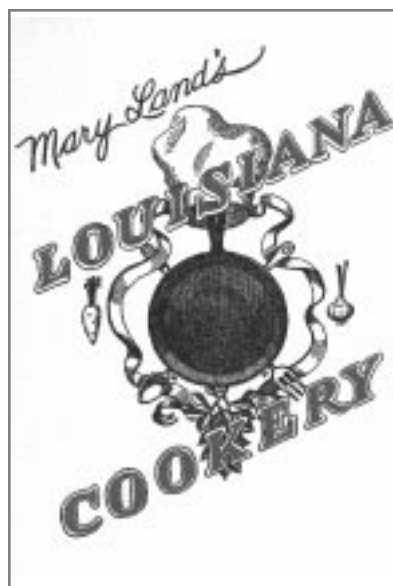
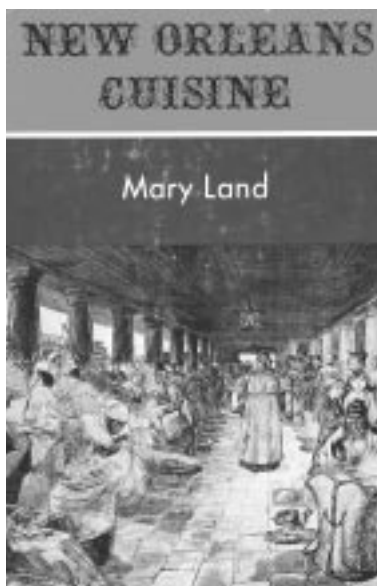


Two Women and Their Cookbooks: Lena Richard and Mary Land



**An exhibit
organized by
the Newcomb
Archives,
Newcomb
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on Women,
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College,
Tulane
University
New Orleans,
Louisiana**

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Two Women and Their Cookbooks: Lena Richard and Mary Land

An Exhibition Guide

By Karen Trahan Leathem

Edited by Susan Tucker
Design by Crystal Kile and Ray Koenig

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Newcomb College Center for Research on Women
Newcomb College, Tulane University
New Orleans, Louisiana



Illustrations on front cover are from the Richard and Land Collections, Newcomb Archives

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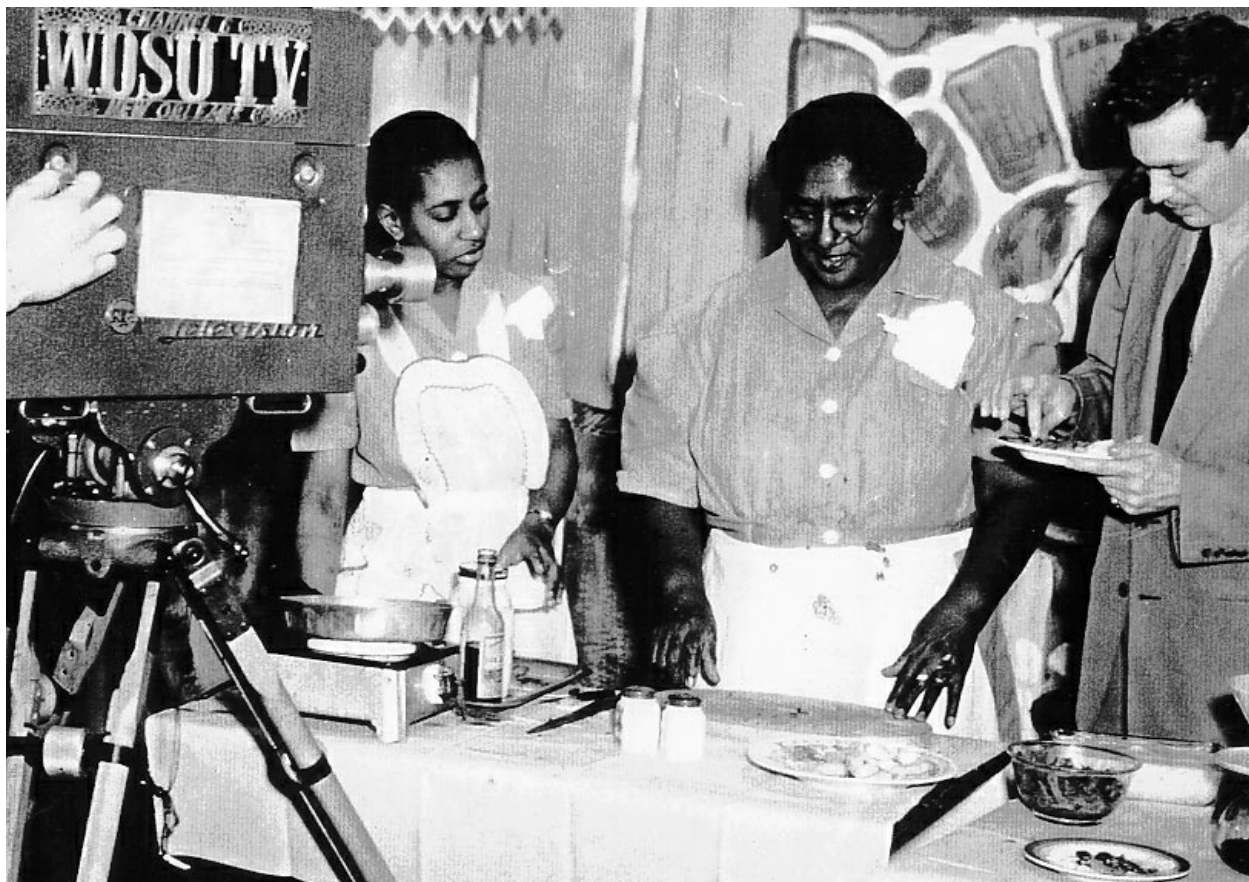
**The New Orleans
Culinary History Group
dedicates this exhibition
and guide to Paula
Rhodes and Pat Stevens,
two women who have
been generous with their
time and their legacies.**

