The History of Garlic: From Medicine to Marinara

Posted on May 31, 2017 by nyamhistmed

Today’s guest post is written by Sarah Lohman, author of Eight Flavors: The Untold Story of American Cuisine (Simon & Schuster, 2016). On Monday, June 5, Lohman will give her talk, “The History of Garlic: From Medicine to Marinara.” To read more about this lecture and to register, go HERE.

Ms. Amelia Simmons gave America its first cookbook in 1796; within her pamphlet filled with sweet and savory recipes, she makes this note about garlic: “Garlickes, tho’ used by the French, are better adapted to the uses of medicine than cookery.” In her curt dismissal, she reflected a belief that was thousands of years old: garlic was best for medicine, not for eating. To add it to your dinner was considered the equivalent of serving a cough syrup soup.

There are records of ancient Greek doctors who prescribed garlic as a
strengthening food, and bulbs were recovered from Egyptian pyramids. Garlic was being cultivated in China at least 4,000 years ago, and upper class Romans would never serve garlic for dinner; to them, it tasted like medicine.

In medieval Europe, garlic was considered food only for the humble and low. While those that could afford it imported spices like black pepper from the Far East, lower classes used herbs they could grow. Garlic’s intense flavor helped peasants jazz up otherwise bland diets. It was made into dishes like aioli, originally a mixture of chopped garlic, bread crumbs, nuts and sometimes stewed meat. It was intended to be sopped up with bread, although it was occasionally served as a sauce to accompany meats in wealthier households.

Garlic (Scientific name Allium Sativum) from Medical Botany (1790) by William Woodville.
The English, contrary to the stereotype about bland British cooking, seemed particularly enchanted by garlic. In the first known cooking document in English, a vellum scroll called *The Form of Cury*, a simple side dish is boiled bulbs of garlic. Food and medicine were closely intertwined in Medieval Europe, and garlic was served as a way to temper your humors. Humors were thought to be qualities of the body that affected on your health and personality. Garlic, which was thought to be “hot and dry,” shouldn’t be consumed by someone who was quick to anger, but might succeed in peppering up a person who was too emotionally restrained. According to food historian Cathy Kaufman, a medieval feast might have a staggering amount of different dishes, all laid on the table at one time, so that different personality types could construct a meal that fit their humors.

Up through the 19th century, people also believed you got sick by inhaling bad air, called “miasmas.” Miasmas hang out by swamps, but also by sewage, or feet—I always imagined them as the puddles of mist that lie in the nooks between hills on dark country roads. Garlic can help you with miasmas, too. Ever see an image of plague doctors from Medieval Europe wearing masks with a long, bird-like beak? The beak was filled with odorous herbs, garlic likely among them, designed to combat miasmas.

In 18th-century France, a group of thieves may have been inspired by these plague masks. During an outbreak of the bubonic plague in Marseilles in 1726 (or 1655, stories deviate), a group of thieves were accused of robbing dead bodies and the houses of the deceased and ailing, without seeming to contract the disease themselves. Their lucky charms against the miasmas? They steeped garlic in vinegar, and soaked a cloth or a sponge in the liquid, then tied it like a surgical mask over their mouth and nose. In their minds, the strong smells would repel miasmas. This story is probably a legend, but I think there is some grain of truth to it: in modern studies, garlic has been shown to obfuscate some of the human smells that attract biting bugs. Since we now know bubonic plague was carried by fleas, it’s possible the thieves were repelling the insects. The plague is also a bacterial infection, and both vinegar and garlic are effective antimicrobials.

Garlic remained in the realm of medicine for most of the 19th century. Louis Pasteur first discovered that garlic was a powerful antimicrobial in 1858. In 1861, John Gunn assembled a medical book for use in the home, *The New*
Domestic Physician, “with directions for using medicinal plants and the simplest and best new remedies.” Gunn recommends a poultice of roast garlic for ear infections:

“An excellent remedy for earache is as follows: Take three or four roasted garlics, and while hot mash, and add a tablespoonful of sweet oil and as much honey and laudanum; press out the juice, and drop of this into the ear, warm, occasionally.”

He also recommends garlic for clearing mucus from the lungs and reducing cough, given by the spoonful with honey and laudanum. Gardening for the South: Or, How to Grow Vegetables and Fruits, an 1868 botanical guide, says the medicinal values of garlic include making you sweat, which, like bloodletting, was believed to leach out disease; it will also make you urinate, and is an effective “worm destroyer,” for any intestinal hitchhikers you might have. By the late 19th century, scientists also used garlic to treat TB and injected it into the rectum to treat hemorrhoids.

