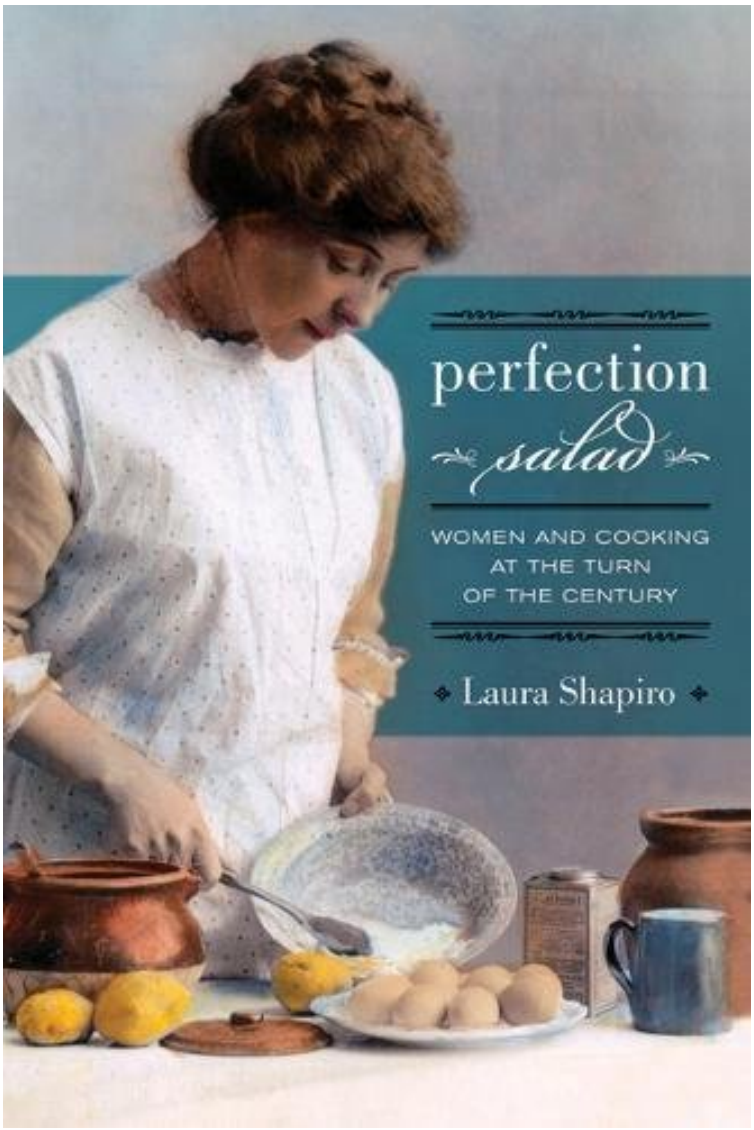
Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century (California Studies in Food and Culture)

Laura Shapiro
*audiobook | *ebooks | Download PDF | ePub | DOC*



#97557 in Books 2008-10-02Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 8.25 x .70 x 5.50l, .75 #File Name: 0520257383296 pages | File size: 48.Mb

Laura Shapiro : Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century (California Studies in Food and Culture) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century (California Studies in Food and Culture):

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. An astonishing look at how American cooking came to be.By The

Strife of Love in a DreamSometimes reviewers overuse words about books, but this one deserves all the best ones. It truly is deft, witty, sparkling, thought-provoking, and groundbreaking. I've reread it now several times and every time some new facet leaps out at me.American cooking is a unique beast--especially cooking from that era between 1850-1950 when food became possible to engineer, meaningfully study, and industrially process. As Americans struggled with putting into action the high and lofty ideals of their forebears, as our nation shuddered through a civil war, women themselves struggled between two differing aspirations: equality or carefully-outlined, carefully-sequestered, overly-sentimentalized, sickeningly-sweet and sanctimonious ultra-femininity. Housekeeping--specifically cooking--was seen as a way to elevate women and even society as a whole spiritually and morally, to assimilate a growing horde of immigrants into American culture, to civilize the poor, and to make women happier with their own inequality. As Ms. Shapiro points out time and again, that struggle resulted in the weird pseudo-empowering movement known as Domestic Science or Home Economics. The result is something that women even today have to fight against--the sequestering of women in "women's work" and "women's careers", and the elevation of men as not only the recipient of all that work but also the ideal to emulate.Anybody who's ever wondered about Jell-O salads or what one food writer, Sylvia Lovegren, called "the constant drumbeat of marshmallows throughout a meal" featured in the worst American cooking, or why it is that Americans seem so content with horrible-tasting, adulterated convenience food laced with thousands of weird additives and preservatives, this book carefully and I'd even say painstakingly traces the evolution of American appetites from simple fireplace cooking to where it sat at the dawn of our awakening in the mid-1960s with Julia Child--and even beyond, because even that awakening is an outgrowth of and reaction to Domestic Science--to where we are today. But it's all done with friendly, accessible writing by someone who very clearly is comfortable with the history involved here (and with cooking itself). She highlights the many leaders of the Domestic Science movement, the creators and instructors in its cooking schools, and the committees of women who put it all into motion. And she explains exactly why these women veered from the dead-boring to the unthinkably grotesquely wacky in creating the foods they did, and why they got into bed so quickly and so thoroughly with food manufacturers. The entire direction of the movement changed once that last part happened, and Ms. Shapiro very effectively outlines just how cooks all over the country became servants to those manufacturers' increasingly-awful product offerings.If you've been hearing about this book for a while and haven't read it yet, let me encourage you to do so. This book is entirely appropriate for any reader capable of following the information presented, probably late teens and upward. A previous knowledge of American history is not required. This is not a cookbook and does not feature recipes.6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. One of my all-time favorite food histories!By CissaI LOVE this book. I read it for the first time many, many years ago- when it was first published- and it made sense of all sorts of things that otherwise looked random: the increasing industrialization of food; the defiantly anti-useful Home Ec classes I was required to take as a girl 40 years ago; and many more.Shapiro is both very informative and amusing about all this. Like caller the book after one of the most horrible dishes ever invented: yes, I have tasted "Perfection Salad"- my mother used to make it- and it is dreadful. Grate up raw carrots and celery and cabbage, and immerse them in lime Jello. Imagine the joy.But- it gives a solid historical look at what the whole "Slow Food" and locavore movements are trying to counter, and how the passion for processing (to the detriment of taste and nutrition) developed.Plus- it's great fun to read. The first time I read it, I kept buttonholing my poor husband to read him selected bits (and I mostly don't do that).I am sorry the current price is so high; it makes this book less accessible. Still, if you are an interested cook wondering how we got to where we are with industrial food production- this is an excellent place to start- especially since it's so much fun!1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Incredibly interestingBy morehumanthanhumanThis book is a readable and informative exploration of how American women contributed to the standardization of cooking and "home economics" as a discipline. It's fascinating -- I could have kept reading much more on the subject because Shapiro's writing is so interesting. It's a comprehensive history, one that will be of interest to anyone who wants to know more about the history of American cooking, evolving nutritional standards, women in the professions, or the politics of the female appetite.