Lena Richard and Mary Land

played crucial roles in documenting mid-twentieth century foodways in New Orleans and Louisiana. This exhibition examines the contributions of these two women through their cookbooks and their remarkable lives.

Lena Richard operated several New Orleans restaurants, a catering firm, and a cooking school. On two occasions, she left New Orleans for extended periods—once, to cook in New York state and another time, in Colonial Williamsburg. She became well known in these places, meeting such luminaries as James Beard, who assisted in placing her *New Orleans Cook Book* with Houghton Mifflin in 1940. But the city that inspired her creativity pulled her back, and she returned here to become a television cooking show pioneer.

Mary Land, a poet and outdoors writer, cut a colorful figure, winning fishing rodeos and instructing hunters in the preparation of game. An indefatigable researcher, she documented Louisiana cuisine, north and south, as it existed at mid-century. Her exhaustive *Mary Land's Louisiana Cookery* stands the test of time, looking surprisingly modern with its emphasis on unusual herbs and wild greens.



Lena Richard (center) and others during a broadcast of her WDSU cooking show, 1949

Lena Richard

Lena Richard was born in New Roads, Louisiana, in 1892; her parents were Frances Laurence and John Peter Paul. She moved to New Orleans at an early age, and her mother and aunt began working as domestics at the Esplanade Avenue home of Alice and Nugent Vairin. Lena would join her mother after school, assisting in the kitchen. The Vairins, aware of her contributions, began paying her when she was fourteen. When she finished school, they hired her. Lena later referred to Alice Baldwin Vairin as the “lady who raised me,” dedicating the *New Orleans Cook Book* to her. Vairin, perhaps mindful of her own four daughters’ educations at Newcomb College, sent Lena Paul to cooking school in New Orleans, then north to hone her skills at the Fannie Farmer Cooking School in Boston. Lena graduated from the venerable institution in

1918, but later downplayed the school's influence on her cooking. She recalled, "I found out in a hurry they can't teach me more than I know. . . . [W]hen it comes to cooking meats, stews, soups, sauces and such dishes we Southern cooks have Northern cooks beat by a mile." It was at Fannie Farmer that Lena first thought about writing a cookbook. When she demonstrated her specialties, such as gumbo, she noticed her attentive colleagues taking notes; she began to realize that she had something to offer others.