Today, garlic is one of the most heavily used home remedies, and it is increasingly being studied in the medical field. Some of its historic uses have been proved as bunk—while others, like its efficacy as a topical antiseptic, hold up. But since the late 19th century, garlic has found an even more worthwhile home, thanks to French chefs and Italian immigrants, who spread their garlic heavy cuisine around the world, and made even garlic-reticent Americans a lover of this pungent plant.
Join us on Monday, June 5 to learn more about this topic. Click **HERE** to register.

Posted in **Events, History of medicine** | Tagged **cooking, food, Garlic, guest post, medicine** | 1 Reply

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**Announcing the March Madness Food Fight Club Winner**

Posted on **March 30, 2016** by **nyamhistorymed**

Drum roll please...

The winner of the 2016 March Madness Food Fight Club is...

**Vegetable Curry**!

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Thanks to all who voted throughout the competition. If you decide to make this winning recipe, please tell us about it and share some photos.
The four recipes in this competition—from a pamphlet, a manuscript receipt book, and two printed cookbooks—don’t begin to scratch the surface of what our cookery collection holds. We acquired our Margaret Barclay Wilson culinary collection in 1929, and it now contains about 10,000 items. The collection includes manuscripts, menus, and pamphlets that demonstrate the way cookery changed over time, and a large collection of printed books, beginning in the 16th century. These include works by Scappi, Platina, and Carême, as well as many other milestones in culinary printing.

Our cookbooks offer aspirational recipes, practical recipes, and everything in between. Our collections hold a snapshot view of what daily cooking was like in a range of households across the world. These recipe books also reflect the changes that occur when people have access to new innovations—refrigeration, for example, or the gas range. We also have strong collections related to diet regimens and cooking for health, as well as cookbooks published during wartime when resources were scarce.

Interested in researching historic cookbooks? Our library is open to the
Food Fight Club Final: Snail Water v. Vegetable Curry

Posted on March 23, 2016 by nyamhistorymed

It's the Food Fight Club final! Snail Water won round 1 and Vegetable Curry won round 2. Now it's time for these two tough competitors to duke it out once and for all.

This final bout pits a recipe from a manuscript recipe collection against one found in a printed cookbook.
The recipe for Snail Water comes from *A Collection of Choise Receipts*, one of 36 manuscript receipt books in our collection. These collections of recipes, dating from the late 17th through the 19th century, tell stories about the ways food was prepared in a range of households. In many cases, they incorporate source material from contemporary cookbooks in print, showing us the kinds of recipes households valued and relied on. These manuscripts often include personal information about the families who kept them. One noteworthy case in our collections is a recipe for “How to make coffy of dry swet aple snits (slices),” found in a recipe book kept by a German-American family in Pennsylvania-Dutch country between 1835 and 1850. Manuscript cookbooks can also show us the kinds of cooking technologies used by families. Repeated references to coals and the Dutch oven indicate that Pennsylvania-Dutch cookbook’s author was cooking at the open hearth.
Publishers of printed cookbooks responded to demand from readers. These books—and the number of editions that were published—can tell us a great deal about cooking trends. Our 1917 copy of *101 Practical Non-Flesh Recipes*, for example, is the book’s second edition, the first published just a year before. Cookbooks could be aspirational, practical, or a combination of both. A 19th-century cookbook published in Milwaukee in German in multiple editions tell us that there was a demand for cookbooks written in the mother tongue for newly-arrived German immigrants. The mixture of German and American recipes in these books indicate a need for familiar recipes from the Old World, as well as instruction on how to prepare foods that were more typical of the New. A number of printed cookbooks in our collection have emended recipes or manuscript recipes laid-in to their pages, offering clues to how readers modified published recipes for personal use.

Which recipe should be crowned the 2016 Food Fight Club Champion? Vote for your favorite—be it the most appealing, least appealing, or one that just tickles your fancy more—before 5 pm EST on Monday, March 28.
Food Fight Club Round 2: Vegetable Curry v. Ragout of Squirrel

Posted on March 16, 2016 by nyamhistorymed

It's time for match two of our March Madness Food Fight Club.

First, the reveal of last week's smackdown: Snail Water triumphed over Pear and Tomato Chutney. Whichever recipe wins this week has a tough competitor for next Wednesday's final match.

