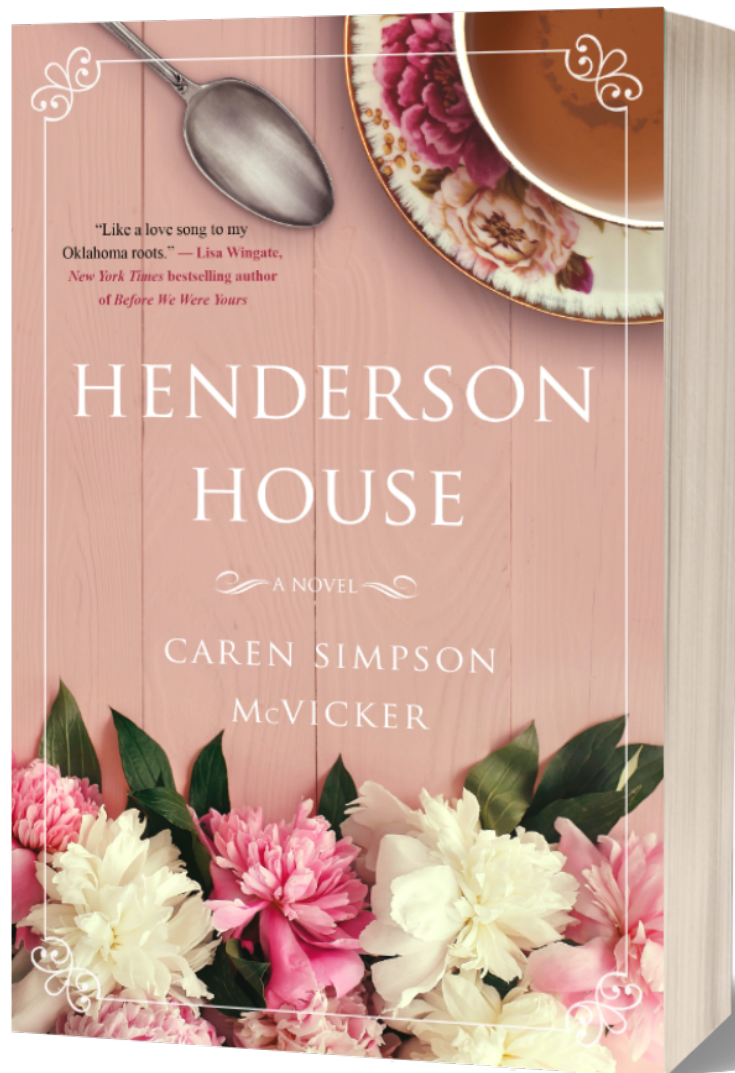


HENDERSON HOUSE

Book Club Menu



Book Club Potluck Supper

- Deviled Eggs
- Cucumber and Tomato Salad
- Miss Lily's Million Dollar Chicken Casserole
- White Cupcakes with Buttercream Frosting
- Signature Cocktail: Oklahoma Club Special

Dear Reader,

There's no doubt food plays an essential role in a novel set in a 1940s boarding house. One of the key scenes early in *Henderson House* is the Wednesday night supper at the church. Mrs. Henderson and Edna explain the history of the weekly gathering to new lodger, Frank Davis. The church began hosting these potluck suppers during the depression and as Edna says, "if there were times you couldn't bring anything to share, no one paid any mind." But the impact went beyond feeding people. "Seems like over a meal is always the best way to find out what's really going on—who's sick, who's hunger who's lonely," Mrs. Henderson confirms.

When choosing a book club menu, I had to go with a classic potluck supper. In the novel, Edna and Mrs. Henderson prepare Edna's award-winning deviled eggs, Mrs. H's cornbread and hotdog casserole (a depression-era favorite that is always a hit with the kids) and a plate of oatmeal cookies. There are plenty of other recipes in *Henderson House* I thought would make delicious potluck fare including a tangy cucumber and tomato salad, Miss Lily's million dollar chicken casserole, and Mrs. H's white cake with buttercream frosting—perhaps better prepared as cupcakes for an easy to serve dessert.

