



February-March 2019

ZOOM in on america

A Bimonthly Publication of the U.S. Consulate Krakow

Volume XV. Issue 159

Influential American Women of Letters



Jesse Above: Emily Dickinson (source: Wikipedia)
Below: "Gone With the Wind" author Margaret Mitchell is shown in this 1937 photo. (Photo ©AP Images)



Top: Activist and author Rachel Carson speaks at a Senate Government Operations Subcommittee meeting on June 4, 1963.
Above: Harriet Beecher Stowe is shown in an undated drawing.
(Photos ©AP Images)

In this issue: Women Writers and Poets

Zoom in on America

Domestic Matters and Cooking

AMELIA SIMMONS (1760s?-?)

It is perhaps unsurprising that many women writers chose food as a subject of their books. We now see the Internet full of blogs about traditional and novel recipes. And it was similar in the pre-Internet era, over two hundred years ago. The author of the earliest book on American cookery is Amelia Simmons, whose cookbook was published just 20 years after the United States declared their independence. The title, as was typical of 18th century literary style, was long and read in full: *American Cookery: or, the Art of Dressing Viands, Fish, Poultry and Vegetables, and the Best Modes of Making Puff-Pastes, Pies, Tarts, Pudding, Custard and Preserves, and All Kinds of Cakes, from the Imperial Plumb to Plain Cake. Adapted to this Country and All Grades of Life by Amelia Simmons, an American Orphan*. The book, now short-titled *American Cookery* was the first cookbook written by an American, for Americans. The importance of this book was that it showed the continuity of English culinary traditions and how they were adapted to the United States. Native American ingredients such as squash, pumpkin and corn were introduced, substituting ingredients that were not available locally. The question "who was Amelia Simmons?" can only be deduced from what she says indirectly. The subtext of her book suggests she might have been an unmarried woman

(at the time of publishing) and had to make her living as a servant cook. The book had numerous editions, especially in the New England region and was a great influence on American cuisine. One of the greatest merits of the book was that it showed how to substitute ingredients with what was available on the local market and that it demonstrated the merging of English culinary traditions with local American products.

The following is Amelia Simmons' recipe is for Independence Cake:

Twenty pound flour, 15 pound sugar, 10 pound butter, 4 dozen eggs, one quart wine, 1 quart brandy, 1 ounce nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves, mace, of each 3 ounces, two pound citron, currants and raisins 5 pound each, 1 quart yeast; when baked, frost with loaf sugar; dress with box and gold leaf.

We cannot say for certain that this same recipe was used for the cake commemorating the 200th Independence Anniversary in 1976 (see the photo below), but it goes without saying that Independence Cake is one of the most important cakes in the United States.



James Rhoads of the National Archives prepares to cut a Bicentennial birthday cake in Washington, July 4, 1976 as thousands look on.

(Photo ©AP Images)

Anti-Slavery

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE (1811-1896)



The cabin and slave quarters where Josiah Henson, the man whom Harriet Beecher Stowe used as a model for the Uncle Tom character in her 1852 novel on slavery, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," once lived sits unoccupied on December 21, 2005, in Rockville, Maryland. (Photo ©AP Images)

Women often took to writing to voice their stand on social issues. They rebelled against slavery, injustice, cruelty and brutality of life. Some of the women writers who chose to fight with their pen were extremely successful. The best example is Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life Among the Lowly*, a book that sold 300,000 copies within the first year of its publication in 1852, making the author the most widely known American woman writer of the 19th century. When, ten years later, she was introduced to Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States exclaimed, "So this is the little lady who started our big war!" Indeed her book describing the oppression and suffering of slaves and encouraging Northerners to disobey the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, fueled antislavery sentiment during the decade before the Civil War. Not everyone approved of the book. Slave owners and all who would gladly continue slavery indefinitely, ardently criticized it. However many others, including those who so far were uninterested or unaware of the oppression, opened their eyes and took a stand. The fragment below is an exchange between Augustine and his cousin Ophelia, who was deeply moved by an account of a slave who was beaten to death. Ophelia is greatly disturbed by the fact that nothing is being done by the system and society to prevent such cruelty. Augustine, who listened to her tirade, is finally shaken out of his complacency and exclaims:

[...] I declare to you, there have been times when I have thought, if the whole country would sink, and hide all this injustice and misery from the light, I would willingly sink with it. When I have been travelling up and down on our boats, or about on my collecting tours, and reflected that every brutal, disgusting, mean, low-lived fellow I met, was allowed by our laws to become absolute despot of as many men, women and children, as he could cheat, steal, or gamble money enough to buy, - when I have seen such men in actual ownership of helpless children, of young girls and women, -- I have been ready to curse my country, to curse the human race !"

