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 Channucah”:

Click on an image to view each recipe listed:

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¹ For more information on Hanukkah, see the article by Johanna Goldberg, Information Services Librarian, on the library’s website.
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.

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

Cauliflower 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.”

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).
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.

Uncooked Foods and How to Use Them: A History of the Raw Food Diet

Posted on December 2, 2015 by nyamhistorymed

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.” 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.”

In his book, The Prevention of Incurable Disease, Bircher-Benner argued 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:
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.


Evelyn J. Kim, today’s guest blogger, was our guest curator for this year’s Eating Through Time Festival.

With speakers from Jacques Pepin, Tom Colicchio, Lori Silverbush, Bryant Terry, and so many others, there was something for everyone at the Eating Through Time Festival on October 17, whether one’s interests were in history, public health, or culture.

The wide range of topics speaks to the various ways we perceive food. Our first main stage speaker, food justice activist and cookbook author, Bryant Terry, succinctly expressed these perceptions: “Start with the visceral, move to the cerebral, end with the political.”

Politics was a theme for many of our panelists. University of Maryland Law Professor Frank Pasquale emphasized the need for transparency in food regulation appointments. At the local level, Ellie Wilson, a nutritionist and policy maker for New York state, and the New York Academy of Medicine’s own Kimberly Libman focused upon the need to support more than food on plates: wellness programs and support for produce farmers are also a part of just and healthy food systems. This holistic view of changing food policy was encapsulated nicely in our screening of Lori Silverbush’s A Place at the Table. Looking at food insecurity in the U.S., producers Silverbush and Tom Colicchio underscored the need for both federal and local efforts in solving hunger.
Are there other ways of tackling nutrition and health disparities in the U.S.? On our all-woman “Starting Up Health” panel, moderator Nina Meijers spoke with three start-ups on how technology can empower consumer decisions. The “Eating the Future” panel also asked similar questions regarding how new technologies, such as insect proteins and 3-D printing, could feed the world sustainably and address malnutrition concerns.

To demonstrate those possibilities, lead researcher at Nordic Food Lab, Josh Evans, proposed entomophagy as a possible response to food insecurity and sustainability dilemmas worldwide. Passing out insect-based food and beverages, Joshua proved that deliciousness and sustainability could go together. Dr. David Eisenberg called upon more doctors and health professionals to learn about food and nutrition by enrolling in cooking classes, such as Harvard Public Health and Culinary Institute of America’s collaborative program “Healthy Kitchens, Healthy Lives.”

Culture and the arts can also be a conduit for action. Poet Simone Bridges and non-profit Hip-Hop Health performed pieces that could teach today’s youth about nutrition and health through the spoken word. In a historical context, culture has also been a driver of nutritional theories and practices. Historians Ken Albala presented his research on sex, power, and food in the Renaissance while Betty Fussell discussed purity and danger in food advertisements in the 20th century.
The power of food is also an embodied knowledge. Betty Fussell, our oldest presenter, gave some sage advice on how food (along with naps, sex, and good friends) is a key factor in longevity not only from a nutritional, but also affective standpoint. No one could be a better spokesperson for this than our keynote speaker, Jacques Pépin. Reminiscing on his nearly eighty years, Chef Pépin’s lecture, “Food Memories,” touched on his life in food from his childhood in France to his most recent (and 14th food show!) on PBS. While Chef Pépin attributed his continued stamina to lots of wine, he also stressed the importance of the social and the sensory in his work as a chef. Despite the materiality of food, Pépin reminded us that food is ephemeral: “Food is fragile. You eat it, it goes. What remains are the memories.”

I can't thank the Academy enough for giving me the opportunity to assemble a day’s worth of programming about the issues I care about most: Food, social justice, and public health. And I certainly will have those memories for a lifetime.

For more Eating Through Time pictures, [visit our Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com).
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.

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.
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.
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.
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


Posted in Collections, Events, History of medicine | Tagged Apicius, cookbooks, De re coquinaria, De re culinaria, Eating Through Time, food, Food 2015, manuscripts, recipes | 1 Reply
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 information.

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!

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. ¹

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.
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).
Cover of "The New Banana," 1931.
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.
Cover of "Banana Salad Bazaar," 1940
“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” 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


Posted in Collections, History of medicine | Tagged banana, bananas, Chiquita, diet, Eating Through Time, food, Food 2015, nutrition, United Fruit Company | 3 Replies

Physicians Discuss Aphrodisiacs

Posted on October 6, 2015 by nyamhistorymed

Ken Albala is Professor of History and Director of Food Studies at the University of the Pacific. He is the author or editor of 24 books on food. He conducted his dissertation research primarily at the New York Academy of Medicine. Dr. Albala will present Aphrodisiacs: The Intimate Connection Between Food and Sex in Renaissance Nutritional Theory and lead the workshop “Hands On” Early Modern Cooking at our Eating Through Time Festival on October 17.