Toasted marshmallows stuffed with raisins? Green-and-white luncheons? Chemistry in the kitchen? This entertaining and erudite social history, now in its fourth paperback edition, tells the remarkable story of America's transformation from a nation of honest appetites into an obedient market for instant mashed potatoes. In Perfection Salad, Laura Shapiro investigates a band of passionate but ladylike reformers at the turn of the twentieth centuryincluding Fannie Farmer of the Boston Cooking Schoolwho were determined to modernize the American diet through a "scientific" approach to cooking. Shapiro's fascinating tale shows why we think the way we do about food today.

.com Perfection Salad, a dish that won its creator first prize in a 1905 cooking contest, consisted of pristine molded aspic containing celery, red pepper, and chopped cabbage. Laura Shapiro, author of this eponymous social history, part of the Modern Library Food series, takes the salad as a model for the domestic science movement, an intriguing women's crusade of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Bent on convincing housewives that the way to domestic order lay in cooking "dainty" nutritional meals from sanitary ingredients in "scientific" kitchens, the movement helped

give birth to our mass-market food scene, with its reliance on home economics precepts, processed convenience foods, and no-cook cooking--our cuisine of boil-in bags and microwave frozen dinners. Entertaining and informative, but also unexpectedly moving, the book chronicles in numerous intriguing stories the ways in which an impulse to liberate women from the drudgery and imprecision of daily food preparation led to its debasement. It's a fascinating story, of interest to anyone who wonders why and how we cook and eat--and think about food--as we do. Beginning with portraits of early domestic movement reformers such as Catherine Beecher and Mary Lincoln, and investigating institutions like the Boston Cooking School, home of Fannie Farmer, the Mother of Level Measurements, the book then pursues "scientific cookery" into its mid-20th-century manifestation. "With the help of the new industry of advertising," Shapiro writes, "the food business was able to reflect Mrs. Lincoln's values [of food-production uniformity] by keeping its achievements in packing, sanitation, convenience, and novelty at the forefront." But greater ills ensued: the effect of the reformers, Shapiro contends, was to encourage women to become docile consumers tethered to commercial interests--and to rob our vigorous cooking and eating traditions of their rich life. In making that point, Perfection Salad reveals its true subject: the cultural priorities that defined American 20th-century life and, finally, the sorry nature of the order they established. --Arthur BoehmFrom Publishers WeeklyA journalist who has written extensively on aspects of feminism, Shapiro presents a well-researched history of women as nutritional revolutionaries during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This serious study is lively entertainment, spiced by the author's wit and wry perceptions. Through her, we discover clues to the motives of women who turned American kitchens into laboratories, run according to the dicta of the Boston Cooking School and similar establishments that proliferated across the country. The most memorable of the culinary movers was Fannie Farmer, whose cookbook was published in a modest 3000-copy edition in 1896. Stories about Farmer and other domestic scientists of the period add strong appeal to Shapiro's report. So do the parallels between early feminists and today's advocates of equal rights. It is somber to realize, as the author emphasizes, that fear of significant power for women "even over themselves" kept their aims restricted. By 1900, they had settled for the status of experts in home economics instead of independence. From Library JournalIn documenting the history of the American domestic science movement at the turn of this century, Shapiro's very readable book helps explain why middle-class Americans developed a preference for a cuisine that sacrifices taste to the pure and the plastic. It was an era when science was in ascendency, and the leaders of the domestic science movement hoped to change the eating habits of the nation and to do away with the irrational methods of traditional housekeeping. How these women succeeded and where they failed is a fascinating story. A good bibliography nicely supplements this admirable book, which should appeal to a wide audience. Highly recommended. Joyce S. Toomre, Russian Research Ctr., Harvard Univ.