



Sign Post

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Volume 29, Issue 2



Who influenced Adelma's Cooking?

By Sue Way, Archivist

Adelma Grenier Simmons influenced thousands of home cooks and many chefs during her long career as an herbalist and owner of Caprilands Herb Farm. Her cookbooks go on influencing new generations of cooks, but who influenced her cooking?

We know that international travel as a buyer for the Stieger's Department Store's Gateway Shops introduced Adelma to foods with many herbs and spices that were new to her. From letters home to her parents 1920-45 it's quite clear that these trips were wonderful experiences for her. When Stieger's added Gourmet Shops to their stores she stocked their shelves with many of those herbs and spices, and customers had so many questions and fears about these new items that she decided to lecture on that subject. Americans, she said, knew nothing about herbs! Later she would concede that at first she knew very little herself. Herbs were not used much in New England cooking. She began to read and experiment herself so that she could answer people's questions and prepare for her lectures and soon became fascinated by herbs and their history, lore and legends.

On Mother's Day 1939 her husband, George Simmons, surprised her by laying out the Kitchen Garden that Adelma had been asking for. She believed an 18th century house, as theirs was, should have a garden right outside the kitchen door.
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Caprilands-Style Luncheon, Lecture & Tour

Sunday August 29, 2021 1-4pm (Raindate Sunday Sept 4)



Join us at the Strong-Porter Museum for a **Caprilands-style Farm-to-Table Outdoor Luncheon & Lecture** highlighting Adelma Simmons as a legendary progenitor of the Farm-to-Table movement & proponent of the Sensory Table. Event hosted by Blue Honey Group, a small team of local farmers and chefs who are volunteering their time, and includes **five courses with complimentary cocktails**, raffle, and tour of our Caprilands display. Limited tickets - \$50 per person - preregistration required. Proceeds will be used towards a Caprilands-style herb garden at the museum. See enclosed flyer for more information.

Notice of Annual Meeting & Barbeque

Sunday, Sept 19 2pm @ Strong Porter



Members are hereby notified that the 59th annual meeting of the Coventry Historical Society will be held at the Strong Porter House on Sunday, September 19, 2021, at 2pm. Business to be conducted includes election of officers and board members, receive and approve annual budget, and any other necessary and proper business. Nominations from the floor are welcome.

Please bring a favorite side dish or dessert to share. Meats, beverages and paper goods will be provided. There is bound to be a lively discussion of Caprilands, our acquisitions and our post-Covid plans.

Time to Renew Your Membership

Please find a membership renewal form included with this newsletter.

Mark Your Calendars

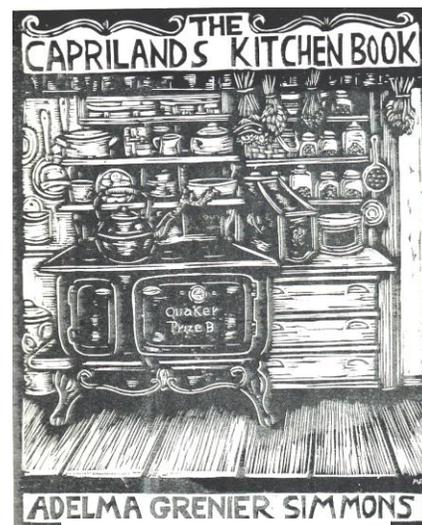
Aug 12	Executive Board Mtg 7pm Strong Porter
Aug 29	Caprilands-style Farm-to-Table Luncheon 1-4pm Strong Porter (rain date Sept 5)
Sept 9	Executive Board Mtg 7pm Strong Porter
Sept 19	CHS Annual Mtg 2pm Strong Porter
Oct 14	Executive Board Mtg 7pm Strong Porter
Nov 11	Executive Board Mtg 7pm Strong Porter

(Cont'd from page 1) As this garden developed, she began inviting neighbors and her Garden Club members to come on Thursdays, her day off from the store, and bring something from their gardens. Her cooking must have been influenced by these friends and by their experimentation. Surely they exchanged recipes. They would sit down afterwards to eat whatever they had made. One week, she says, everyone brought summer squash! "That's it! From now on I'll plan the meal." This was her reaction. Her guests began leaving a little money to help defray the cost of supplies, and they began bringing their friends as guests. The luncheon program was born, and at some point, perhaps 1953, a price was set and Caprilands Herb Farm became a business.

As the program grew, Adelma began to employ help in the kitchen. She credits Rose Roberts, who came to Caprilands as a nurse for Adelma's mother, Abbie, and stayed to cook for many years, with saving the luncheon program from "early extinction". There followed Irene Conroy, Ally Reimor, Baiba, and many others whose families came from different cultures and brought their recipes and influence to Caprilands' kitchen.

