

#380: HENRIETTE SCHØNBERG ERKEN (1866-1953)

Image: Henriette Schønberg Erken's
home economics school in Oscarsgate 16,
Oslo. C. 1905

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"Even though I'm 80 years old, I haven't thought of resting on my laurels, are you nuts? I'm working on a larger edition of my cookbook. One must never stand still, you know. And you can never do that in the kitchen, anyway."

Henriette Schønberg Erken was a renowned cookbook author who was named by Norwegian newspaper VG as one of the 100 most influential Norwegians of the past 200 years. Born in Oslo, she lived at home until she was 27 and learned the art of cooking from her mother. After substitute teaching at a girl's school, she enrolled in state courses for home economics teachers. She studied cooking in Berlin and received a diploma from the Edinburgh School of Cookery, one of the first of its kind in Europe. She also wrote a regular column on home economics for a women's magazine, *Urd*. In 1901 she married Albert Erken and followed him to Levanger, later moving to Vang near Hamar, where she founded *Dystingbo husstellsskole*, the Dystingbo School of Home Economics, which she ran for 19 years. She offered a five-month home economics course, and also a two-year teacher's program. Schønberg Erken taught women how to save money by making food from plentiful Norwegian produce, such as fish and dairy.

Schønberg Erken is by far Norway's most prolific cookbook author, having produced 29 cookbooks between 1895 and 1941, covering a wide variety of topics such as desserts, canning, dairy, nutrition, fish, low-sugar and low-cost recipes. Her father found it inappropriate that a woman of her status should write about food preparation, and tried to convince her that she would never get published, to spare her the

disappointment. In the end, Schønberg Erken's family produced several cookbook authors, including her two sisters and her daughter.

Her self-published first cookbook was *Kogebog for Skole og Hjem*, co-written with her Danish-born teaching colleague Caroline Steen. The book emphasized nutrition, and was criticized by some as being too impractical. The title sold out within a year, and the first publisher she visited immediately agreed to reprint it. Her most famous publication, *Stor Kokebok* (Big Cookbook), was released in 1914 for the centennial celebration of *Grunnlovsdagen*, Norway's Constitution Day. The original version had a staggering 700 pages, and sold more than 230,000 copies between its release and 1951. *Liten Kokebok* (Little Cookbook), a smaller version of her previous cookbook, was released in 1931, selling more than 100,000 copies.

In 1916, Schønberg Erken received the King's Medal of Merit in gold, which is awarded for exceptional accomplishments of distinction to Norwegian society. In 1924, Schønberg Erken was the first woman nominated to the *Storting* (Norwegian parliament) by the *Bondepartiet* (Farmer's party), though it was not until 1961 that the *Bondepartiet* voted in the first woman, Karen Grønn Hage. In 1927, Schønberg Erken closed her home economics school, and continued giving lectures and demonstrations around Norway on cooking and home economics.

Schønberg Erken's recipes influenced daily meals and holiday foods for nearly two generations of Norwegians through her teaching, writing and demonstrations.

