

**Concours de Livres Culinaires Canadien
Canadian Culinary Book Awards**

2010

Canadian Culinary Landmarks
HALL OF FAME AWARD

Kate Aitken's Canadian Cookbook

Author: **KATE AITKEN**

Publisher: **MONTREAL STANDARD**

Year: **1945**

About the Award:

In 2009, Cuisine Canada and The University of Guelph inaugurated the Canadian Culinary Landmarks Hall of Fame Award, named after Elizabeth Driver's ground-breaking *Culinary Landmarks: A Bibliography of Canadian Cookbooks, 1825-1949*. This award is given to honour outstanding achievements in the field of culinary writing.

About the book:

Kate Aitken's Canadian Cookbook, first published in 1945 by *The Standard* of Montreal where she was food editor, went into numerous updated editions and reprinting into the 1970s. It was published by Collins of Toronto, with separate editions sponsored by the national drug store chain Tamblyn's. In 2004, Whitecap Books published a reprint of the first edition edited by Elizabeth Driver.

The reader of *The Kate Aitken Cook Book* finds traditional recipes for Aitken favourites: chili sauce, mustard pickles and catsup, chicken pot pie and dumplings, apple pie, and cupcakes, but also less familiar foods such as crepes suzettes, brioche and veal rossini. They are reliable, for she tested them all during her innumerable classes and cooking shows including in her own home where she had four kitchens. In her cookbooks Mrs. A. looks back on a happy childhood on the farm where her mother – and many of their neighbours – were prize-winning cooks.

About the author:

Kate Aitken of Beeton, Ontario, cookbook author, teacher and radio personality, was known to everybody as “Mrs. Henry M. Aitken” in the 1920s and 30s. But by the 1940s she was simply “Mrs. A.” to her fans, and Canada’s first celebrity cook.

Beginning in the early 1920s, Mrs. Aitken’s cooking demonstrations at the Canadian National Exhibition, and the Royal Winter Fair, were attended by hundreds of visitors—sometimes one third of them men. A major exhibition attraction, she won their full attention whether she was putting on a wedding breakfast complete with cake, or creating theme days based on the titles of novels such as “Gone with the Wind,” with recipes for southern meals.

It was through her radio broadcasts – over 9000 in all – that Mrs. A. taught cookery to anyone within reach of a radio signal. Beginning in 1934 her cooking lessons were heard three days a week on station CFRB in Toronto, Ottawa and Windsor. By the late 1940s the CBC was airing her cooking show every weekday, and eight of these broadcasts have been pulled from the CBC archives for their website. Each year speeches and lectures took her from one coast of Canada to the other, and to the United States. After giving up broadcasting in 1957 she wrote cookery columns for the *Globe and Mail*.

Mrs. Aitken compiled cookbooklets for several food suppliers, among them Ogilvie Flour with whom she had a long association as author and broadcaster. During the 1940s and 50s Tamblin’s issued her monthly newsletter *Good News* with four pages of seasonal recipes. These booklets and pamphlets ended up in tens of thousands of Canadian homes, making the name “Kate Aitken” as well known as that of any movie star.

She loved to reminisce about her celebrity gigs: tea with King George and Queen Elizabeth in Buckingham Palace on more than one occasion, being seated in the Abbey for the wedding of the Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip, tea with Winston Churchill, and a long “chat” with Mussolini in 1927 which led to sales of Canadian wheat to Italy.

Kate Aitken wrote and spoke on subjects other than food such as etiquette and childcare. But “the busiest woman in the world” was best known to English-speaking Canadians as the best source for everyday recipes, and for her chatty on-air advice about food and cooking.