

Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

Vol. 7, Winter 1991-92

Jell-O -- Just for Kids?

What mother had not served Jell-O to her children? What pot-luck was ever devoid of a Jell-O mold? Jell-O is after all the quintessential American food.

The story of Jell-O is a chronicle of marketing which transformed a trademark into a household word. The history involves the purchase of a trademark in 1899 for \$450 and its subsequent sale for \$47 million a quarter century later.

The name Jell-O has entered our vernacular, to represent bourgeois society, describing an incompetent cook who "can't even make Jell-O", characterizing an addled-minded person as having Jell-O for brains.

It started in 1845 in the U.S. (although gellee had long been a tradition in French and other cuisines) with a patent obtained by Peter Cooper for a "transparent concentrated substance".

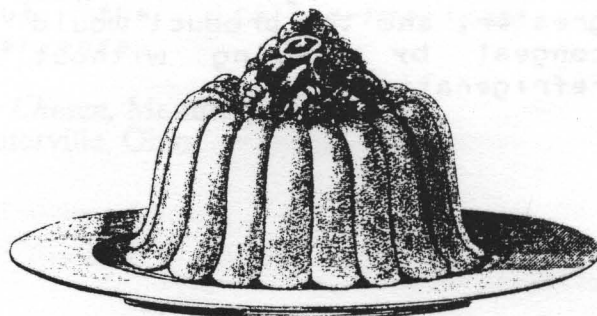
No further use was made until 1988, when Pearl Wait, maker of patent medicine in Leroy, New York, began selling a pre-packaged gelatin dessert known as Jell-O.

Sales were slow, and Wait sold the business to another townsman, Orator Woodward for \$450 in 1899.

Woodward improved product reliability and realized \$250,000 by 1902, the year of the first national

Contents

JELL-O--JUST FOR KIDS?	1
SCHLESINGER LIBRARY FOR FOOD HISTORIANS	3
PhD IN PROGRESS	3
FOOD IN MARCO POLO'S TRAVELS	4
QUEST FOR COOKBOOKS	6
COOKBOOK COLLECTING	7
HOLLYHOCKS AND RADISHES	8



advertisement in The Ladies Home Journal.

Beginning in 1905 a vigorous ad campaign flooded the country with Jell-O recipe booklets. By the mid-1920's 10 million booklets were distributed annually. Noted artists, including Maxwell Parrish and Norman Rockwell, illustrated these pieces which became collector's items.

Since the Renaissance molded desserts had been the fare of the rich and fashionable. Woodward built on this history, and Jell-O was pictured in tasteful and elegant surroundings-- in cut glass and silver, parfait glasses, on linen tablecloths or on top of stylish furniture.

By 1925 the Jell-O trademark was known everywhere. It was sold to Postum Cereal Co. of Battle Creek (later evolved into General Foods Corp.) for 47 million dollars.

A simpler food can hardly be imagined. When prepared, the jell is 14% sugar, 1% gelatin, and 86% water. The gelatin comes from cow hides and bones, processed and denatured so that all resemblances to an animal by-product have been removed. It has an almost limitless shelf-life; 40 years old and it will still jell.

The formula has changed however with the advent of refrigeration. Originally the percent of gelatin was greater, and the product would congeal by cooling without refrigeration.

Variety has increased. We now have Jell-O wiggles, sugar-free Jell-O, and dozens of flavors instead of the basic six. It has uses other than culinary -- some people use it in wrestling contests.

Certain social classes may eschew Jell-O as plebian, but no one can deny that it is a symbol of America, the culture of consumption, the success of marketing, and the resiliency of tradition. Jell-O is here to stay.

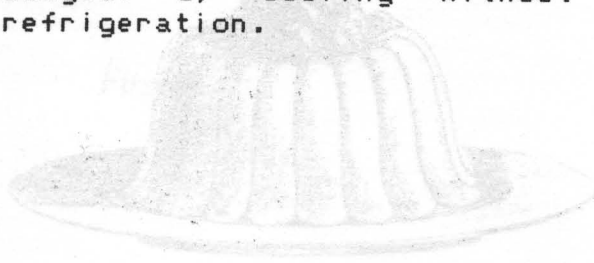
*Larry Imerman, Member,
Birmingham, Michigan*



TASTE & THE AMERICAN TABLE

American taste--shaping it, manipulating it, interpreting it, forecasting it--will be the topic at the American Institute of Wine & Food's Ninth International Conference on Gastronomy. Three days of panel discussions, presentations and small-group sessions will begin January 29, 1992 at The Westin Canal Place in New Orleans, LA.