This week, we pit Vegetable Curry against Ragout of Squirrel.
The innocuous-sounding vegetable curry comes from Margaret Blatch’s *101 Practical Non-flesh Recipes*, a nice little vegetarian cookbook from 1917. The title might sound a bit odd to modern readers and is an interesting choice, considering the term vegetarian was well-established by the 1840s.¹ A 1908 physical education article sheds some light on the terminology of the time, saying the word vegetarian “usually suggests a person who abstains not on hygienic but on religious, ethical, or theological grounds,” preferring instead “flesh-abstainer.”² It appears “non-flesh” was less provocative than “vegetarian.”
Our next contestant features two items not commonly seen on today’s dinner tables: Chafing dishes and squirrels. In the 1890s, chafing dishes experienced a surge in popularity in America, and *Recipes for the Jewett Chafing Dish* was just one of many cookbooks published featuring recipes specifically for the dish. The Waldorf-Astoria Hotel offered “chafing dish suppers” to top socialites, and stores sold table linens to match the cookware. Squirrel, too, was a common sight at the American dinner table due to its availability. One can track its rise and fall by looking at editions of *The Joy of Cooking* over time, where the numerous squirrel recipes of the 1930s gave way to recipes for chicken.

Which recipe should face Snail Water in the final round? Vote for your favorite—be it the most appealing, least appealing, or one that just tickles your fancy more—before 5 pm EST on Monday, March 21.

**Food Fight Club Round 2**  
(Poll Closed)

**References**
Food Fight Club Round 1: Snail Water v. Pear and Tomato Chutney

Today we begin our March Madness competition, Food Fight Club.

This week and next, two recipes will go head to head, vying for your votes. The following week, the winners of the first two rounds will duke it out for the honor of being named the champion of our first Food Fight Club.
The smackdown begins with **Snail Water** versus **Pear and Tomato Chutney**.

This lovely snail water recipe comes from *A Collection of Choise Receipts*, a late 17th-century English manuscript written in exquisite penmanship, perhaps written by a professional scribe. Snail water was thought to treat ailments including “sharpness in [the] blood” and appetite loss. Learn more about snail water in our blog archives.

It takes a bold competitor to go up against this beauty. But we have one: Pear and Tomato Chutney from the American Can Company’s undated *Relishes from Canned Food* pamphlet. As early as the 1850s, commercially canned goods—especially sardines, tomatoes, condensed milk, and fruits and vegetables—found an eager consumer audience in the Western United States. Their popularity only increased over time; by the 1930s, foods from supermarkets were increasingly prepackaged (learn more in our 2015 April Fool’s blog—the food history facts are true!).
Which recipe should move on to the next round? Vote for your favorite—be it the most appealing, least appealing, or one that just tickles your fancy more—before 5 pm EST on Monday, March 14.

FoodFightClub Round 1
(Poll Closed)

Gather ‘Round the Table, We’ll Give You a Treat

Posted on December 4, 2015 by nyamhistorymed
By Johanna Goldberg, Information Services Librarian

It's almost Hanukkah, a time to light the candles, spin the dreidel, and argue about how to spell the name of the holiday.

It's also a time to eat foods fried in oil, traditionally potato pancakes (latkes) and jelly doughnuts (sufganiyot), a remembrance of the oil that miraculously burned for eight days to rededicate the Temple after its defilement by the Greeks.¹

If you are looking to expand the offerings on your holiday table this year, Mildred Grosberg Bellin's The Jewish Cook Book (New York, 1941) does not disappoint. She provides an elaborate “Menu for Chanucah”:

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The “Chanucah” menu in Bellin’s Jewish Cook Book, 1941.

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Click on an image to view each recipe listed:

- Pineapple and banana cocktail recipe in Bellin’s Jewish Cook Book, 1941.
- Julienne soup recipe in Bellin’s Jewish Cook Book, 1941.
- Goose liver with mushroom sauce recipe in Bellin’s Jewish Cook Book, 1941.
Roast goose recipe in Bellin’s *Jewish Cook Book*, 1941.

Potato pancakes recipe in Bellin’s *Jewish Cook Book*, 1941.

Kishke recipes in Bellin’s *Jewish Cook Book*, 1941.

Pickled beet recipe in Bellin’s *Jewish Cook Book*, 1941.

Cauliflower recipe in Bellin’s *Jewish Cook Book*, 1941.

Recipe for rolls in Bellin’s *Jewish Cook Book*, 1941.

Apple sauce recipe in Bellin’s *Jewish Cook Book*, 1941.

Seven layer schalet recipe in Bellin’s *Jewish Cook Book*, 1941.

The “Seven Layer Schalet” not enough dessert for you? *The Economical Jewish Cook* (London, 1897) offers a 30-minute recipe for “Hanucah Cakes.”

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“Hanucah Cakes” in Henry’s *Economical Jewish Cook*, 1897.
And what would the holiday be without doughnuts? Here are a selection of recipes, one from the Brooklyn Jewish Women’s Relief Association’s *A Book for a Cook* (1909) and the rest from *The International Jewish Cook Book* (New York, 1918).

