Fannie Merritt Farmer Biography

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Biography

Fannie Merritt Farmer (1857-1915) was an American authority in the art of cookery and the author of six books about food preparation.

Fannie Farmer was born in Boston, Mass., on March 23, 1857. Her parents had hopes of sending her to college. But after high school graduation she suffered a paralytic stroke, and her doctor discouraged all thoughts of further schooling.

While at home when handicapped, Fannie Farmer became interested in cooking. When her physical condition had markedly improved, her parents advised her to seek schooling which would develop and refine her knowledge and abilities in cookery. She liked the idea and enrolled in the Boston Cooking School, where her performance was outstanding. Because of the excellence of her work, upon graduation in 1889 she was invited to serve as assistant director of the school under Carrie M. Dearborn. Farmer's inquiring mind led her into studies, including a summer course at the Harvard Medical School.

After Dearborn's death in 1891, Farmer was appointed director of the school. While there she published her monumental work, *Boston Cooking School Cookbook* (1896), of which 21 editions were printed before her death. It has remained a standard work. She served as director of the school for 11 years. After her resignation in 1902, she established her own school and named it Miss Farmer's School of Cookery. It was decidedly innovative, emphasizing the practice of cooking instead of theory. Its program was designed to educate housewives rather than to prepare teachers. The school also developed cookery for the sick and the handicapped. Farmer became an undisputed authority in her field, and she was invited to deliver lectures to nurses, women's clubs, and even the Harvard Medical School.

One of Farmer's major contributions was teaching cooks to follow recipes carefully. She pioneered the use of standard level measurement in cooking. Farmer, her school, and her cookbooks were extremely popular. She received favorable newspaper coverage in many American cities, and her influence was widespread. The well-attended weekly lectures at the school were tributes to the value of the work she and her assistants were doing. She also wrote a popular cookery column, which ran for nearly 10 years in the *Woman's Home Companion,* a national magazine.

Farmer was a woman of unusual motivation, intelligence, and courage. Though she suffered another paralytic stroke, she continued lecturing. In fact, 10 days before her death in 1915, she delivered a lecture from a wheelchair.