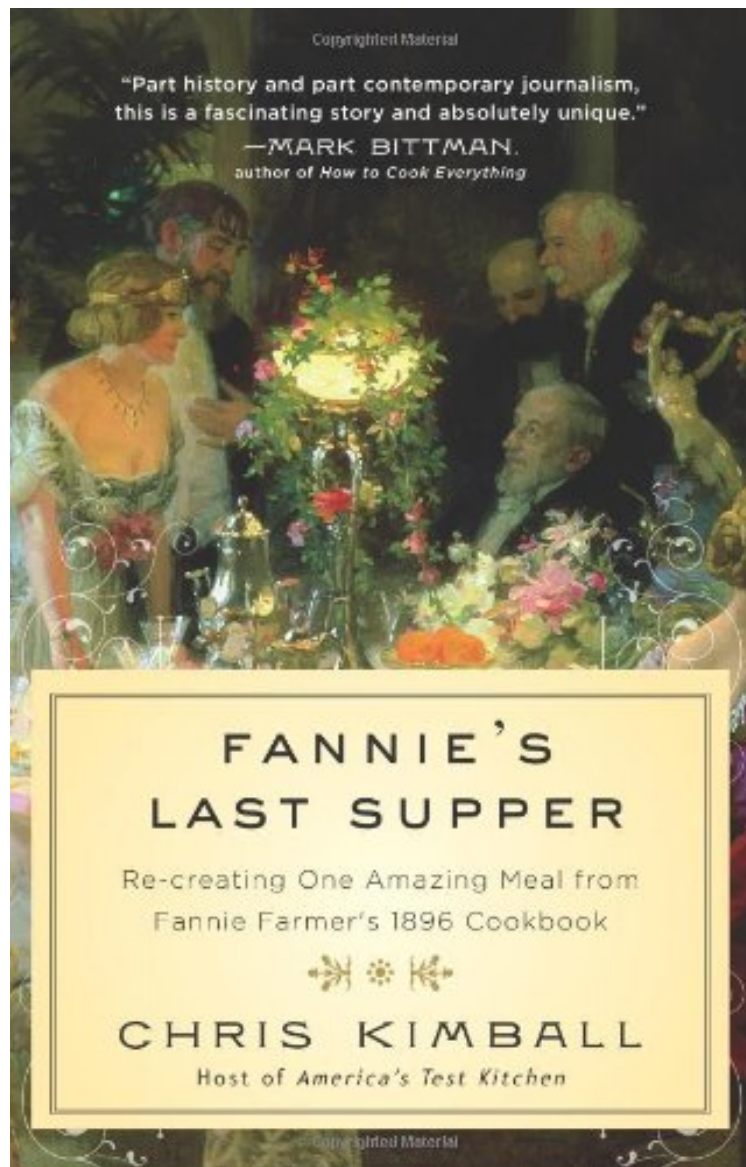


(Library ebook) Fannie's Last Supper: Re-creating One Amazing Meal from Fannie Farmer's 1896 Cookbook