For more information write the American Institute of Wine & Food, 1550 Bryant St, #700, San Francisco, CA 94103 or call (415) 255--3000.



Schlesinger Library for Food Historians

If conditions are just right--you are in Cambridge, Mass., it is a weekday, you have the time and a sincere interest in food history--then you have a treat in store. You can visit the Schlesinger Library and browse through its extensive culinary collection.

Even if conditions are not just right--you can join the Radcliffe Culinary Friends (a support group) and receive their newsletter "Culinary Times." It has book reviews, notes and queries and updates on who is using the culinary collection of the library. For membership information write the Schlesinger Library, 10 Garden St., Cambridge MA 02138.

The library, located on the Radcliffe College campus (near Harvard Yard), is a welcoming and pleasant place.

There are open stacks of cookbooks, books about food, manuscripts and ephemera, and a very helpful staff ready to assist you.

Formerly known as the "Women's Archives", the collection was at first just a few unwanted home economics books given by Harvard's Widener Library. Recent years have seen a huge expansion with the gift of 2000 volumes from Julia Child and nearly 450 volumes from the Simon Lowenstein collection at the American Institute of Wine and Food.

There are old and rare works, including ethnic cuisines such as French and Chinese, and a large selection of community



cookbooks (those published by churches, historical societies etc.).

The library is open 9 to 9 Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, 9-5 on Thursday and Friday. The manuscript department is open 9-5 every day.

PhD in Progress

I began work on my doctoral dissertation almost two years ago. I searched for a topic that would combine history of women, immigration and culinary events. In September 1990 I received a National Endowment for the Humanities grant for \$30,000. I focused on the Italian immigrant woman and the history of food as used by them in Chicago.

In January, I was awarded a \$500 grant from the Giovanni Agnelli Foundation. This foundation awards grants to people working on research about the Italian-American experience.

*Judy Chesen, Member,
Centerville, Ohio*

Food in Marco Polo's Travels

This article is PART ONE of a two-part series.

Marco Polo (1254-1324) left his native Venice as a boy of 17 with his father and uncle. For the next 25 years, until his return in 1296 he travelled extensively throughout much of the Middle East and Far East. He made careful notes of his itineraries and, among other things, the kinds of crops and foods he encountered.

Computing the exact number of food references in his Travels, the account of this extraordinary journey, is a dicey proposition. The first problem is one of text. Some 119 extant manuscripts of this work have been uncovered, the most recent in 1932 in Toledo, Spain. No two are exactly alike and hundreds of other documents and translations exist; one of the most famous was carried by Christopher Columbus on his 1492 voyage.

The range of these food references is extensive, showing that, at least in the circles where Polo moved, especially in China, food was abundant and sophisticated.

Europeans knew of many of these foods well, e.g. garlic and onion. Others which were plentiful in Asia but rare in Europe, for example, sugar and ginger, were used sparingly in European cooking, even among the elite, because of their expense. Whereas the Chinese peasants could afford ginger, their European counterparts could not.



Below are the foods referred to in his journeys. (pl. means that various varieties were noted).

FOWL:

capon	pheasants
cranes	peafowl
ducks	quail
geese	swan
guinea fowl	turtle dove
partridges	sand grouse

MEATS:

boar	hare
buffalo	marmot
cattle	ox
camel	pig
deer (pl)	rabbit
dog	reindeer
goat	sheep (pl)
horse	

FRUIT:

bananas	peach
date	pear
grape	pomegranate
jujube	raisin
melon	quince

GRAINS/CEREALS:

barley	rice (pl)
groat	sago
millet	wheat
panic grass	

MILK PRODUCTS:

camel milk	dry milk
curds	mare's milk

NUTS:

almond	coconut
pistachio	

SEAFOOD:

oyster	trout
salmon	tunny fish
sturgeon	fish biscuit

SPICES:

cinnamon	saffron
clove	sesame
cubeb	spikenard
galangale	tamarind
ginger	nutmeg
pepper	

VEGETABLES:

garlic	rhubarb
onion	

WINES:

date	rice
grape	sugar
honey	wheat
Koumiss(milk)	

MISCELLANEOUS:

berchi(melon)	mare's
betel nut	blood
honey	salt
human flesh	sugar
sesame oil	

Quest for Cookbooks



Cookbook collecting, although a labor of love is also a very labor-intensive occupation.