Recipe for doughnuts in the Jewish Women’s Association’s *A Book for a Cook*, 1909.

**DOUGHNUTS.**

Beat a cup of sugar and 1 egg, add to it a cupful of milk; and flour enough to make a soft dough, adding to the first cupful 2 level teaspoonfuls of baking powder. Then add 1-2 teaspoon salt, 1-4 teaspoon of cinnamon and a tablespoonful of butter. Roll out on a floured board and fry in deep hot fat.
DOUGHNUTS

Mix two and one-half tablespoons of melted butter, one cup of granulated sugar, two eggs, one cup of milk, one-half nutmeg grated, sifted flour enough to make a batter as stiff as biscuit dough; add two teaspoons of baking-powder and one teaspoon of salt to the sifted flour. Flour your board well. Roll dough out about half an inch thick, and cut into pieces three inches long and one inch wide. Cut a slit about an inch long in the centre of each strip and pull one end through this slit. Fry quickly in hot Crisco. Sprinkle powdered sugar on top of each doughnut.

FRENCH DOUGHNUTS

French doughnuts are much daintier than the ordinary ones, and are easily made. Take one-half pint of water, one-half pint of milk, six ounces of butter, one-half pound of flour, and six eggs. Heat the butter, milk, and water, and when it boils remove from the fire and stir in the flour, using a wooden spoon. When well mixed, stir in the eggs, whipping each one in separately until you have a hard batter. Now pour your dough into a pastry bag. This is an ordinary cheesecloth bag, one corner of which has a tiny tin funnel, with a fluted or fancy edge. (These little tins may be purchased at any tinware store.) It should be very small, not over two inches high at the most, so the dough may be easily squeezed through it. Pour the paste on buttered paper, making into ring shapes. Fry in hot oil or butter substitute. Dust with powdered sugar.

CRULLERS

Cream two tablespoons of butter with one-half cup of sugar, then beat in one at a time two whole eggs. Mix well, then add one-half cup of milk, two teaspoons of baking-powder, and sufficient flour to make a soft batter to roll out. (Try three cupfuls and then add as much more flour as necessary.) Last, add one-half teaspoon cinnamon. Roll one-half inch thick, cut in strips one inch wide, three inches long and fry in hot Crisco.

If you try making any of these recipes, please let us know and share a picture of the results.

Note

1. Yes, we know the holiday commemorates a military victory, too.
By Danielle Aloia, Special Projects Librarian

There are endless diets, ways to prepare foods, and types of foods to eat in the world. One of these is the Raw Food Diet or Raw Foodism. While this may seem like a new age, trendy diet, it has been around for more than a hundred years. As defined in a 1923 American Raw Food, Health and Psychological Club publication, raw food has not “been subjected to the devastating heat of the flame and the consequent devitalizing changes which destroy its freshness and render it so much waste when taken into the human system.” Depending on whom you followed in the field, raw food diets could include eggs, milk, vegetables, fruit, and even meat.

Mr. & Mrs. Eugene Christian, authors of the 1904 book *Uncooked Foods and How to Use Them*, claimed to have cured all their stomach ailments with complete restoration to perfect health after following a raw food diet for a year. They held a seven-course banquet dinner in New York City to bring their theory to public attention—and it worked. They published this book after receiving many inquiries and hoped that it would emancipate women from the slavery of the cook stove and in turn allow her freedom to cultivate her higher faculties. (Not sure they met their goal there.)
The raw food diet’s most famous proponent was a Swiss nutritionist and physician Maximilian Bircher-Benner. He was also the creator of muesli and a contemporary of John Harvey Kellogg. The original muesli consisted of: “200 grams of apple (mashed) per helping with only a tablespoon of well soaked oats, some finely grated nuts for protein and fat, the juice of half a lemon and a tablespoon of sweetened condensed milk.”² He believed that these foods contained all the energy the human body needed to sustain itself.