She reveals in her own writing, however, and through the many interviews she gave over the years, the ground in which these various influences were planted. She tells us that Caprilands' food was mostly basic American, economy cooking with some French influence. The Caprilands Kitchen Book chapter called "Meat Dishes Beef, Ham, Lamb" Adelma begins with Abbie Jane's Pot Roast. "Abbie Jane was my mother, and an excellent real Yankee cook – no French twist for her. Abbie Jane's Pot Roast, served with dishes of horseradish and strong mustard, is a well-remembered treat . . . This was our principle meat dish in my faraway Vermont days . . . The winter kitchen was where we all congregated, for it was warm and bright, filled with good smells that issued from the commodious pantry, as large as a modern kitchen, and the big black iron cookstove where dinner was cooking. This was not herbal cooking, for we used few herbs in Vermont, just the very basic ones like parsley, mint and sage . . . Onions were considered only a vegetable, but they dressed and seasoned bland dishes, and were served separately, boiled with butter, baked, and fried with innumerable things. Chives appeared in

some cooking, leeks and scallions were known, tho' I don't remember them in connection with our own cuisine. Horseradish was a necessary condiment and the green tops were used as a spinach-like dish in spring.



Nettles and brake greens (river fern fronds) were also considered a delicacy. Basil and rosemary, so much in use today, were unused and unknown in our cooking. Rose Geraniums, however, thrived in many farmhouse windows, always were in evidence in the plantstand on the porch in summer. Its fragrant leaves were used in jellies, in cakes for seasoning, but would have been too exotic for teas, as we use them most frequently at Caprilands. Dill was used in the pickling season, and dill seed was saved for potato salads. Caraway, which grew wild, was gathered for the Caraway Cream Cookies we know as Farmer's cookies. Rhubarb was a sweet and sour sauce canned for winter, and made into pies in summer."

She goes on to tell us more about the kitchen where she first learned kitchen basics, and a love of cooking. This all took place in "The Big House which stood at the top of Crowe Hill." The hill was named for her English grandfather who owned a large acreage and built his Victorian home at the top of a long, steep road during the Civil War and so was probably where her mother Abbie Jane learned to cook as well. The men came in from the farm work "ready to eat bears" and were served substantial meals that included plentiful vegetables, good home-made bread and desserts using "sweet sauces ("sass") from the musty archives of the cellar - gooseberry, raspberry, blueberry, strawberry and beautiful currant jam, and pies without end."

Sources: CHS Archives Adelma Grenier Simmons Collection letters and newspaper clippings.

The Caprilands Kitchen Book by Adelma Grenier Simmons 1981, The Clinton Press of Tolland

Caprilands Tag Sale

Our tag sale of items given to us by the Adelma Grenier Simmons' estate from the Caprilands barns and gift shop was a great success despite pouring rain on 2 of the 3 days it ran and temperatures in the 40s. Thank you to all who helped organize, clean, price, set up, sell, and break down for the event. It was a lot of work but provided income after a year without an ability to fundraise and gave the hundreds who attended the ability to go home with a piece of Caprilands history.



STRONG PORTER MUSEUM

Visit our Caprilands Display at Strong Porter

Strong Porter Museum has a Caprilands display devoted to the life and legend of Adelma Grenier Simmons and her famous herb farm. The Museum is open Sundays 11-3. Tours on alternate days may be possible. Email



info@ctcoventryhistoricalsociety.org to schedule an appointment.

Brick School

The Brick School, 951 Merrow Road, is open to the public on the 1st and 3rd Sundays from 1-4 pm during the months of May to October. Stop by and learn about our one-room schoolhouse and what school was like in Coventry in the early 20th century.



Museum of CT Glass Open House

Visit this museum at their open house on Saturday, September 11, from 1-4 pm at the Capt Turner House, 289 North River Rd (Corner Rt 44), Coventry.

New Lifetime Members & Business Sponsors

We welcome the following new lifetime members.

- Joyce Albro
- Elizabeth Aschenbrenner
- John Fortunato
- Jean Jennings
- Montgomery Shaw
- Jim & Joyce Wicks

We welcome the following new business sponsors.

- Hickory Ridge Tree Farm

Check Us Out Online & On Facebook

Make sure to visit and Like our Facebook page [facebook.com/coventryhistory/](https://www.facebook.com/coventryhistory/) and website ctcoventryhistoricalsociety.org for lots of information about Coventry's past, photos of items of historical interest, and occasional opportunities to offer an opinion about a "Whatsit" that's come our way.

CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

For the latest information about any meeting or program changes watch your email or our Facebook page [facebook.com/coventryhistory/](https://www.facebook.com/coventryhistory/).

Shop Amazon

Log on to www.smile.amazon.com, select Coventry Historical Society, Coventry, CT, as your preferred charity, and a portion of the cost of your purchases will be donated to us.



Archives Corner

By Sue Way, Archivist

We have received several donations in the last few months to add to our collections.

The Albro family maintained a home in Coventry for 5 generations. Joyce and Arthur Albro returned to Coventry every summer from their home in NY. Arthur died 3 years ago and left us a very generous donation. Now his wife Joyce has donated Arthur's collection from his "1890s Room" which includes many Coventry collectibles and antiques. We will keep many of these for our collection and list the duplicates on Facebook Marketplace to benefit the Society, so look for some of these items there, or send me a message (susanrway@gmail.com) if you'd like me to show you what's available.

During the Victorian Era Coventry Village was a mix of old and new. Chloe Palmer created this sampler in 1797. Chloe married Asher Morgan. The purse probably belonged to her granddaughter, Ellen M. Morgan, who married Perry Packer in 1867.



Both lived in Victorian style houses in Coventry Village. These and many other pieces were sent to us from the west coast by descendants of this Morgan family.



Albro donation

One of the interesting items we plan to keep for our collection is a WWI Trench Periscope. Soldiers



were dug into trenches on the German and the Allied side. A soldier could be easily shot raising his head above ground level, so these periscopes were standard equipment for American soldiers. This was made very simply with a mirror at an angle at the top and the bottom.

The spinning, weaving and hand sewing that were the near constant occupation of women in Chloe's day whenever there was a spare moment gave way in her granddaughter Ellen's day to embroidery and decoration of store bought cloth as that became more



readily available. Ellen's mother, Mary Bailey Morgan, probably made this homespun and marked it with a B for her Hope Chest before she was married.

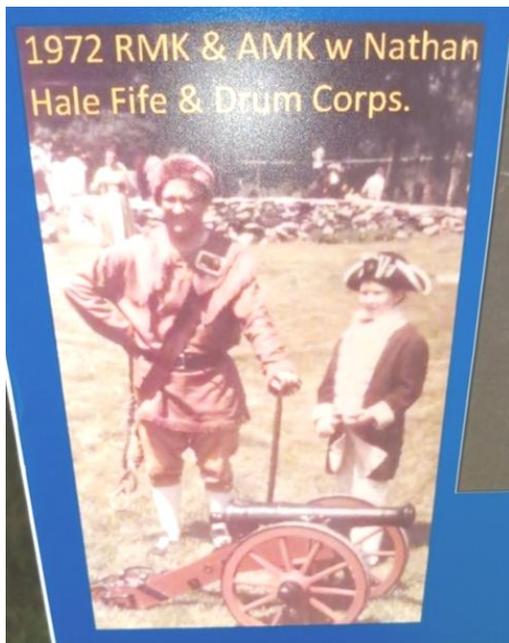
(Cont'd on Page 5)

(Cont'd from Page 4) A donation of 2 books about the family of Robert Monteith Keller were given to us by the Keller family at his memorial service in June. Two generations of that family lived in the Pomeroy Stage house on the Boston Turnpike which they



called Stokel Farm.

The family was involved in many activities in town, including the Coventry Historical Society and the Nathan Hale Fife and Drum Corp. Robert Keller's father, Capt. Walter Keller, served on the Town Council and insisted that it was time for houses in Coventry to have street numbers!



Walter's wife, Bee Keller, became very interested in the history of American dancing, perhaps inspired by their house, the Pomeroy Stage House,

that has walls hinged to the ceiling on the second floor that fold up to create a Ballroom (one of at least 4 such Ballrooms in town in the 1800s) Wouldn't you like to know how often they celebrated?



The Pomeroy Stage House Ballroom

We continue to find interesting things in the items we saved for our collection from Caprilands. Adelma Grenier Simmons wrote poetry, and she also wrote a story book about their house for her young son Oskie. It begins this way: "The House winked its windows, some fresh new glistening, others misty clouded, old with remembering, shook its two big chimneys 'til they rattled - grinned in all its dentils and heaved a sigh in all its hand hewn timbers.



A deep voice very old and feeble at first, but growing stronger as it proceeded issued from its great chimney caverns. 'At last I am awake after all these years of sleeping. Oh hum what a long time I've rested - now a little boy has come to wake me. I always said I would wake up if another boy would come and really care about me - so Oskie - I've come alive again and I've stories enough to tell you to last you many , many long winters.'"