In the early 1920s, Lena Paul began catering from her home, then opened the Sweet Shop at 1577 Derbigny after she married Percival Richard; the city directory lists her residence at the same address. The shop's offerings included sandwiches, red beans, and a New Orleans favorite, watermelon. Richard took this seasonal fruit, which was often sold and eaten on the streets, and creatively incorporated it into a number of salads and desserts.

By 1931, Lena Richard moved her catering business and home to 3938 Third Street; she also operated a lunch house primarily for laundry workers laboring in the next building. The following year, she moved again, living at 1927 Foucher Street and conducting her business at 1929 Foucher. The tireless Richard also cooked at the Orleans Club, an elite white women's organization, further gaining more contacts for catering jobs.

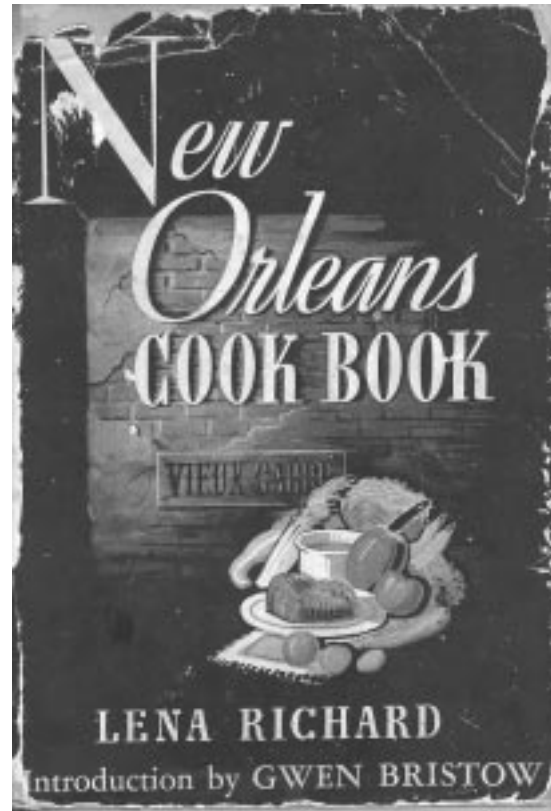
In 1937, she opened a cooking school at the request of several of her friends. With the help of her daughter, Marie, she taught classes three nights each week. Indeed, Marie proved to be invaluable, helping compile her mother's cookbook and serving as an active partner on many jobs. While Marie attended school at nearby Xavier University in the late 1930s, Lena recruited waiters there. Moreover, Xavier students would show up at her house, always ready to eat the catering leftovers that Lena generously provided. Following in her mother's footsteps, albeit in a more modern fashion, Marie Richard, later Rhodes, became an occupational food instructor at Booker T. Washington High School. All the while, she made hors d'oeuvres for the catering business and kept the books for the restaurants.

Constant requests for recipes and cooking instruction inspired Richard to extend her entrepreneurial realm. She privately published a cookbook around 1938, then embarked on a marketing blitz. As part of this sales campaign, she hosted several

cooking demonstrations for white New Orleans socialites at the Bethlehem Temple in the French Quarter. The *New Orleans Morning Tribune*, reported, “Society Sees Lena Wow ‘Em with Her Cooking.” This early cookbook remains somewhat of a mystery; so far, none have surfaced.

The first recipe collection was quickly followed by *Lena Richard’s Cook Book*, a volume that was republished as the *New Orleans Cook Book* by Houghton Mifflin in 1940 with the help of Clementine Paddleford, the eminent *New York Herald-Tribune* and *Gourmet* food writer, and James Beard. A marketing manager’s dream, Richard sold her books wherever she cooked and also at such New Orleans department stores as D. H. Holmes and Maison Blanche. She also benefited from the more unusual outlet of Father Divine, founder of the Harlem-based Peace Mission Movement. Lena met Father Divine, who agreed to promote her book to his followers and sell them for two dollars per copy, one-third of the list price; Father Divine proceeded to sell one thousand copies.

The *New Orleans Cook Book* showcases the strong points of New Orleans cuisine, even as it reflects the long reach of generic American cooking. Congealed salads appear, but so do gumbo, stuffed crabs, and Calas Tous Chauds. More important, it stands as a record of African American cooking in New Orleans; Richard said she obtained many recipes from other black cooks of “old Southern families.”