In Meyer-Renschhausen and Wirz’s 1999 article about Bircher-Benner they explained that:

“The core of Bircher-Benner’s therapeutic programme was his dietary plan, which promoted raw food and carbohydrates over cooked food and animal protein...He called this a revolutionary diet, and that it was because, first, it turned prevalent bourgeois culinary values upside down, and second it contradicted the medical thinking of the day, which stressed the value of animal protein above all else.”³

that faulty nutrition was the root cause of incurable diseases. He outlined the mistakes “civilised people” make in their diets. His three biggest arguments were: “Change in Quality of Food by Heat,” “The Excessive Consumption of Protein,” and “Disregard of the Foodstuffs as a Whole.” The following diet is included in his book:
Health-giving Diet

Fifty per cent. of the daily intake should consist of raw unfired fruits, nuts and tastefully prepared vegetables made up into salads or hors d'œuvres, dressed with olive oil and lemon-juice, seasoned with aromatic herbs, no salt. Apples can be grated, including skin and core, and mixed with other ingredients to make palatable fruit-dishes. Fruit-dishes can also be made of berries (strawberries, blackberries, raspberries, blueberries), apricots, cherries, plums, bananas, etc. These health-giving dishes suitable for children, adults and patients exhaustively explained in "Fruit Dishes and Raw Vegetables."

The other fifty per cent. should consist of

1. Whole-meal bread.
2. Conservatively cooked vegetables.
3. Clean milk, butter, cream, cheese in moderate quantity, from healthily-bred cows.
4. Eggs only in very small quantities, and if one does not give up meat altogether,
5. Meat dishes twice a week or a mouthful or so a day to have the taste, as says Prof. Hindhede.
6. Beverages: water, lemonade, unfermented apple- and grape-juices, tea of eglantine, limes, elder, peppermint, camomile, etc.

One Principal Meal and Two Accessory Meals a Day

Principal meal:
- Fresh fruit and nuts.
- Hors d'œuvres of vegetables, salads.
- Whole-meal bread with little butter.
- Cooked vegetables.
- 1 cup of our beverages.

Accessory meals: Breakfast
- Fruit-dish.
- Fruits and nuts.
- Whole-meal bread with little butter.
- 1–2 cups of our teas.

The second meal (Lunch)
- The same as breakfast with addition of a salad, or sandwiches with vegetable salads.
Conservatively cooked vegetables are cooked at less than 145°F. According to Stella McDermott, author of *The Metaphysics of Raw Foods* (1919), heating food at or above 145°F destroys certain properties of plant life. When foods are heated, but not cooked, little, if any, chemical change takes place.

In her book, McDermott includes this chart on the nutritive values of raw foods. She explains that the discovery of the vitamin revolutionized “man’s understanding of foods, and theory of diet. Heretofore the value of a food has been determined by its power to give heat and energy. Now it is being determined as essential or non-essential to man according to its richness in Vitamines.”

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Raw food diets may not have been the panacea for fixing incurable diseases
or getting women out of the kitchen, but the benefits of including raw foods in your diet cannot be denied. Eating lots of fruits and vegetables lowers blood pressure (BP) and cholesterol levels. According to Chan et al., “Among commonly consumed individual raw vegetables, tomatoes, carrots, and scallions related significantly inversely to BP. Among commonly eaten cooked vegetables, tomatoes, peas, celery, and scallions related significantly inversely to BP.”

A more recent study suggests that “consumption of a strict raw food diet lowers plasma total cholesterol and triglyceride concentrations, but also lowers serum HDL cholesterol and increases tHcy concentrations (a protein associated with heart attack, stroke and blood clots) due to vitamin B-12 deficiency.”

While it is necessary to eat your fruits and veggies, it’s also advisable to have a well-rounded diet that includes all the essential nutrients that sustain the body.

References


3. Ibid.


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**Cook like a Roman: The New York Academy of Medicine’s Apicius Manuscript**

By Anne Garner, Curator, Center for the History of Medicine and Public Health

This is one of several posts leading up to our day-long Eating Through Time Festival on October 17, 2015, a celebration of food, cookery, and health. *View the full program and register for the Festival.*

Ancient sources document the culinary excellence of one Marcus Gavius Apicius, a Roman gourmet who flourished during Tiberius’ reign (1st century CE). It isn’t clear from textual evidence that this Apicius ever wrote a book of cookery. And yet, the gem of our Library’s cookery collection—a 9th-century manuscript collection of Greek and Roman recipes—bears his name.
Our manuscript, transmitting a 4th– or 5th-century compendium of culinary and medical recipes compiled from a number of 2nd-century Roman sources, packs a powerful wow factor. It contains 500 Greek and Roman recipes from the Mediterranean basin. A handful may date as early as the 4th century BCE. As such, our manuscript is sometimes referred to as the oldest extant cookbook in the West.

This collection of recipes was likely compiled from multiple sources. The 2nd-century satirical writer Juvenal indicated that the name “Apicius” was frequently used to describe a foodie, not a specific person. Other sources suggest that the name conjured luxury and excessive eating.²

These recipes appear to be written by and for cooks. While some recipes called for cuts of meat that might have been beyond the means of the average Roman citizen, many others, including a number of meat, vegetable, and legume dishes, were well within the reach of Rome’s tradespeople, builders, artists, and modest farmers. Some of the recipes may have reflected popular dishes served in local popinae (street bars).

