



Citation **Barbara Ketcham Wheaton**

Barbara Ketcham Wheaton is an American writer and food historian, and honorary curator of Harvard University's Schlesinger Library Culinary Collection.



Born in Philadelphia, she briefly studied Freshwater Biology before graduating with an undergraduate and master's degree in art history. She married Bob Wheaton, and they moved to the Netherlands c. 1958 where they lived for over two years and where she discovered a book called *La Cuisine de Madame E. Saint-Ange* and started cooking French food. On her return to Cambridge, she got a library ticket for Harvard and started reading *Le Ménagier de Paris* treatise which included a large section on recipes.

She also spent many hours perusing the historical cookbook collection of her friend and neighbour, Julia Child. This combined love of cooking and a passion for the past led her to wonder if she might apply the methodology she had learned in art history to the humble cookbook.

She buried herself in the Schlesinger Library's historic cookbook collection and spent many hours perusing her neighbour's antique cookbooks. 'I started looking at cookbooks and one thing led to another' she says of what would become her 'structured approach' to studying historical cookbooks. More than fifty years later, this approach is known as 'Barbara Ketcham Wheaton's Structured Approach to Reading Historic Cookbooks' where specific elements of a cookbook are analysed, starting with its ingredients, the kitchen layout and technologies that its recipes assume cooks have access to, the author's suggestions for menus and meal planning, the book as an object, and the role of the cookbook in the broader society. The module 'Reading Historic Cookbooks' is one of the most popular series of lectures on TU Dublin's Masters in Gastronomy and Food Studies, delivered by staff who had the opportunity to learn directly from Barbara when she taught the course in Dublin in September 2013.

Barbara imagined a catalogue of cookbooks that would allow her to map out a history of European cookery from the Middle Ages to the present, and in 1983 published *Savoring the Past: The French Kitchen and Table from 1300 to 1789*. She was always fascinated by computers and in the early years of her research used a system of stacked cards with punched holes around the edges, where each formation of holes represented categories. When she wanted to see all the works in a particular category, she slipped a knitting needle through that series of holes. She started logging her work digitally in the early nineties and in 2020 launched *The Sifter*, a free online database of more than a thousand years of European and American cookbooks, from the medieval Latin *De Re Culinaria*, published in 800, to *The Romance of Candy*, a 1938 treatise on British sweets.

The Dublin Gastronomy Symposium Fellowship Award is being presented to Barbara Ketcham Wheaton for her outstanding contribution to the field of gastronomy, in particular for the methodology she developed which is applied by food scholars today to create a growing body of knowledge of a world previously deemed inappropriate for academic inquiry and which may have remained hidden had she not inspired to do so.