Cook Book dust jacket, 1940

About the time Houghton Mifflin released the book, Lena Richard left New Orleans and assumed a position as head chef at the newly opened Bird and Bottle Inn, fifty-five miles north of New York City in Garrison, New York. There are two accounts of how she landed there. Family lore says that the inn's owners, Charles and Constance Stearn, met her at a dinner party in New Orleans and offered her the position. Clementine Paddleford later recalled that Richard started cooking at the inn after traveling to New York to find a publisher. Her legacy at the Bird and Bottle was Shrimp Soup Louisiane, which, according to Paddleford, was the inn's "most unusual dish." This New Orleans-style bisque was later canned by the inn and sold by mail order.

Richard soon returned to New Orleans, opening Lena's Eatery at 2722 LaSalle Street in November 1941. The restaurant served typical New Orleans plate-lunch fare, including pork chops, fried chicken, potato salad, stuffed crab, stuffed peppers, gumbo, and red beans and rice. The African American and white clientele ate side by side, ignoring the segregationist strictures of the day.

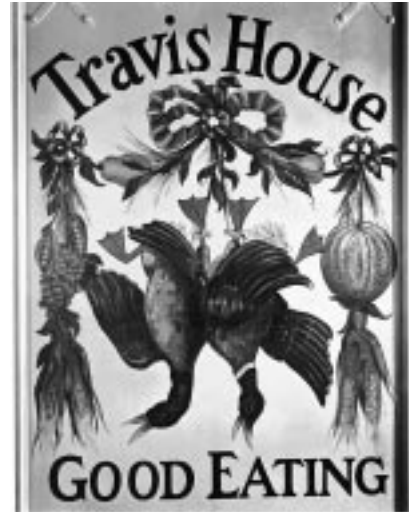
But Richard was lured away again, this time by Charles Rockefeller of the John D. Rockefeller Foundation. She became chef at the Travis House in the foundation's Colonial Williamsburg during World War II, from about 1943 to 1945. In May 1943, she cooked for the British High Command during its break from meetings with American military staff in Washington; later that year she cooked for Clementine and Mary Churchill, the wife and daughter of Winston Churchill. At the Travis House, she became known for her scalloped oysters, as well as her shrimp Creole and stuffed eggplant. Responding to a demand for



Lena and Marie Richard, 1941

Richard's concoctions, the Travis House management promptly expanded its services to a brisk take-out business.

Upon her return to New Orleans in April 1945, Richard set up shop at 2710 Marengo Street, catering once more with her daughter, now Marie Rhodes. In the late 1940s, Richard hosted a weekly cooking show on New Orleans's first television station, WDSU. Richard also opened the Gumbo House at 1936 Louisiana Avenue in 1949. Known to her regulars as "Mama Lena," Richard presided over a neighborhood gathering spot. Her family helped run the restaurant. Her son-in-law, Leroy Rhodes, managed the establishment; her husband, Percival, ensured its cleanliness; and Marie kept the finances in order.



**Travis House Restaurant
sign, ca. 1940**

**Courtesy of Colonial
Williamsburg**

Perhaps inspired by the Bird and Bottle's packaging of her soup as well as the Travis House take-out venture, Richard produced frozen dishes in the late 1940s at a Metairie Road plant that employed mostly women. Remarkably, she was said to do all the cooking. Distributed by Bordelon Fine Food, five- and ten-gallon containers were shipped cross the country from California to New York. New Orleanians could buy Richard's specialties, including turtle soup, okra gumbo, grillades, chicken fricassee, and Creole beef stew, by the pint and quart.

Lena Richard died unexpectedly, without any sign of illness, in late 1950, and her family kept the Gumbo House open until 1958. She had built a business and made a name for herself during the Jim Crow era, when opportunities were limited for black women in the South. She turned a common employment for African American women—cooking for white families—into a career and became an entrepreneur. She served both a white and black clientele, managing to balance her catering, cookbook sales, and television appearances in the white world with a grounding in her community, serving affordable food at a neighborhood restaurant, hiring needy students, and passing on her culinary skills to another generation.