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Chris Kimball

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Chris Kimball : Fannie's Last Supper: Re-creating One Amazing Meal from Fannie Farmer's 1896 Cookbook before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Fannie's Last Supper: Re-creating One Amazing Meal from Fannie Farmer's 1896 Cookbook:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A Good Try By R. Parsons Kimball's idea to re-create a great Victorian meal was indeed clever. Not so clever was the idea to use Fannie's cookbook, then find it necessary to re-write many of the receipts because they did not come up to Kimball's understanding of what they were to be. It is an awkward historical fact that there were bad foods and bad tastes in every historical period. So what is billed as a great Victorian meal is really a Kimball meal, much less instructive thereby. Kimball's purchase of a fine Victorian solid-fuel range was marred by taking inadequate time to learn its use. The machine did not immediately perform to Kimball's expectations; it is a bad workman that blames his tools. As a long-time user of solid-fuel ranges (three different ones and counting), I find that any fault with the cooking lies with the cook and not the range. 6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Lots of fun facts, but odd attitude. By Kriti Godey I'm a big fan of America's Test Kitchen, and I love reading about food and history, so I was really looking forward to reading Fannie's Last Supper by its host and founder, Christopher Kimball. The book's tagline is "Re-creating One Amazing Meal from Fannie Farmer's 1896 Cookbook", and is (purportedly) about recreating an elaborate dinner party from Victorian-era Boston, based on the recipes of Fannie Farmer, a famous cooking teacher and businesswoman from the time. About the title - although Kimball was certainly inspired by his discovery of Fannie Farmer's cookbook, I would not go as far as to say his meal was a recreation. He does not seem to respect Farmer as a cook or as a person, which makes for odd reading. His reactions to exact recreations of her dishes range from "inedible" to "truly horrible" to "rather uninspired" to "second rate." (There is the occasional "good", but it is rare.) This means that pretty much all of the recipes were changed quite a bit. A few of the recipes were even sourced entirely from other books, after Farmer was deemed unsatisfactory. This is all fine, but it seemed like false advertising. The book is peppered with fascinating facts and insights into the world of the 19th century cook. The industrial revolution was changing cooking at an extremely rapid rate, plus domestic servants were no longer common. Kimball likens it to a music aficionado in the late 1990s (p. 193): "who used a turntable for his LP collection while relying on a large group of CDs and then a smattering of digital downloads from iTunes on his MP3 player." I loved that description (although, what about cassette tapes? that's what I used in the 90s) - I think it's a great analogy. I think the structure of the book could have been easier to read - part of it deals with the evolution in cooking methods and ingredients in the US, some of it is about how Boston's food culture and how that changed (including random little details like the price of gelatin), some of it is about Fannie Farmer's life, and then there's the story of Kimball's journey to making this dinner, testing recipes, finding silverware, etc. The trouble is that each chapter contains a bit of everything. I think it would've showcased the material far better if it had been better structured, although it is still really interesting. I also appreciated a lot of the trouble that they went to to make the dinner accurate - mock turtle soup using calf-brains, and making gelatin from calf-feet stand out. It sounded like a horrendous amount of work. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Love it! By Jan Loved it on PBS, glad to have the photos and recipes more easily accessible

In the mid-1990s, Chris Kimball moved into an 1859 Victorian townhouse on the South End of Boston and, as he became accustomed to the quirks and peculiarities of the house and neighborhood, he began to wonder what it was like to live and cook in that era. In particular, he became fascinated with Fannie Farmer's Boston Cooking-School Cook Book. Published in 1896, it was the best-selling cookbook of its age—full of odd, long-forgotten ingredients, fascinating details about how the recipes were concocted, and some truly amazing dishes (as well as some awful ones). In Fannie's Last Supper, Kimball describes the experience of re-creating one of Fannie Farmer's amazing menus: a twelve-course Christmas dinner that she served at the end of the century. Kimball immersed himself in composing twenty different recipes—including rissoles, Lobster À l'Américaine, Roast Goose with Chestnut Stuffing and Jus, and Mandarin Cake—with all the inherent difficulties of sourcing unusual animal parts and mastering many now-forgotten techniques, including regulating the heat on a coal cookstove and boiling a calf's head without its turning to mush, all sans food processor or oven thermometer. Kimball's research leads to many hilarious scenes, bizarre tastings, and an incredible armchair experience for any reader interested in food and the Victorian era. Fannie's Last Supper includes the dishes from the dinner and revised and updated recipes from The Boston Cooking-School Cook Book. A culinary thriller. it offers a fresh look at something that most of us take for granted—the American table.

From Publishers Weekly Starred . Kimball, founder of Cook's Illustrated and host of the PBS series America's Test Kitchen, spent more than two years of "research, recipe testing, and intense planning" in order to host a Victorian dinner based on the recipes of Fannie Farmer, author of The Boston Cooking-School Cook Book, which was first published in 1896. Kimball is as exhaustive in his research as he is in one of his own test recipes for Cook's Illustrated, and fans of his work will appreciate his attention to even the smallest morsel of information. Kimball is off on a culinary and historical adventure as he literally traces Fannie Farmer's steps around Boston at the turn of the century, regaling the reader with a history of Boston, observations of the Victorian character, manner of dress, and cooking implements and appliances available. In the meantime, his own team has been assembled and they are methodically testing recipes and ingredients in Kimball's 1859 red-brick Boston bowfront. All this work culminates in a foodie's dream dinner party, complete with Victorian plate settings, an all-star guest list, and 12 courses you won't find in any

restaurant today. A must-read for history buffs, home cooks, and professional chefs alike. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. About the Author Chris Kimball founded Cook's Magazine in 1980; it has grown to a paid circulation of 1,000,000. He hosts America's Test Kitchen and Cook's Country, which are the top-rated cooking shows on public television, reaching 2 million viewers per week in over 94% of American households. Kimball is a regular contributor to both the Today Show and the CBS Early Show. He has been written up in most major newspapers, many national magazines including The New Yorker and Time, and regularly contributes to NPR's Morning Edition, including doing a regular Thanksgiving segment. He will also host a public radio show on cooking starting in the fall of 2010. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