A closer look at book one reveals a wide range of useful directives
applicable for the Mediterranean home cook. Called *Epimeles* (careful, or attentive), book one includes recipes for a spiced wine surprise, honeyed wine, and Roman absinthe. Here too are tips for preserving pork and beef rind, fried fish, blackberries, and truffles.

The dishes reflect the polyglot culture of the Mediterranean basin. The dominance of Greek culinary tradition in the early empire makes it likely that the Apicius began as a Greek collection of recipes, though mainly written in Latin, and adapted for a Roman palate. The cookbook incorporates a number of Greek terms, like *melizomum* (honey sauce) and *hypotrimma* (here a mixture of cheese and herbs), despite the existence of Latin glosses. Other words are hybrids of Greek and Latin, like *tractogalatae*, combining the Latin tractum (thin sheet of pastry) and *gala*, Greek for milk.

The Apicius manuscript is the gem of the Academy’s Margaret Barclay Wilson Collection of Cookery, acquired in 1929. Conservators restored and rebound it in 2006.

Our manuscript was penned in several hands in a mix of Anglo-Saxon and Carolingian scripts at the monastery at Fulda (Germany) around 830 CE. It is one of two manuscripts (the other at the Vatican) presumed to have been copied from a now lost common source.

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The gilt and illuminated Vatican manuscript of *De re culinaria*, as replicated in a 2013 facsimile. Click to enlarge.
Images from both 9th-century iterations illustrate the different approaches to the text. The image above shows the gilt and illuminated Vatican manuscript, as replicated in a 2013 facsimile. Below is the Academy’s text. The number of cross-outs and the plain, unadorned style of the manuscript suggest it may have been a teaching tool for scribes.

— The Academy’s unadorned 9th-century manuscript of *De re culinaria*. Click to enlarge.
Apicius has been a bestseller since the beginning of the print era, published in multiple editions since the 15th century. The Academy library holds many print editions, including two of the earliest. This title page is from the earliest dated edition of the text, published in Milan in 1498. Pictured below is the device of the printer, La Signerre, who later set up shop in Rouen. Our copy is annotated by an early reader who adds the titles of the text’s ten books, grouped by type of dish.
The second earliest dated edition, printed in Venice, offers one of the earliest examples of a title page in printing history. It too is heavily annotated by an early food-lover, fluent in Greek and Latin.

Margins in our 1503 printed Apicius offers Greek glosses on Latin terms.
Enthusiasts will find many other print descendants of this extraordinary manuscript in the Academy’s library.

The Apicius manuscript and a number of print editions of the text will be on display in the Academy Library’s Drs. Barry and Bobbi Coller Rare Book Reading Room during our October 17th festival, Eating through Time. A complete schedule of events can be found here.

References


The Diaspora of Spam

Posted on October 13, 2015 by nyamhistorymed

This post, by Evelyn Kim, guest curator for our day-long Eating Through Time Festival, is one of several posts leading up to the October 17, 2015 celebration of food, cookery, and health. View the full program and register for the Festival.
For millions of Asians and Pacific Islanders, Spam makes the world go ‘round. Seemingly inconsistent with local food cultures, Spam has seeped itself into regional cuisines, including Hawaii’s Spam musubi, South Korea’s Spam jjigae, and Hong Kong’s Spam ramen. In China, Spam is considered a gourmet treat, with Spam gift boxes appearing for Chinese New Year.

How did this piece of tinned meat earn so many frequent flyer miles? The answer lies in the history of Spam. Hormel, the meat processor and eventual food giant, originally developed Spam as a means to commercialize pork shoulder, an unwanted cut at the time, in 1937. Originally marketed as a home alternative to butcher-sliced luncheon meat, Spam’s worldwide debut came with the United States’ entry into World War II. While spurned by American housewives, Spam was perfect for US military rations: it was shelf-stable, compact, and a cheap source of protein. And it wasn’t just for the US military. Thanks to the Lend-Lease Act of 1941, Spam was the star food aid product for Allied countries and troops, finding its way across the United Kingdom, France, and even Russia. By the end of the war, the US government had bought nearly 150 million pounds of Spam.
The same story repeated itself in Asia, but with a twist. US troops also brought Spam with them there. But unlike European countries, where Spam’s utility and popularity waned after the war, the product remained popular in Asia and the Pacific Islands. In many places, including Hong Kong and Japan, Spam was the only meat available immediately after WWII. In the case of Korea, the Korean War insured a steady supply of Spam to the peninsula, even becoming local currency for troops and the civilian population for everything from dental care to building supplies to tactical...
But the question remains as to why Spam stayed so popular in Asia as opposed to Europe. Europe did not embrace Spam after the war for a number of reasons. While post-war Europe had the same problems with hunger as post-War Asia, Europe reverted to pre-war agricultural production relatively quickly. The other possibility is that the association of Spam with wartime poverty and starvation led to a backlash against the product. This was certainly the case in America. For the troops coming home, the mere mention of Spam sent them into paroxysms of disgust.