CATERESS Souvenirs—Door Prizes—Music—Drinks—Personally Autographed Photos

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Advertisement for first anniversary of Lena's Eatery, November 1942

The Gumbo House, 1949



Mary Land

Mary Land was born in 1908 on Rough and Ready Plantation near Benton, not far from Shreveport in North Louisiana. Her distinguished family background stretched back to the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and included three Louisiana Supreme Court justices—her great-grandfather and two great-uncles. Her father, a prominent attorney and politician, had hoped for a boy. Faced with a girl, he decided to mold her into a fishing and hunting companion anyway. As Land wrote in *Louisiana Cookery*, “When I was big enough to tote a gun, I did. And at the mature age of four I felt no fainting fits from jabbing a fishhook into a worm—for I was reared by my father.”

Mary’s outdoor pursuits were balanced with study. At Forest Hall, an elite girls’ school in Shreveport, she received a classical education, including four years of Latin. When she was fifteen, she was sent to boarding school in Long Beach, Mississippi. The famous poet Vachel Lindsay taught there, and Land developed her love of poetry in his classes. Later, she continued her education at the Cheyney-Trent School of Poetry in California and the University of Chicago School of Journalism.

Land began her professional writing career as a poet, selling her first poem to the *Christian Advocate* in 1937.



Mary Land, ca. 1959

She eventually published several volumes of poetry, including *Shadows of the Swamp* (1941), *Abode* (1972), and *Dreams* (1977). Over the course of her life, her poems appeared in various regional and national magazines and newspapers as well as in anthologies.

In 1954, Land told a reporter, “My hobbies are fishing, hunting, cooking, and people. My work is writing.” The fortunate writer skillfully incorporated her hobbies into her job. She began working for the Louisiana State Department of Conservation around 1940, running a conservation education program in public schools. She also added recipes to her articles on fish and game in the department’s publication, *Louisiana Conservation Review*. In the late 1940s, she was briefly a staff writer for the *Mississippi Valley Sportsman*.

In such work, she was a woman in a man’s field: in 1947, she was the only woman member of the Louisiana Outdoor Writers Association and one of six women who attended the national convention of the Outdoor Writers Association of America that year. She was conscious of her status and perhaps saw herself as a trailblazer for other women. In 1940, noting that only five percent of Louisiana fishing licenses went to women, she wrote in the *Louisiana Conservation Review*, “Women think, for some inane reason, that fishing is a man’s sport. This misconception has been planted in the female mind for generations.” She hypothesized that this “malignant attitude on man’s part is [due to] the fact he recognizes woman’s ability and cannot stand to have his pis-



Mary Land at her typewriter, ca. 1930



Charcoal drawing of Mary Land by Morris Henry Hobbs, 1954

catorial glory taken away.” Thus, men conspired to keep fishing gear out of women's hands. “Some men,” she reported, “even go into acute and violent attacks at finding one of their wooden minnows moved a third of an inch in their tackle box.” Land advised women to wait until the men in their families went away on business trips to raid the box and practice casting in the back yard. “Your casting a fly into a rose bush is not half so imbecilic looking as the carressing [*sic*] of flies and plugs by men during the months of their fishing confinement,” she pronounced. When women mastered casting on dry land, it was time to hit the water. The result would be more than just a fish for dinner; the reader would, she asserted, come home with “a

sense of independence.” Nevertheless, she saw differences between male and female fishing experiences, an outlook that conformed to the predominant attitudes of the day: “A man will make his kill, guzzle a bottle of brew and blindly head homeward; a woman will be satisfied with one small perch and linger to revel in the infinitesimal loveliness of the bloom on Spanish moss or the haunting song of a rain crow at dusk.” Yet at the end of the article, Land made her final pitch with a list of women who found satisfaction in winning competitions, including Mrs. H. F. Collister, winner of the Ladies Trophy at two recent tarpon rodeos, and Mrs. Sylvester La Brot, whose eighty-four-pound tarpon garnered her a trophy in the 1936 Grand Isle Rodeo.