Do you have a favorite dish you usually make for a potluck supper or do one you remember from your childhood? The characters in *Henderson House* prefer to drink sweet tea or lemonade, but to honor Johnny's love of golf and add a little zip to your meeting, here's the recipe for the **Oklahoma Club Special**: 2 ounces of vodka, 2 ounces of limeade, 2 ounces Sprite (could be Sprite Zero), 2 ounces of club soda, lemon and lime wedges. Combine vodka, limeade, and Sprite in a glass with ice. Fill glass with club soda and garnish with lime and lemon wedges. This signature Oklahoma cocktail was invented at Oklahoma Golf and Country Club in Oklahoma City where I was born and is as refreshing as an Oklahoma breeze on an evening in May.

Enjoy,

Caren Simpson McVicker

Edna's Award-Winning Deviled Eggs

The kitchen is the heart of *Henderson House* and with so many recipes in the novel, it was hard to pick just one to share. But I thought Edna's Award-Winning Deviled Eggs might be a book club winner, especially with people focusing on yummy low carb dishes these days. Edna is Mrs. Henderson's housekeeper and co-cook at Henderson House. As Mrs. H says they've been "dancing around this kitchen together for almost twenty years." I loved choreographing their scenes working side-by-side as they chatted and charted the future. Mrs. H tells us that Edna's deviled eggs have won more awards than she can remember, including the blue ribbon at the Washington County Fair. Her secret? Adding a little of her homemade relish. If you've never added sweet pickle relish to your deviled eggs, you're in for a treat!

As a writer of historical fiction, I couldn't resist doing a little research on the origins of this potluck favorite. Turns out, you can trace the deviled egg all the way back to ancient Rome. The term "deviled" is a culinary description that goes back to the 1700s and applies to any dish with spicy seasonings. Author Anne Byrn says she found the first mention of a recipe for deviled eggs in an Alabama newspaper in 1877. The easily transported dish gained popularity in the 1920s when automobiles led to a surge in outdoor excursions, church picnics, and family gatherings.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of making deviled eggs is the opportunity to experiment with different ingredients and toppings. I've used wasabi mayo and black sesame seeds to make creepy and delicious deviled eggs for Halloween, added salsa and cilantro for a Mexican flair, and of course, crumbled cooked bacon on top whenever possible.

RECIPE: Edna's Award-Winning Deviled Eggs

Adapted from Anne Byrn's recipe in *Southern Kitchen*, 2021

Prep Time: 30 minutes
Total Time: 45 minutes
Category: Appetizer
Yields: 12 egg halves

INGREDIENTS:

6 large eggs
1 teaspoon yellow mustard (the 1941 choice, you can use Dijon if you prefer)
2 tablespoons mayonnaise (plus more if needed)
2 tablespoons sweet pickle relish (plus some of the juice if desired)
Pinch of cayenne pepper
Salt and pepper
Paprika, for topping
Freshly snipped chives, for garnish

DIRECTIONS:

1. Place the eggs in a large saucepan and pour in enough cold water to cover them by a couple of inches. Place the pan over medium-high heat and bring to a boil. Once the water boils, remove it from the heat, and cover. Let the eggs stand in the hot water for 15 minutes.
2. Drain the water from the pan and immediately fill it with cold water. I add a couple handfuls of ice cubes to get the water even colder. Remove the eggs from the cold water one at a time. Gently tap each egg to crack it and then peel under cool running water started at the large end. Once all the eggs are peeled, slice each egg in half lengthwise. Remove the yolks with a teaspoon and place the yolks in a small bowl. Set aside the whites.
3. Add the mayonnaise, sweet pickle relish, and mustard to the yolk mixture, mashing the yolks with a fork. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Add more mayonnaise or some of the sweet pickle relish juice if the yolk mixture is too dry.
4. Spoon the yolk mixture into the hollows of the egg whites and place on a serving plate. Lightly sprinkle the top of each egg with paprika. Use scissors to snip fresh chives over each as garnish. Serve.

TIPS:

You can make deviled eggs up to a day in advance. Store the whites and the filling separately. Assemble the next day and serve.

