

LOCAL

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SUBMITTED

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America's first dietitian lived here



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Before there was Julia Child, there was Sara Tyson Heston Rorer.

Most people today probably never heard of Rorer, but — like Julia Child — her name was a household word, and her cookbooks were a part of every woman's kitchen at the turn of the 20th century.

Born in Richboro, Bucks County, in 1849, Rorer was raised in New York, but she ended her days in the Colebrook and Mt. Gretna area. In the late 1800s, she earned a reputation as "America's first dietitian." She taught doctors, nurses and medical students about proper diet, especially for the sick. She also worked to bring dignity to the role of women and to make households more modern and efficient.

Rorer's interest in the science of cooking and nutrition may have stemmed from her father, a pharmacist. When Rorer was about a year old, her father moved the family to Buffalo, N.Y. As she grew, Rorer developed a keen interest in her father's work, often spending time in his laboratory, where she learned science. In later years, she recalled that she wanted to be a pharmacist like her father, but she abandoned the idea because of prejudice against women in science.

Her family returned to Philadelphia around 1870, and a year later she married William A. Rorer. The couple had three children, two boys and a girl, who died before age 2.

While her children were young, she decided to enroll in a cooking class at Philadelphia's New Century Club, and later became a teacher there. She then established her own cooking school in Philadelphia, which operated until 1902. During this period, she began writing columns for magazines, publishing the first of 54 books, "Mrs. Rorer's Philadelphia Cook Book."



CHRIS SHOLLY

Our Story

In the 1890s, she served as the domestic science editor of a relatively new women's magazine — Ladies Home Journal. At the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago and at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition (World's Fair) in St. Louis in 1904, Rorer continued to spread her ideas on modern cooking, diet and healthy living.

Rorer visited Mt. Gretna as early as 1889, appearing at the Mt. Gretna Agricultural, Mechanical and Industrial Exposition. The Cornwall-Lebanon Railroad gave her easy access from Philadelphia to Mt. Gretna, one biographer, Emma Seifrit Weigley, wrote in her book, "Sarah Tyson Rorer: The Nation's Instructress in Dietetics and Cookery."

Rorer became very active in the Pennsylvania Chautauqua movement and, during the summer in Mt. Gretna, she held cooking classes for women at the Sarah Tyson Rorer Hall of Cooking (the Rorer building). Her courses and lectures on cooking and diet drew large audiences and were among the most popular at Mt. Gretna. The Rorer building was demolished in 1908.

Rorer was described as a "fluent and interesting speaker" with a "great stage presence." Weigley wrote that she would often wear silk dresses during her cooking demonstrations just to show how "neat and clean cooking could be."

In her later book, "Mrs.



Rorer's New Cook Book: A Manual of Housekeeping," Rorer explains the chemistry of food as well as how to cook. The 730-page tome includes recipes for foreign dishes and the foreign names of fruits and vegetables in several languages.

Her writing style is simple and clear. "A large quantity of fried foods may be eaten without nourishing the body, and of one thing we are quite sure, they always tax the digestive organs," she wrote in the book. "Fried meats are always to be avoided, even by persons with strong digestion. They will in time produce disorders of the digestive tract." She was also an advocate of eating lots of "clean and wholesome" vegetables and suggested a salad should be served 365 days of the year.

Through the years, she built two cottages at Mt. Gretna and was one of the first people to live

there all year. She later moved to the Colebrook area. She was active in local organizations, serving as president of the Lebanon County League of Democratic Women and was an honorary member of the Lebanon Quilt Club.

Rorer died at the age of 88 on Dec. 27, 1937, following a short illness. She is buried in the Colebrook Lutheran Church cemetery.

If you're interested, you can still buy Rorer's books online. The Lebanon Public Library has a copy of Rorer's book "Canning and Preserving." And the Lebanon County Historical Society has a copy of her book "Mrs. Rorer's New Cook Book" in its archives.

Update

Last month, we ran a photo showing former Mayor John L. Worrlow shoveling coal at the Lebanon Steam Co. in 1966. The man helping him was Paul Schaeffer Sr. For many years, Schaeffer was the plant foreman but left the company with his brother, Walter Schaeffer, in August 1965.

His son Byron Schaeffer wrote in an email: "Walter was not involved with the actual hands on running of the steam plant — that was Dad. An arrangement was made with his employer, Margut's Plumbing, to bring him back to supervise the workers and get the boilers working. He was the only one that knew how to get the boilers working, since he had been doing the maintenance on them for years. They were really old boilers and Dad was one of the few people that understood them."

Thanks to the family for identifying Schaeffer and providing these additional details. Sholly's column appears periodically in the Daily News. She may be reached at 717-272-5611, ext. 151, or by email at chrissholly@ldnews.com. Also, visit the Our Story blog at LDNews.com.