Land herself was accomplished at this newly popular form of sport fishing, now termed “rodeos.” In 1939, competing against seventy-five men, she won a tarpon rodeo

Shreveport, to Lake Charles, Louisiana, to Knoxville, Tennessee, then back to Shreveport again. Mary Land also became a devoted citizen of the Vieux Carré in New Orleans. During a lengthy residence in the Pontalba building, she had a number of interesting house guests—including frequent visits from her son’s pet lion. A small alligator was in residence until his size required a new home. Land often invited street musicians up for drinks and earned a reputation as a vivacious host. She enjoyed socializing with a wide range of people; as she remarked, she had her “daytime friends” and her “nighttime friends.” Her daughter later said, “Mother didn’t set out to be unconventional, she was simply born that way.”

As she wrote about the outdoors, Land collected fish and game recipes, both because she recognized the need to deal with the catch and because she enjoyed cooking. She published recipes in many of her outdoors articles, and after twenty years of compiling recipes, she went to Louisiana State University Press. The director, Don Ellegood, suggested that she expand the book beyond outdoor cookery and incorporate all of Louisiana cuisine. Land characteristically approached the project with gusto, and the result was a classic Louisiana cookbook, one that recorded old-style dishes as well as embraced innovations.



Cover with Morris Henry Hobbs illustration

Louisiana Cookery was illustrated by noted artist Morris Henry Hobbs, whose sketches of a cast-iron pot, the cuts of meat on a deer, and other culinary symbols added a touch of whimsy. Cookbook author and acknowledged food authority James Beard played a role in the book’s publication, providing the reader’s report. It was, he pronounced, “a massive work, truly an encyclopedia of invaluable information.” Beard and Land became friends; after one visit, he wrote to her: “I loved your house; I loved the parties; I liked your husband immensely; I adored you.”

The volume evoked considerable interest, both in the state and nationally. A *New York Times* review found it a “definitely worth while” inves-

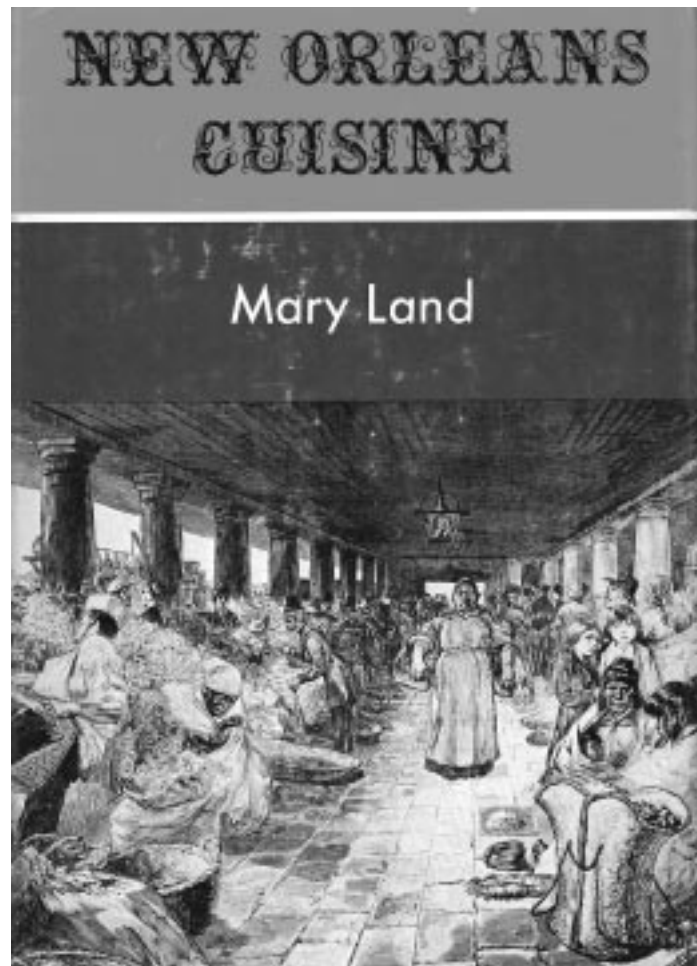
tigation of “the cuisine of one of the regions of the United States richest in culinary lore.” The reviewer singled out the chapter on game as “particularly interesting,” especially given its information on more unusual game, such as bear and muskrat. Writer Stephen Longstreet found Louisiana food the perfect antidote to the “sterile, sanitary ideas” of American cooking, characterized by “sand-filled stews, battery acid soups and color schemes on salads to match your drapes.” Prominent New Orleans writer Harnett Kane, author of *Louisiana Hayride* (1941) and *Queen New Orleans* (1949), called it “the finest Louisiana cook book ever written by anybody, any time.”