Store the filling in a resealable plastic bag and you can cut a small opening in a corner of the bag and use it to pipe the filling into the eggs.

This recipe is easily doubled.

Once the eggs are assembled and served, they are best eaten the day off.

Miss Lily's Million Dollar Chicken Casserole

Mildred Henderson, learned to cook when she was a newlywed. And she had to learn in secret. Mildred's mother believed cooking was beneath their social status and hired a Jamaican woman named Liliana Johnson to run her daughter's kitchen in St. Louis after Mildred and Dr. Charles Henderson married in 1905. Miss Lily turned out to be "the kindest, most approachable woman I'd ever met," Mildred tells us. She begged Miss Lily to teach her how to cook and Miss Lily laughed and said they better hope her mother never found out.

Fast forward to 1941, when Bessie Blackwell comes to Mrs. Henderson and asks her if she will teach her how to cook. They decide Bessie's lessons should also be kept secret since Blackwell family stories paint Bessie as a disaster in the kitchen, warning that her mere presence will cause roasts to burn and pots to boil over. As Bessie begins to stretch beyond the limits of these family perceptions, she's ready to learn and Mrs. Henderson is happy to teach.

Miss Lily used to say, "What I don't know how to make by heart, I make by feel." Million Dollar Chicken Casserole is a classic comfort food dish many of you may be able to make by heart. For Miss Lily's version, I've added some traditional Jamaican spices. The addition of all spice, white pepper, and thyme takes this dish from simple and satisfying all the way to savory and downright irresistible. Serve over pasta or rice if you desire, add Edna's Cucumber and Tomato Salad as a side, and a glass of iced tea with fresh mint for a complete Henderson House dinner.

Recipe: Miss Lily's Million Dollar Chicken Casserole

Prep Time: 10 minutes
Cook Time: 45 minutes
Total Time: 55 minutes
Servings: 6
Category: Main Course

INGREDIENTS:

4 cups chicken, cooked and shredded (this is about one rotisserie chicken or roughly 1 ½ pounds of chicken breasts)
4 oz cream cheese, softened to room temperature
1 cup cottage cheese
½ cup sour cream
10.75 ounce can condensed cream of chicken soup, as is, do not add water (for a low-carb version substitute 3 large beaten eggs and ¼ cup of half and half for the soup)
½ tsp garlic powder
½ tsp onion powder
¼ tsp all spice
¼ tsp white pepper
1 tsp thyme

32 Ritz crackers, 1 sleeve, crushed (for a low-carb version top with 1 cup grated mozzarella cheese instead)

4 tbsp unsalted butter, melted

Snipped parsley for garnish

DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.
2. Shred the cooked chicken into bite-sized pieces.
3. In a large bowl, combine the cream cheese, cottage cheese, sour cream, cream of chicken soup, and seasoning. Mix well.
4. To the same bowl add the chicken and stir to coat well. Pour into a 9x9 casserole dish.
5. In a separate medium bowl, add a sleeve of Ritz crackers and crush into small bits. Pour in the melted butter and toss to coat the cracker pieces.
6. Top the casserole with the Ritz crackers.
7. Bake uncovered for 45 minutes. Garnish with parsley.

Cucumber and Tomato Salad

Seems like there's always a fresh batch of this cucumber and tomato salad in the ice box at Henderson House. While lettuce-based salads began to appear on American dining tables in the late 1920s, the popularity of greens did not explode until the 1960s. In the 1940s, many "salads" contained no lettuce greens at all, but instead were a collection of marinated vegetables. This cucumber and tomato salad is a summer classic. For me, the key to this recipe is the tang of the red wine vinegar.

Recipe: Cucumber and Tomato Salad

Prep Time: 10 mins
Marinating Time: 20 mins
Total Time: 30 mins
Servings: 4
Category: Salad/Side

INGREDIENTS:

1 long English cucumber, sliced into rounds, if pieces are too large, halve them
2-3 large tomatoes, diced
½ red onion, sliced
1 tbsp of fresh herbs like parsley, basil, and dill
¼ tsp celery seed
2 tbsp olive oil
1 tbsp red wine vinegar
Salt and pepper to taste.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Combine all ingredients in a bowl and toss well.
2. Cover and refrigerate at least 20 minutes before serving.