The shelf life of cookbooks is growing ever shorter in our competitive age, and the authors literally push each other off the shelves, in the name of sophisticated taste buds, wordliness, guarded geographical turf, gourmet vogue and holiday glitz.

Hence, out-of-print books turn into big business and finding them is like a treasure hunt.

I have been attracted to cookbooks since my days as a young adult in Israel. I believe I owned two cookbooks but I didn't even boil water.

My arrival in the U.S. in 1960 forced my introduction to the kitchen, where I had to learn to cook for plain survival. I was initially seduced by a cookbook club that offered three books for \$1.00 and promptly ordered JOY OF COOKING, NEW YORK TIMES COOKBOOK AND THE FRENCH CHEF BOOKBOOK.

And so my collection started. As my interest grew deeper and my cooking more varied, the collection was driven from the shelf onto and into cartons and into every corner of the house.

Carlo Coppola, Member, Birmingham, Michigan

Quest for Cookbooks

My search can take me to several sources: books in print, available in stores and through catalogues, second hand stores, antiquarian book stores, and special distributors such as Wimmer Brother and Cookbook Collection or Centax.

My special interest is the community book, efforts of a church, synagogue, or historical society. The editors must incorporate the entire recipe donating community (which are not always of the same ethnic background) and so the search and monetary investment for these books can be risky; some are great, some are lemons. In all instances, be it Jewish, Arab, Serbian or Slovak, Swedish or Russian, one recipe will forever appear; Lasagna. Ever heard of the Passover matzah Lasagna or the refried bean Lasagna? It is there.

Perserverance is an essential trait for the collector. One story (and I have many) of my search involved a cookbook, Pure Greek Cooking, exemplifies this trait.

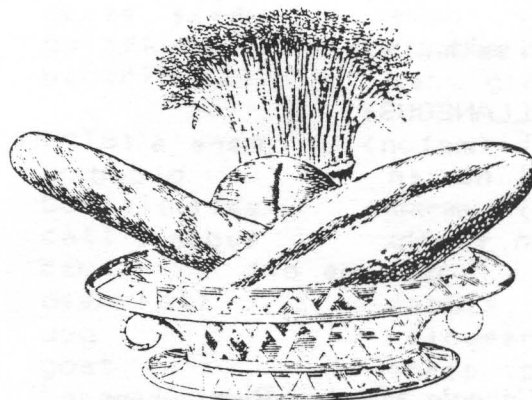
Published in 1976 by Stackpole Books, Pa., it is about Greek cooking on the Island of Ikarya and was written by a mother and son, Anna and John Stanos. But it was out of print and out of sight.

A call to Stackpole Books was a dead end. I called the librarian in a Greek Orthodox church in Baltimore because they have a large library. They had the book and the dust jacket led me to Pittsburgh

where the authors lived in 1976. The telephone directory had too many Spanos' to call. John Spanos had worked at the University of Pittsburgh but a call to their Personnel Dept. yielded nothing. I called the Chamber of Commerce and located the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of Pittsburgh. The secretary knew Mrs. Anna Spanos but had not seen her in a very long time-- said she was aged and ailing. But I got her phone number.

When I called Mrs. Anna Spanos answered, spritely and cheerful. She was delighted to hear that someone was still interested in the book. She didn't have a copy but referred me to their agent in Los Angeles. Good news..I received the book promptly. The effort was worthwhile; the book is informative, the recipes authentic. Bantam Books planned a reissue in '91 with a new title, The Art of Simple Greek Cooking. Another search completed.

Dalia Carmel Goldstein
Member, New York Society of
Culinary Historians





COOKBOOK COLLECTING: A SHORT REFERENCE LIST

1. Colonel Bob Allen. A Guide to Collecting Cookbooks and Advertising Cookbooks. A History of People, Companies and Cooking. Paducah, KY: Collector Books, 1990. Oversize, illustrated trade paperback. 213 pgs. No index. Can be ordered from the publisher for \$14.95 + \$2.00 for shipping. Meant more as a price guide for the collector of charity and advertising cookbooks than as a history, although some chapters contain historical information.

2. Hazlitt W. Carew. Old Cookery Books and Ancient Cuisine. London: 1902 (second edition). This is an essential reference on early English cookery books and manuscripts. A facsimile of the original 1886 edition was reprinted in 1968 by Gale Research in Detroit.

3. Patrick L. Coyle. Cooks' Books: An Affectionate Guide to the Literature of Food and Cooking. New York: Facts on File, 1985. 239 pgs. Oversize, illustrated trade paperback. Out of print. Basic but useful survey for the new collector.