A Culinary Time Machine A Seat at the Victorian Table

A high Victorian dinner party was a modern re-creation of the ancient ritual of class and culinary artistry, displaying the plumage of high society while underlining the rigid rules of proper social intercourse. It was tails for the gentlemen and full dress costume for the ladies. One was expected to arrive neither early nor more than fifteen minutes late. When dinner was announced, the guests were led in procession from parlor to dining room, the host escorting the honored lady of the evening. The standard twelve courses were to be served briskly, in no more than two hours, yet there were few restraints on the amount of silverware used, with up to 131 separate pieces per setting in myriad styles from neoclassical, Persian, and Elizabethan to Jacobean, Japanese, Etruscan, and even Moorish. The rules of behavior were well known to all diners: one was never to appear greedy, draining the last drop from a wineglass or scraping the final morsel from the plate; one never ate hurriedly, which implied uncontrolled hunger; and since meal preparation was not something to be shown in public, plates were prepared out of view. Within this rigid construct, food was the creative spark, the manna for imagination, and the kitchen a place where one was at last allowed to express one's wildest desires. Victorian jellies with ribbons of colors and flavors, Bavarian cream fillings, and hundreds of custom molds were a culinary free-for-all, as was the sheer variety of a twelve-course menu, from oysters and champagne to fish, turtle, goose, venison, duck, chicken, beef, vegetables, salads, cakes, bonbons, coffee, and liqueurs, all carefully orchestrated from soup to crackers to provide an eclectic, wide-ranging array of tastes and textures. Among the very wealthy, these dinners occasionally crossed the line from artistic perfection to excess, with menus that included roasted lion, naked cherubs leaping out from live-nightingale pies, chimps in tuxedos feted as guests of honor, and gentlemen in black tie dining on horse back. The Victorian dinner table was a moment in time that encapsulated the dreams of a young country—the radical pace of change from farm to city, from water to steam power, from local to international, from poor to rich—that defined our nineteenth century, and this food, these menus, this dining experience have today remained dormant for over a century, just waiting to be rediscovered: the old cast-iron stove lit once again, the venison roasted, the geese plucked, and the dining table decorated using the furthest reaches of culinary imagination. And so, in 2007, with Fannie Farmer's original 1896 Boston Cooking School cookbook in hand, using a twelve-course menu printed in the back of the book and an authentic Victorian coal cookstove installed in our 1859 Boston town house, I set out on a two-year journey: to test, update, and master the cooking of Fannie Farmer's America, re-creating a high Victorian feast that I hoped to serve in perfect succession to a dozen celebrity guests for a televised public television special. The project had begun with a book. It was horse chestnut brown, the color of a dark penny roux, mottled through a century of use, and measuring just 5 by 7 3/4 inches. The cover had separated from the binding, and there was no printing on the front or back—just a simple mustard yellow title on the upper spine: *Mrs. Lincoln's Boston Cook Book*. It was subtitled, on the inside, *What to Do and What Not to Do in Cooking*. The book was published in Boston by Roberts Brothers in 1890, seven years after the first edition; it was 536 pages. In 1896, Fannie Farmer, the new head of the Boston Cooking School, revised, updated, and expanded Mrs. Lincoln's work. I had found it in 1983 through an act of pure serendipity, in the library of a house I was thinking of purchasing at the top of Mine Hill Road in Fairfield, Connecticut. It was a two-story white clapboard number, more a square than a colonial rectangle, well proportioned and big enough for a small family, but no trophy house by any stretch. The former occupant, well in her eighties, had just died; she had been the German mistress of a long-departed lawyer in town who had willed her the use of the house during her lifetime. Coming up the back steps into the kitchen for our first inspection, my wife-to-be, Adrienne, and I noticed the antique gas stove, the even older four-door General Motors refrigerator, and a screen door between the kitchen and the dining room, as if the occupant had kept live chickens or goats secluded from the rest of the living quarters. As the Realtor took Adrienne on a tour of the upstairs, I sat on a window seat and read the preface of the small cookbook I'd found abandoned on a shelf. In it, Mrs. Lincoln put forth her premise: to compile a book "which shall also embody enough of physiology, and of the chemistry and philosophy of food." Hmm, that sounded quite modern to me, hardly what I might have expected from a book published in 1890. She went on to define cooking as "the art of preparing food for the nourishment of the human body. [Cooking] must be based upon scientific principles of hygiene and what the French call the minor moralities of the household. The degree of civilization is often measured by its cuisine." Clearly, she was a heck of a lot more enlightened regarding cooking and diet than 99 percent of all cookbook authors today, most of whom were promising meals in minutes. Who were these Victorian cooks? Years later, while researching this book, I came across an awe-inspiring account of the Boston Food Fair of 1896. This made the contemporary Fancy Food Show look like amateur hour. A series of over-the-top meals was served, including a