Mrs. H's White Cake with Buttercream Frosting

Nothing says “special occasion” like a layer cake from scratch. In the final chapters of *Henderson House*, Bessie bakes a white layer cake with buttercream frosting for Florence. For your book group or pot-luck supper, using this recipe to bake cupcakes might make more sense. The key to a truly white cake is using only egg whites and clear vanilla extract (which you may have to find online or at a kitchen store.) If you use regular vanilla, the cake will still taste delicious, but it won't be quite that pure-as-snow color.

Recipe: MRS. H's WHITE CAKE WITH BUTTERCREAM FROSTING

Adapted from The Best White Cake Recipe by Sugar Spun Run

Prep Time: 35 minutes
Cook Time: 35 minutes for 2 8-inch round cake pans, 22 minutes for cupcakes
Total Time: 1 hour to 1 hour 10 minutes depending on format
Serving: 12 slices of cake or 24 cupcakes
Category: Dessert

TIP: It takes some advanced planning, but bringing your butter, milk, and eggs all the way to room temperature before you begin this recipe makes a big difference in the texture of this cake.

INGREDIENTS:

6 tablespoons unsalted butter softened to room temperature
2/3 cup vegetable oil
2 cups sugar
1 tbsp clear vanilla extract
2/3 cup all-purpose flour, plus more if preparing round cake pans
1 tbsp baking powder
1 tsp salt
1 cup milk at room temperature
6 large egg whites at room temperature

DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. For a layer cake, prepare two 8-inch round cake pans by lining the bottom with a round of parchment paper and generously greasing and flouring the sides. For cupcakes, line two muffin tins with cupcake liners.
2. In a stand mixer (or with an electric hand mixer) beat better on medium-low speed until creamy.
3. Add sugar and oil and beat until well-combined and creamy.
4. Scrape down the sides and bottom of the bowl and stir in your vanilla extract.
5. In a separate bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, and salt.
6. With mixer on medium speed, gradually alternate between adding the flour mixture and the cup of milk to the butter mixture. Start and end with the flour mixture. Mix each one until

completely combined before adding the next. Pause occasionally to scrape down the side of the bowl.

7. In a separate bowl, use a hand mixer on high speed to beat the egg whites until stiff peaks form.
8. Using a spatula, gently fold your egg whites into your batter. Be sure to scrape the sides and bottom to that the ingredients are well-combined but take care not to overmix.
9. Evenly divide the batter into prepared pans, or if making cupcakes, fill each cupcake liner until it is $\frac{2}{3}$ full.
10. Bake cake rounds at 350 degrees for 35-40 minutes and rotate halfway through baking. Bake cupcakes at 350 degrees for 20-22 minutes until a toothpick comes out clean and the tops bounce back when lightly pressed. Cakes will be a light golden brown when done baking.
11. Remove cake pans or muffin tins from oven and allow to cool for 15 mins. For cake pans, run a knife around the inside of each pan and invert onto a cooling rack.
12. Allow to cool completely before frosting with a double batch of Buttercream Frosting.

Recipe: Buttercream Frosting

You'll need to double this recipe to have enough for a layer cake or 24 cupcakes. A single batch is fine for 12 cupcakes.

Total Time: 10 minutes
Servings: 12 generously iced cupcakes

INGREDIENTS:

1 cup unsalted butter softened to room temperature
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp salt
3 cups powdered sugar
3 tbsp heavy cream
1 tsp clear vanilla extract (if available)

DIRECTIONS:

1. Beat butter with an electric mixer until creamy.
2. Sprinkle salt over butter mixture and stir to combine.
3. Gradually add powdered sugar, about $\frac{1}{2}$ a cup at a time, mixing on low and waiting until each cup is completed mixed before adding more.
4. With mixed on medium-low speed, add the heavy cream, one tablespoon at a time. Once ingredients are well incorporated, increase the speed slowly to high and beat for about 30 seconds.
5. Add the vanilla extract and stir well.
6. Spread frosting over cooled cupcakes or cake rounds.

Extra frosting will store well in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to a week.