The cookbook was indeed encyclopedic, and eclectic in its methods and techniques. A recipe for Quick Bisque that called for canned bouillon and tomato soup coexisted with recipes that instructed the cook to “clean and pluck a teal duck.” Reflecting the South Louisiana enthusiasm for alcoholic drinks, the beverages chapter ran thirty-eight pages and included such concoctions as Hotel Roosevelt Café Brûlot, Creole Downfall (made from “corn likker” and ginger ale), and Cajun Cherry Bounce. But she hardly forgot the land of her birth; recipes for burgoo, Brunswick stew, and Hopping John hailed from North Louisiana, brought there by migrants from other southern states. She correctly viewed Louisiana cuisine as the product of different cultures—Acadians, Creoles, Africans, “Red Necks,” Spanish, Italian, German, and American Indian. Some recipes came from friends and acquaintances, while “others were passed down to me along with my grandmother’s iron skillet.” She dismissed the precise measurements that had become standard in American cookbooks: “You will find my measurements indefinite, for that is ‘our way.’” One chapter, entitled “Gastronomic Gambles,” reflected what Land termed the “spirit of gastronomic adventure” among Louisiana marsh dwellers. In it, she explained how to prepare food few would think of eating today, such as crows and owls, as well as delicacies now admired by those with sophisticated palates, such as eel and octopus.

Many recipe titles reflect the cuisine’s grounding in place: Isle Dernière Shrimp Stew, Grand Isle Pilau, Bayou Lafourche Boogalee Sauce, Breaux Bridge Bisque, and Pontchartrain Wiggle. The focus on game, fish, and such wild plants as bulrush, cattail, and dandelion point to the strength of traditional Louisiana cuisine, which, like all great cooking, thrives off the surrounding land.

Fifteen years later, Land focused on Crescent City food in *New Orleans Cuisine*, a work that she dedicated to her good friend Matilda Geddings Gray, a philanthropist

and author of *Food for Gourmets* (1940). In her book, Land presented recipes from well-known restaurants, such as Arnaud's, Brennan's, Commander's Palace, and Corinne Dunbar's. As with *Louisiana Cookery*, the book received much praise. One critic noted that it was "not just a cookbook, but the preservation of a way of life in New Orleans, of its traditions, customs, and cuisine." Each chapter began with a literary quotation. Land gave detailed descriptions of food customs in southern Louisiana and told stories about particular dishes and chefs. Photographs and illustrations showed New Orleans scenes and dishes.



New Orleans Cuisine
dust jacket

Even as she continued to explore Louisiana food, Land looked further afield to the tastes of foreign lands. As Julia Child popularized French cuisine in the 1960s, Mary Land, who had featured recipes for Tête de Veau Vinaigrette and Pâté Canard in her 1954 work, looked to even more exotic locales. A 1960 column in *Southern Outdoors* offered recipes for Tahitian coconut fish, sashimi, Cuban escabeche, Louisiana escabeche (made with Louisiana oranges and peppers), and sevice Acapulco style.

Immersed in the diverse culture of Louisiana, she perhaps yearned for an even greater degree of adventure. For years, she traveled to Mexico every winter. She once

rented D. H. Lawrence's house in Guadalajara; on other occasions she stayed in Mexico City. She felt a close kinship to Mexico, and the land and its people inspired her to write an article-length manuscript called "Happy Land," a title that reflected the "spontaneous gaiety" that she found in that country. To her, it was an exotic place, where "the Mexican savors life while we, 'Norte Americanos,' rush madly through each day."

Land died in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, in 1991 at the age of eighty-three, leaving behind cookbooks and articles that serve as a window on the foodways of Louisiana in the twentieth century. Like Lena Richard, she broadcast the virtues of Louisiana cuisine to all who would listen, and today's cooks are richer for it.

