eating and the old, rich British cookery were still present in the recipes and the format of the first American cookbook.

References

Primary sources

1674. *The Queens Closet Opened*: *III The Complete Cook*. London: Printed for F. Leach.

Carter, Susannah. 1765. *The Frugal Housewife, or Complete Woman Cook*. London: Printed for E. Newbery.

Collingwood, Francis, and John Woollams. 1792. *The Universal Cook, and City and Country Housekeeper*. London: Printed by R. Noble.

Glasse, Hannah. 1751. *Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy.* London: Printed for the author.

Markham, Gervase. 1623. *Countrey Contentments, or, The English Huswife*. London: Printed for R. Jackson.

Smith, Eliza. 1727. *Compleat Housewife: or, Accomplish'd Gentlewoman's Companion*. London: J. Pemberton.

Simmons, Amelia. 1796a. *American Cookery*. Hartford: Printed by Hudson and Goodwin.

———. 1796b. *American Cookery.* Albany: Charles R. & George Webster, printed for the authoress.

Winslow, Edward. 1865. *Mourt's Relation, or Journal of the Plantation at Plymouth*. Boston: John Kimball Wiggin.

Pobrane z czasopisma New Horizons in English Studies **http://newhorizons.umcs.pl**
Data: 11/01/2026 10:28:30

Secondary sources

Feeding America – the Historic American Cookbook Project. 2003. *American Cookery.* Accessed July 10, 2018. http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/cookbooks/html/books/book_01.cfm

Beahrs, Andrew. 2010. "The Mysterious Corruption of America's First Cookbook." *The Atlantic*, December 7.

Carroll, Abigail. 2013. *Three Squares: The Invention of the American Meal*. New York: Basic Books. EPub e-book.

Hess, John L. and Karen Hess. 2000. *Taste of America*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Hess, Karen. 1996. Introduction to *American Cookery: A Bicentennial Facsimile of the Second Edition Printed in Albany, 1796*. Bedford, Massachusetts: Applewood Books.

Kiple, Kenneth F. and Kriemhild C. Ornelas. 2001. *Cambridge World History of Food.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

O' Conell, Libby. 2014. *The American Plate: A Culinary History in 100 Bites*. Illinois: Sourcebooks.

Oliver, Sandra L. 2005. *Food in Colonial and Federal America*. Westport, Connecticut, London: Greenwood Press.

Olver, Lynne. 2015. *Food Timeline.* Accessed July 10, 2018. http://www.foodtimeline.org/

Smith, Andrew F. 2007. "Cookbooks and Manuscripts." In *Oxford Companion to American Food and Drink*, 147–151. New York: Oxford University Press.

———. 2004. "Potato." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America*, 48–52. New York: Oxford University Press.

———. 2006 "The Fall and Rise of the Wild Turkey." *Wild Food: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery*, ed. Richard Hoskig. Bristol: Footwork.

Snell, Rachell A. 2014. "As North American as Pumpkin Pie: Cookbooks and the Development of National Cuisine in North America, 1796 – 1854." *Cuizine*: *The Journal of Canadian Food Cultures* 5 (2).

Stavely, Keith and Kathleen Fitzgerald. 2004. *America's Founding Food. The Story of New England Cooking*. Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press.

———. 2011. *Northern Hospitality: Cooking by the Book in New England*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Wilson, C. Anne. 1976. *Food and Drink in Britain. From the Stone Age to Recent Times*. Aylersbury: Peregrine Books.