"Augustine! Augustine!" said Miss Ophelia, "I'm sure you've said enough. I never, in my life, heard anything like this, even at the North."

Harriet Beecher Stowe is an author of many other influential books, including one that she co-wrote with her sister Catharine E. Beecher, *The American Woman's Home*. Published in 1869, the book is a domestic guide dedicated to "the women of America, in whose hands rest the real destinies of the Republic." It includes chapters on healthful cookery, home decoration, exercise, cleanliness, good air ventilation and heat, etiquette, sewing, gardening and care of children, the sick, the aged and domestic animals. Extremely popular in its time, it became the standard domestic handbook.

Poetry

EMILY DICKINSON (1830-1886)

*Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me –*

These hauntingly beautiful words - the beginning of poem no. 479 - were written by a poetess who managed to have just 10 out of her 1,775 poems published in her lifetime. Emily Dickinson, now considered one of the best and most influential American poets, was likely too original and outstanding for her times, which moreover, did not offer equal opportunity for women authors.

When she lived, she kept her poems literally in a drawer, in packets which she bound in string and called “fascicles”. She did make some effort to get her work published by sending her poems to her friend, Samuel Bowles, who was editor of the *Springfield Republican*. She also had a habit of attaching a poem to letters that she sent to friends, possibly with the hope of someone discovering her talent for poetry.

This lack of recognition or success did not, however, dissuade her from writing, even though her life was more and more solitary with the passing of time. A native of Amherst, Massachusetts, she led a quiet home life, tending to her aging parents and the rest of the family. She never married, though love was one of her favorite subjects. Other frequent themes included death and nature.

Her early poetry was inspired by the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, as well as by Emily Bronte. She read Shake-

spere, Greek and Roman classics as well as American and English authors of the time: Thoreau, Hawthorne, the Brownings, Keats, Ruskin, Tennyson, and George Eliot. She loved reading other authors but it was her sensitivity and individual perception of reality that gave her writing a unique and recognizable voice.

If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire ever can warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way?

Posthumously, and thanks to her sister Lavinia, her poems finally got published and immediately met with acclaim. Once discovered, they inspired legions of budding poets. Today, her poetry is still fresh and original and has withstood the test of time.

“Called Back” are the words engraved on the tombstone of Emily Dickinson’s grave in West Cemetery in Amherst. For this great poet and mystic, death was a return to where she had come from.

As the first stanza of the quoted poem 479 goes:

*The Carriage held but just Ourselves –
And Immortality.*



The tombstone of the grave of poet Emily Dickinson. The photo was taken on April 23, 2011. (Photo ©AP Images)

Romance

MARGARET MITCHELL (1900-1949)



Undated photo of American author Margaret Mitchell, centre, who talks with British actress Vivien Leigh, who played Scarlett O'Hara in the film adaption of the book, at a reception somewhere in America. American film actor Clark Gable, who played Rhett Butler in the film, listens to the conversation. (Photo ©AP Images)

“After all... tomorrow is another day!” - who doesn't know Scarlett O'Hara's famous words that end one of the most popular love stories of all time, *Gone with the Wind*?

Margaret Mitchell's life was closely connected with the American South. She was born in Atlanta, Georgia and the Civil War was a frequent topic of conversation among her family members who had lived through it. Mitchell worked as a feature writer for *Atlanta Journal*, and even though she was a success at the job, she finally gave it up to try her hand at fiction.

This is how her work on *Gone with the Wind* started. The manuscript had some 1,037 pages and Mitchell handed it to Harold Latham, an editor at *Macmillan Publishers*. She just met him on a tour of Atlanta, which she guided. Latham was perhaps not impressed with a manuscript stuck in many envelopes, but when he started reading it, he couldn't put it down.

Gone with the Wind is the story of Scarlett O'Hara, whose father is an owner of Tara, a plantation in the South. The

book tells the story of her love for Ashley Wilkes, a neighbor who loves another woman, Melanie Hamilton. Hurt by the unrequited love, Scarlett marries her brother, Charles, but he dies soon after joining the Confederate Army. Scarlett, who is now a mother, spends most of the war with her son and Melanie in Atlanta, but they have to escape when the city is set ablaze. They escape to Tara, now, a ruined plantation. Scarlett marries again, but again becomes a widow. Her third husband is Rhett Butler, who has been in love with her for many years. He is a wealthy man now and his wealth helps her secure the ownership of Tara. Scarlett doesn't realize that she really loves him until Butler, feeling alienated, leaves her.