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The Culinary History Research Group is open to all interested people. In the past, we have conducted special project centered on the history of refrigeration, bread, restaurants, and other subjects. We are currently conducting an oral history project on caterers, ethnic cuisine, and restaurant owners.

For information about becoming part of the group, please contact Susan Tucker, Curator of Books and Records, Newcomb College Center for Research on Women, 200 Caroline Richardson Building, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA 70118 • 504 865 5238 • susannah@tulane.edu

**The Culinary History Group
thanks the individuals and
organizations listed at right for
their assistance and special inter-
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preparation of this exhibit.**

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Exhibition checklist

Clipping

"Pen Women's New State President is Gifted Poet"

May 1948

Clipping

"A Woman's Angle on Angling"

Mary Land

Louisiana Conservation Review

1940

Letter

James Beard to Mary Land

October 6, 1969

Photograph

Mary Land

c. 1930

Copperplated Dish

Lena Richard's Chafing Dish

1945

Photo

Lena Richard's Cooking Show

WDSU-TV

Late 1940's

Photograph

Gumbo House Grand Opening

February 19, 1949

Photograph

Gumbo House

c. 1949

Photograph

Lena Richard

c. 1949

Book

New Orleans Cook Book

1940

Book

Lena Richard's Cook Book

1939

Photograph

The Vairin Home

19 Audubon Place, New Orleans

c. 1921

Photograph

Portico of the Vairin House

19 Audubon Place, New Orleans

c. 1921

Photograph

Alice Vairin

c. 1895

Travis House Sign

Colonial Williamsburg

c. 1940s

Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg

Photograph

Lena Richard and Leroy Rhodes

Lena's Eatery

1941

Clipping

Advertisement for Lena's Eatery

November 1942

Letter

Kenneth Chorley to Lena Richard

April 30, 1943

Letter

Amy A. Rockefeller to Lena Richard

November 10, 1943

Photograph

Lena Richard at Work

c. 1949

Menu for British High Command Dinner

Travis House, Colonial Williamsburg

May 15, 1943

Advertisement for Gumbo House

February 1949

Photograph

New Orleans Cook Book Dust Jacket

1940

Photograph

Lena Richard and Her Daughter, Marie

1937

Painting
Portrait of Mary Land
Jacques de Tarnowsky
c. 1940

Photograph
Mary Land
c. 1969

Photograph
Mary Land at Work
c. 1935

Photograph
Mary Land
Outdoor Writers Association of America Tarpon Rodeo
1947

Photograph
Mary Land with Catch of the Day
c. 1959

Letter
James Beard to Mary Land
c. 1970

Letter
Florida Wildlife Federation to Mary Land
June 6, 1947

Mary Land's Fish Trophy
Lake Hamilton, Arkansas
June 27, 1959

Cover Illustration for *Mary Land's Louisiana Cookery*
Morris Henry Hobbs
1954

Photograph
Mary Land with her Son's Pet Lion
c. 1955

Hat
Mary Land's Cap
Outdoor Writers Association of America
c. 1980

Book
Mary Land's Louisiana Cookery
1954

Book
New Orleans Cuisine
1969

Photograph
Mary Land
c. 1985

Magazine Cover
Louisiana Conservation Review
1941

Clipping
"Creole Cookery"
Heddon Fishing Tackle Catalog
1955

Sketch
"Votre Sante" for *Louisiana Cookery*
Morris Henry Hobbs
1954

Sketch
Wild Game Sketch for *Louisiana Cookery*
Morris Henry Hobbs
1954

Sketch
"Cuts of Meat on a Deer" for *Louisiana Cookery*
Morris Henry Hobbs
1954

Sketch
"Cast-Iron Pot and Ingredients" for *Louisiana Cookery*
Morris Henry Hobbs
1954

Clipping
"Cook from New Orleans Teaches Northerners 'Tricks of Trade'"
Clementine Paddleford
New York Herald-Tribune
c. 1940

Clipping
"Louisiana Woman Outdoor Writer Formerly Resided in Hot Springs"
Hot Springs (Ark.) Sentinel Record
June 21, 1959

Photograph
Alice and Nugent Vairin
c. 1905

This exhibition guide is also available on the web:

www.tulane.edu/~wc/text/reportsexhibits.html

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