During the late 19th century, when many young Irish women sought work in the United States, Anne Sophia Penn Chew hired largely Irish women to serve as cooks at Cliveden including Hannah Welsh, occasionally Hannah’s sister Mary and Mrs. Anny Brownlee, the wife of the estate’s gardener and Kate Kelly.

Cliveden’s Cooks: Sustaining Life

A fundamental responsibility in any household is the preparation of meals. At Cliveden, there was always an individual, most often a woman, who cooked food for the family and staff. The records illuminate some, but not all of the names and lives of the women who labored as cooks over Cliveden’s two hundred year history. The women who served the Chew household during the late 18th and early 19th centuries were a diverse labor force including enslaved women Hannah and Dinah as well as hired servants Elinor Munt and Becky.

In the early 19th century Elizabeth Oswald hired Sarah Bayard as a cook. Based on payment found in Elizabeth’s receipt book between August 1812 and December 1818, she paid Sarah $60 per year for her work. Cynthia Ross labored as an indentured cook for Benjamin Chew Jr. for five months beginning in October 1810.

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Anny Brownlee was born in Pennsylvania to parents of Irish descent and had two young daughters by 1880.

Catherine Burns

In the early 20th century Catherine or Katy Burns served as a housekeeper for Elizabeth Brown Chew. Catherine and her husband James both worked for the Chews and lived both on and off the property during their tenure. She also raised five children.