

# The Culinary Muse of Shaw

By Cara Jensen

How many cooks have reached for that iconic volume, *The Joy of Cooking*, when searching for culinary advice or a tasty new dish? Since its original publication, *Joy of Cooking* has been the most authoritative cookbook in America, the one upon which millions of cooks have confidently relied for over 70 years. It has provided encouragement, information and remedies for kitchen emergencies to countless uncertain newlyweds, college students, and even experienced cooks. Even culinary goddess Julia Child says it is the one book she'd keep if she could have only one English title on the shelf!!

International accolades aside, there is a special significance to the book's place on the shelves of **our** kitchens – *Joy of Cooking* was conceived in the Shaw neighborhood. Written in the 1920s by Irma von Starkloff Rombauer as a collection of recipes for her Unitarian Women's Alliance, it was first tested and illustrated by her daughter, Marion Rombauer Becker. As with many families of that era, the entire Rombauer clan inhabited Shaw - Julius and Ernest living with their families in the 3600 block of Flora and the Edgar and Irma Rombauers living at 3803 Flad. The same streets and houses we look upon today provided the backdrop and the inspiration for the most referenced and revered cookbook in American history.



I had the honor of borrowing a neighbor's 1943 edition of *Joy* – leafing through the pages is as much a history lesson as it is a culinary adventure. Recipes are dotted with encouraging and witty comments and complex procedures are thoroughly explained – even providing details on how to clean calf brains and roast pigeons. The voice of Irma Rombauer is no doubt the very reason why this humble cookbook has stood the test of time, proving that her humor and gentle candor are as timeless as a good recipe.

I feel a special connection to this book – which combines my loves of history and food – that compels me to share the conscious significance with my neighbors. Perhaps, as we enjoy dinner this evening, we can raise a glass to Shaw's own Irma Rombauer and honor her contribution to the American culinary

experience.