4. Janice B. Longone and Daniel T. Longone. American Cookbooks and Wine Books: 1797-1950. Ann Arbor: The Clements Library, 1984. 68 pgs. Oversize paperback with photos. Available for \$15.00 from The Wine and Food

Library, 1207 W. Madison, Ann Arbor, MI 48103. (313) 663-4894.

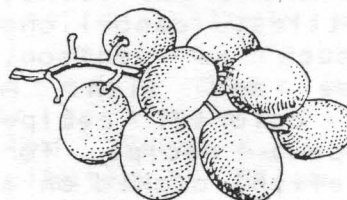
Includes a scholarly historical introduction to the main trends in American cookbooks and wine books during the first 175 years of American History. Serves both as a historical introduction and a bibliography of important books on the subject.

5. Elizabeth Robins Pennell. My Cookery Books. London: The Holland Press, 1983. Illustrated. Limited edition facsimile reprint of original 1903 Houghton Mifflin edition. 171 pages. Out of print.

Elizabeth Pennell was an American who lived in Europe for 30 years, during which time she wrote a column on gastronomy for an English newspaper.

6. Eric Quayle. Old Cook Books: An Illustrated History. Brandywine Press Book. New York: EP Dutton, 1978. Illustrated, 256 pgs. Oversize hardback. Has both a general and a recipe index, as well as a one-page bibliography. Out of print.

Patricia L. Cornett, PhD



THE



OOK'S



OOKSHELF

Hollyhocks and Radishes

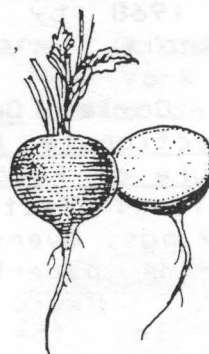
This book is based on a collection of recipes, letters and drawings of local scenes, combined with charming marginal notes. The setting is a remote spot in Northern Michigan: The Les Chenaux Islands along Lake Huron's Northern shore.

It is there that Judy and Marv Chard operate a produce stand where Judy arranges the fruits and vegetables with hollyhocks and marigolds to enhance their beauty.

The author, Bonnie Mickelson, and her family vacationed in these islands (called the "Snows" by the locals) for many years. She was a regular at the produce stand, buying, visiting and sharing recipes with "Grandma Judy," who has been collecting during her 64 years of married life.

Some of the recipes in Mrs. Chard's Almanac Cookbook: Hollyhocks and Radishes feature foods indigenous to the wilds of the area: leeks, morels, nettles, dandelions and game such as venison, duck, grouse and fish. A particularly colorful recipe is a Chippewa recipe for planked whitefish, cooked on a hickory board over a wood fire.

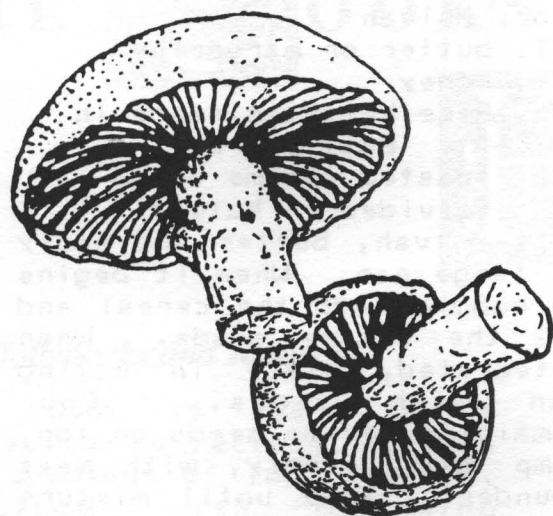
Most of the recipes are for simply prepared ordinary foods. But, paradoxically, no simple dish in this book is ordinary. Judy and her friends usually spice up an otherwise plain combination, thus transforming it into a party dish. Meatloaf is made into a pie, pot roast is prepared with a gravy of pureed vegetables, and cherry cobbler becomes extraordinary when made with sweet, dark red Michigan cherries. There are also some surprising uses for autumn's ubiquitous zucchini and green tomatoes.



The book by Bonnie Mickelson published in 1989, is available from Pickle Point Publishing, Bellevue, Washington.

Clare Szücs, Member, West
Chester, Ohio

Contributed by Ellen and Jim
Saalberg



Mushrooms in the Wild

Bob Shaffer Professor of Botany at the University of Michigan, teaches a course each fall, under the aegis of Matthei Botanical Gardens on the identification of local mushrooms. Lest you think this is a modest undertaking, over 1500 species have been identified in 25 years.