While many of the circumstances in Asia were fairly similar in the post-war era, geography and politics may explain Spam’s continued proliferation in the region. With the exception of China, all areas in which Spam was introduced during WWII have limited land for agricultural use, making meat a scarce commodity, even in the best of times. Compared to the price of locally produced fresh meat, Spam was relatively cheap, even after the war. For Hawaii, political conditions allowed Spam to dominate the market. Hawaii had a large population of Japanese residents during WWII. Instead of interning them like on the US mainland, the US government resorted to restricting Japanese-American dominated industries, such as fishing. Without a steady supply of locally available protein, Spam easily dominated the Hawaiian market.

One other major factor explains Spam’s ubiquity across Asia: marketing. Hormel, like many other industries post-war, had to re-market itself. Hormel attempted to re-brand Spam as the food for the modern 1950s housewife. Unfortunately for Hormel, this effort didn’t revive Spam’s sales in North America. However, Hormel’s re-branding efforts were quite successful in Asia. Across the continent, Spam can be found in gift packs for any occasion. Furthermore, Hormel not only has added different varieties to please local markets, but in some places, like China, it has reformulated the recipe.

Spam is now available in 44 countries across the world. Hormel, in some ways, became the case study for food multi-nationals in how to introduce new food product to a global audience. Spam may have lost its battle with the American housewife, but it certainly has won the war across the globe.
References


4. As a side note, the popularity of pork across all Asian nations is also due to a combination of poverty and land scarcity. Pigs have a low feed conversion ratio and have a higher meat yield compared to other livestock. Sigrid Schmalzer, in her fantastic article, *Breeding a Better China: Pigs, Practices, and Place in a Chinese County, 1929-1937* (*Geographical Review*, Vol. 92, No. 1. Jan, 2002. Pp 1-22.) discusses the importance of pigs to the Chinese diet.


Extra, Extra, Get Your New Banana!

Posted on October 8, 2015 by nyamhistorymed

By Anne Garner, Curator, Center for the History of Medicine and Public Health

This is one of several posts leading up to our day-long Eating Through Time Festival on October 17, 2015, a celebration of food, cookery, and health. View the full program and register for the Festival.

Among the many attractions at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876 were the bananas. Wrapped in foil and sold for a dime each, they were a novelty for many Americans who had never seen them before.
In the decades that followed the Exposition, the United Fruit Company (now Chiquita) was responsible for introducing many more Americans to the fruit, promoting the banana in their literature, and distributing them throughout the country.

The story of the UFC begins in 1871, when cattle rancher Minor C. Keith first planted bananas alongside the tracks of the national railroad in Costa Rica. By the 1880s, Keith was the dominant banana trader in Central America. In the same decade, Lorenzo Dow Baker founded Boston Fruit, the first to import bananas in the U.S. Keith’s enterprise merged with Boston Fruit in 1899 to create the United Fruit Company.

During the next decade, United Fruit Company’s Great White Fleet, painted white to reflect the intense sun, carried bananas from Central America to the U.S. An increasing number of refrigerated train cars pushed bananas further inland, to places they had never gone before.

Beginning in the early 20th century, the United Fruit Company promoted the banana in a series of pamphlets and ads, taking it from a little-known novelty to a household staple. At the heart of their campaign was an endorsement of the fruit’s healthy properties. During the 1920s, the United Fruit Company hired doctors to extol the nutritional virtues of the fruit. In 1939, they offered free textbooks—decidedly pro-banana—to schoolchildren.²

The Academy Library has a number of historical pamphlets produced by the United Fruit Company and its distribution arm, The Fruit Dispatch Company. Here, we offer a selection of images from our collection.
POINTS ABOUT BANANAS

Wholesome
Cheap
Nutritious
Delicious
Easily digested
Always in season
Available everywhere
No waste
Convenient for the dinner pail
Good food when cooked
Good food when not cooked
The poor man’s food
The children’s delight
Endorsed by physicians
Put up and sealed by nature in a germ-proof package
Produced without drawing on the Nation’s resources
In 1917 the United Fruit Company published “The Food Value of the Banana,” a collection of 15 opinion pieces touting the virtues of the banana as a nutritious snack. “Points about Bananas” concluded the volume.