Mitchell's book, the only one she wrote, won the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award. Despite controversies relating to the writer's treatment of slavery, the book remains popular. In 1940, it became the basis of the one of the most popular movies of all time, starring Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh. Who doesn't remember Rhett Butler's final line: “Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn”, in response to Scarlett's tearful question: “Where shall I go?”

Environment

RACHEL CARSON (1907 - 1964)

Rachel Carson's role in ultimately banning the use of DDT (Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane), at a time when the pesticide was widely celebrated and even called the "savior of mankind", was an extraordinary achievement. The discontinuation of DDT, prompted by Carson's book on the subject, saved many lives and inspired an environmental movement. After 1945, agricultural and commercial usage of DDT became widespread in the U.S. DDT was highly effective in killing pests, and so people started treating it as a remedy for many ailments. Carson's research, however, showed the contrary. She noticed that within a few generations after being sprayed with DDT, mosquitoes developed a resistance to the chemical. She discovered that consistent use of DDT caused the thinning of the eggshells of birds, which led to a decrease of their populations. Her book, *Silent Spring*, which was the result of four-years of research, was a revelation for many people. The book was a 1963 National Book Association Nonfiction Finalist and was so popular and influential that DDT was banned and a care-free approach to the use of pesticides, changed, despite resistance from chemical industries. The book sold over 500,000 copies in hardcover.

Carson was biologist by profession, with a mindset of a writer. It took her some time to realize that her occupation

wasn't a hindrance to writing, but rather a tool for disseminating scientific knowledge and research. In that way, she paved the road for many other scientists who, in addition to scientific articles in specialized magazines and periodicals, started writing books for general audiences, thereby popularizing science. She is also considered a founder of the environment protection movement.



One of Carson's first jobs was a marine biologist. Her love of the sea led to her first major story, *Undersea*, which met with a considerable acclaim, and was followed by two books on the marine theme: *Under the Sea Wind* and *The Sea Around Us*. This last book was on a best sellers list and was awarded the National Book Award.

Another one of Carson's books, *The Edge of the Sea* (1955), was also on the bestseller list and the National Council of Women voted it "Outstanding Book of the Year". Carson was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, an exclusive group with only fifty members.

In 1980, in honor of her literary and scientific contributions, President Jimmy Carter awarded Rachel Carson, a posthumous Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award.



Top: Rachel Carson

Above: Students at Chatham College in Pittsburgh take part in a demonstration to protest pesticides in the environment on September 27, 2002. It was part of the school's program commemorating the 40th anniversary of the publication of "Silent Spring," by environmentalist and school alumna Rachel Carson. (Photos ©AP Images)

ACTIVITY PAGE

February-March 2019
TRIVIA QUESTION

How many poems by Emily Dickinson were published in her lifetime?

Send the answer
(with your home address) to:
KrakowAIRC@state.gov

The 4th, the 7th and 12th
sender of the correct answer
will be awarded with a book
prize.

Deadline April 15, 2019

December 2018 - January
2019 Answer:

9 states

The winners are:
Paulina from Szczecin, Natalia from Trzyciaz and Ewa from Wroclaw

CONGRATULATIONS!!!

The prizes will be sent to you
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The May-June cover is the winner in our 2018
Best Zoom Cover

The first five readers who sent their choices are:
Ewelina from Krakow, Malgorzata from Poznan, Maya
from Gliwice, Paulina from Krakow and Dominika from
Luzino. Congratulations! The prizes will be sent to
you by mail.



Exercise 1. Reading Comprehension.

Read the texts on pp. 2-6 and decide if the sentences below are true or false:

1. Rachel Carson was a biologist by profession.
2. The name of the main character of *Gone with the Wind* is Tara.
3. Emily Dickinson wrote about 1,800 poems, which brought her international fame in her lifetime.
4. *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life Among the Lowly* is the full title of a book by Amelia Simmons.
5. *American Cookery* was published in 1796.
6. Rachel Carson's research led to banning the use of DDT.
7. Emily Dickinson's favorite subjects were: love, death and nature.
8. Margaret Mitchell was born in Atlanta.

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UNCLE TOM'S CABIN;
OR,
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VOL. I.

BOSTON:
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JEWETT, PROCTOR & WORTHINGTON.
1852.