The four-week course features a two-hour lecture at the Botanical Garden on a week night. On Saturday of that week there is a mushroom collecting field trip, with a different location each week.

The group meets promptly at 9 a.m., rain or shine, armed with collecting baskets and reams of waxed paper. By 11 a.m. we gather to compare our treasures. The mushrooms are arranged, identified, and discussed by Dr. Shaffer and his assistant. Meanwhile, Jocelyn Shaffer gather two or three of the edible species and cooks them on a Coleman stove and passes out samples.

The best part comes at precisely noon. The tables are cleared, and people uncover the foods they have brought for a picnic lunch. Mushrooms are prominently featured. I have seen morrell quiche and other wonders. Jocelyn Shaffer is famous for her fabulous cheesecake.

Some people bring home baked breads, luscious cheeses, fresh fruit and, of course, wine. Some make their own wines and there often are as many bottles as there are participants. Ann Arbor is known for its fine cooks and these picnics are a showpiece of their art.

The total experience (classes and fieldtrips) costs \$85, but for those who prefer just the field trips, the cost is \$50. Some people have been going on the field trips for 15 years. For more information, call Matthei Botanical Gardens, (313) 998-7061.

Chris Richards, Member, Ann Arbor

HUNGARIAN MUSHROOM SOUP

Saute 12 oz. sliced mushrooms and 2 c. chopped onion in 2 T butter. Add 2 t. dill, 1/2 c. water, 1 T Hungarian paprika and 1 T. Tamara, or soy sauce. Cook 15 min.

Make sauce with 2 T butter, 3 T flour, 1 c. milk and 2 c. chicken stock. Combine with mushroom mixture and cook 15 min., simmering gently. Add 2 t. lemon juice, 1/2 c sour cream, and parsley. Enjoy.

Marion Prince Holt

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Jan Longone gave illustrated lectures on "The History of American Cookbooks" at A Taste of History festivities at Greenfield Village on July 27 and 28, 1991. Jan commented on the splendid two-day activity, revolving around food history, which brought close to 10,000 visitors to the Village. For the first time ever, the Village was able to serve foods from various historical eras including such delights as Rabbit Fricasse, Crab Bisque, Switchel, Queen Cakes and Molasses Cookies.

Jan Longone and Dan Longone presented a joint paper at the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery held at St. Antony's College, Oxford, England in September 1991. The general topic for this conference was "Public Eating." They spoke on "Camp Cookery in the American Civil War; The Florence Nightingale and Alexis Soyer Connections."

Jan Longone participated in the symposium, entitled "Good as Gold: Foods the Americas Gave the World," in Washington, D.C. in October, 1991 sponsored by the National Museum of American History and the National Museum of Natural History as part of the Smithsonian's observance of the Columbus Quincentenary. She was on a panel to discuss how New World foods changed the history of the world.

John and Carol Thompson

opened The Trellis Cafe & Tea Room, Ltd. in the Plymouth-Green mall at U.S. 23 & Plymouth Road. They are offering light lunches and desserts with an emphasis on scones. Daily specialties include homemade soup, quiche, pot pie, beef stew. Afternoon tea is available anytime with a selection of desserts. Open from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday.

We apologize for our tardiness with this newsletter—but we are back on track now.

CULINARY HISTORIANS of ANN ARBOR

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Winter 1992 Programs

January 15, 1992 - Food References in Montaigne's Journals

Michel de Montaigne was the George Pierrot of his time, traveling around Europe in the 1580's, locating and describing gastronomic delights and other events in his Journal.

Speaker: Dr. Dikka Berven,
Dept, Modern Languages and
Literature, Oakland University,
Rochester, Michigan

February 16, 1992 - Children's Cookbooks

The Harris collection of children's cookbooks spans 100 years of teaching children to cook. This program will be a 'show and tell', exhibiting and explaining some of the items in the collection.

CHAA Newsletter
31651 Auburn Drive
Birmingham, MI 48009

Treats from the children's recipes will be served.

Speakers: Elaine and Doug
Harris, Members, Southfield,
Michigan

March 15, 1992 - Spices Around the World

The fascinating history of the spice trade and the effect of the supply and demand equation on human lives and nations' honor. How spices are used in various cuisines will be discussed.

Speaker: Marion Prince
Holt, Member, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

7
Vol 6, Winter, 1991/92

First Class