The United Fruit Company’s test kitchens reported in 1924 that bananas with corn flakes and milk made the best breakfast for families. The company’s subsequent publications emphasized that bananas were powerfully healthy, especially for the very young.
The cover of the fourth edition of “The Food Value of the Banana,” published in 1928, features a rosy-cheeked and radiant little boy, banana in hand.
The back cover of the same 1928 pamphlet explains the ideal time to consume a banana, and how it can be eaten in each phase of ripeness.
Most bananas cycle from green to yellow to yellow with brown spots in seven days.\(^4\)

In the 1920s, UFC hired doctors to publicly recommend that babies should consume mashed bananas. Researcher Sidney Haas found that children
diagnosed with celiac disease who had been given a diet of milk and bananas dramatically improved (of course bananas are gluten free, which may have had something to do with it). Here, an ad from the Women’s Medical Journal from 1945 (v.52, no.6).
The Fruit Dispatch Company’s 1931 newspaper-format pamphlet, “The New Banana,” tells stories in which the banana’s hero status is high. In one, a Norwegian hikes from Oslo to Christianssand. Nourished by the banana, “his strength increased from day-to-day!” In another, the banana sustains two transatlantic pilots (and fits compactly into the cockpit).
The Scientific News section of “The New Banana” reminds parents of the considerable nutrients in the banana: vitamins A, B, and C, calcium, magnesium, and iron. It’s also “non-fattening” though not especially so when paired with bacon, as on the back cover.
The Fruit Dispatch Company published “Serve Bananas in ‘Latest Style’” in 1940 to introduce new banana recipes to American households. Recipes included “ham banana rolls with cheese sauce” and “banana fritters” as well...
as a “banana sweet potato casserole.” We’re charmed by the lady banana with the Elizabethan collar waving her napkin. She predates the United Fruit Company’s Chiquita Banana by four years.
“Banana Salad Bazaar,” produced by the United Fruit Company’s Home Economics Department in 1940, is introduced by a sign-waving banana-man announcing “This Way to the Salad Bazaar.” Salad makers are encouraged to use fully ripe bananas (yellow peel flecked with brown). Recipes include banana gelatin salad and banana sardine boats.
1941 was a busy year for the UFC's presses. Here, a chart from the second addendum to “Nutritive and Therapeutic Values of the Banana,” an annotated bibliography of recent research devoted to the fruit. The forward tells us that the banana pictured is a Gros Michel, or “Big Mike” banana,
imported to the U.S. since the late 1890s. The “Big Mike” was larger, with a sturdier peel, and anecdotally more flavorful. By 1960 “Big Mikes” had been almost entirely eradicated by Panama disease. On American tables it was replaced by the Cavendish.⁶

This inset from “Bananas...How to Serve Them” (1941) illustrates the health benefits of bananas at every age. We learn that the Dionne quintuplets (b. 1934), the earliest quints to survive their infancy, ate bananas. Bananas are a
“training table favorite” for athletes, and they appeal to the elderly as well because they are easy to chew and digest.

On the left, a sweet banana artist paints bananas at three stages of ripeness and explains how to prepare bananas for meals at each phase. On the right, encouragement for the housewife, with a promise of new banana recipes on the pages that followed. A monocled banana with a cane and top-hat below rips off Mr. Peanut, well-known to Americans since the early 1930s.
Inspired by Carmen Miranda’s character in Busby Berkeley’s *The Gang’s All Here*, United Fruit Company introduced Chiquita Banana in 1944 (Miranda herself was frequently called, “chiquita” in her films). Dik Brown, creator of *Hagar the Horrible*, drew the first Chiquita; advertising execs composed her famous song. Here, a 1960 iteration of Chiquita graces “Chiquita Banana’s Cookbook.”
In “Chiquita Banana’s Cookbook,” Chiquita offers ideas for decorating with bananas. Here, “fruit in a scoop” and a banana bouquet, in a pressed-glass stand.
Under consideration by Betty Draper and the Mad Men set: a triptych of bananas in “Chiquita Banana’s Cookbook,” prepared with three different garnishes: a currant jelly, a curry sauce, and mint jelly.

— “Chiquita Banana’s Cookbook,” 1960, pages 4-5. Click to enlarge.
“Chiquita Banana’s Cookbook” offers an adorable banana bunny and a banana skillet breakfast, as well as new recipes for shakes. “Drink a banana and feel better for it,” says Chiquita, and we believe her because she’s wearing that amazing hat.

References


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