“Mermaid’s Dinner.” There was an electric dairy in the convention hall that churned out three thousand pounds of butter each day, a towering replica of a castle to promote flour, and a giant barn with grass, trees, and a Paul Bunyan-sized cow whose only purpose was to promote canned evaporated cream. Women queued up for free samples from two hundred different vendors: shredded wheat, cereals, gelatins, extracts, ice cream, candy, and custards. Other booths promoted shredded fish, preserved fruits, olives, baking powders, and dried meats. And then, just to remind us that we were still in the Victorian age, tucked darkly under the stairs, was the perfect dour touch: a melancholy exhibit of gravestones to remind passers by of their inevitable end. Just as today, food and cooking were at the convergence of popular entertainment and capitalism. In fact, in the late 1800s, the culinary world was on fire, as technology came to the rescue of the exhausted home cook with modern versions of classic ingredients. Powdered gelatin had recently replaced ungainly thickeners such as isinglass, made from the swim bladders of sturgeon, or Irish moss, made from seaweed, or, God forbid, calf’s-foot jelly, a smelly proposition indeed. Jell-O was even marketing an ice-cream powder in vanilla, strawberry, chocolate, and lemon as an alternative to making the real thing. Gas stoves were coming into use, replacing dirty, high-maintenance coal cookstoves. Fruits were being shipped in from California and the Northwest, mushrooms from France, extra-virgin olive oil from Italy, and cheese from all over Europe, including real Parmesan and Emmentaler. Sugar was now modern and highly refined, no longer consumed in yellow loaves, but pure white and granulated. Contemporary cookbooks, especially *The Epicurean* by Charles Ranhofer, exhibited an advanced knowledge of cooking and the assumption that home cooks were up to the task of creating elaborate masterpieces. Then a strange and self-indulgent notion struck me. Trying to understand the culinary past through old cookbooks and newspapers is a dodgy enterprise at best. A century or two from now, would historians be able to paint an accurate picture of home cooking in the early twenty-first century by reading the *New York Times* food pages or looking at best-sellers in the Cooking, Food, and Wine category? Instead, why not just cook my way back through history—investigate the ingredients and the techniques; make the puddings, the soups, the roasts, the jellies, and the cakes; and then give myself a final exam, a twelve-course Victorian blowout dinner party that I would serve to the most interesting group of guests I could cobble together? Oh, and I should do all of this on an authentic coal cookstove from the period and make everything from scratch, including the stocks, the puff pastry, the gelatin, and the food colorings. It would be like building a culinary time machine: I could travel back through history and stand next to Fannie as she cooked, feeling the intense heat of the cast-iron stove and the chill of the thin strips of salt pork as I larded a saddle of venison, and then follow her instructions precisely as I handled a poached calf’s brain so gently that it did not dissolve into custard. This idea was to remain nothing more than a daydream until 1991, when I moved to Boston and purchased an 1859 brick bowfront only a few blocks away from Fannie Farmer’s home in 1896, the year that she published *The Boston Cooking-School Cook Book*. I still had to renovate the house and re-create an authentic Victorian kitchen—all of that would take years—but the seed had been planted. My fantasy dinner party, sleuthing the Victorian age through its recipes, was about to be born. From the Hardcover edition.