As a scholar sometimes you have ideas that get orphaned that you come back to after many years, very randomly. Such was a paper I first delivered at a Northern California Renaissance conference in 1995 on aphrodisiacs in medical literature. In truth, I had intended to fit the topic into my dissertation and it never made it in. The paper was a way to make use of the pile of notes I had taken at the New York Academy of Medicine just a few years before. And when I say a pile of notes, I mean an entire filing cabinet full of handwritten notes taken in pencil and coded with colored crayons. There was no such thing as a laptop then.
These notes cover about 100 books I read at the Academy between 1989 and 1993, practically every dietary text written in Europe between the mid-15th and the mid-17th century. I was a permanent fixture in what was then called the Malloch Room, now the Drs. Barry and Bobbi Coller Rare Book Reading Room. The notes became my dissertation at Columbia University and eventually morphed into my first book *Eating Right in the Renaissance* (UC Press, 2002). While I always kept an active interest in the history of medicine, my career since then has shifted far more toward culinary history and broader food history. Every now and then I deliver a paper or write an article involving food and medicine, and I still teach a history of medicine course, but I had completely forgotten about the topic of aphrodisiacs. In jest I have often said it would be a really interesting topic for experiential research. Alan Davidson, the late author of the Oxford Companion to food, encouraged me many times to write a serious book on aphrodisiacs, but it never came to pass.

What surprise then, when this past spring, two decades after first giving that paper, I was asked to speak in Miami on aphrodisiacs. I thought, OK, I will just go into my computer and find that paper. No evidence of it. I realized that when I wrote that paper I was still learning to type, had just sent my first email, and had still written out everything by hand. So I needed to dig through the filing cabinets to find the original paper. Then to revise and update it using my original trove of notes taken 25 years earlier. Happily the paper was a success. I also delivered it in Dublin a few weeks later, and then a publisher contacted me asking if I would like to write a book on aphrodisiacs. I think I probably will. Isn’t it funny how every stray idea eventually finds a good home?

The most remarkable thing about the whole experience is that I can still hear the voices of early modern authors after all these years. I can still quote them in half a dozen languages. From the French version of Platina printed in 1507 there is “L’heure que tu sentiras ta viande estre cuite, car…l’heure est bonne pour engendrer enfans…” (The moment you feel that your meal is digested, the time is good to produce children.) Or Girolamo Manfredi from 1474 “Imperho dicono li philosophi che chi usa molto il cohito vive poco e tosto invechia.” (Therefore philosophers say whoever has a lot of sex lives a short life and ages too soon.) Or there’s Baldassare Pisanelli who tells us that 4 drams of cloves in milk “aumento mirabilmente le forze di Venere” (greatly increase the power of Venus.) There’s also the Fleming Hugo Fridaevallis who tells us that asparagus is great for timid newlyweds “primas coniugii difficultates, et si quid minis in uxore tunc placet, dulce et amabile futurum tandem uxoris contubernium” (whenever...has conjugal difficulties at first, and if you are unable to please your wife, later she will be a sweet and loving mate).
Their opinions are of course very amusing, but they also give us some remarkable insights into the kinds of problems Renaissance people would have taken to their physicians. These kind of frank open discussions of sex gradually become rarer in the 16th century, no doubt under the influence of the Reformations a kind of prudery pervades the later dietaries. It took another few centuries until they discuss the topic again, in the 19th century, but all this is the subject for a book. Stay tuned.

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Baldassare Pisanelli’s *Trattato della natura de’ cibi et del bere Nel quale non solo tutte le virtù, & i viti di quelli minutamente si paleseano*, 1586. His discussion of the power of cloves in milk appears top right. Click to enlarge.

Bee Bread

Posted on October 1, 2015 by nyamhistormed

Today’s guest blog is by Josh Evans, lead researcher with Nordic Food Lab in Copenhagen. He will lead a workshop on insect eating at our October 17 Eating Through Time Festival. A version of this article was first published on the Nordic Food Lab blog.

Honeybees (*Apis mellifera*) have mastered feats of chemical engineering as various as they are alchemical. Their most well-known substances are of course honey, their concentrated, stable, hive-warming energy source, and wax, their pliable, moisture-proof structural material. Yet there are other substances nowadays known primarily only to beekeepers and practitioners of traditional medicines. Propolis (or ‘bee glue’) is a structural sealant and potent antimicrobial agent within the hive, and it carries a beautiful resinous aroma. Royal jelly is what all brood—the immature larvae and pupae—are first fed before being weaned onto honey (unlike the future queen, who becomes differentiated by being fed only royal jelly). It has remarkable moisturizing, emulsifying, and stabilizing properties. Even the brood are used as food in many cultures around the world and have a delicate savoriness with hints of raw nuts or avocado.

Each substance is fascinating in its own right, though pollen is particularly notable for the transformation it undergoes between its collection and storage. While bees use honey as their primary energy source, pollen is where they derive proteins, vitamins, and other vital nutrients. At first glance, bee pollen seems like quite a straightforward product—in the course of pollinating thousands of flowers every day, worker bees are repeatedly showered with grains of pollen, some of which accumulate into granules on the hairs of their hind legs. This is the pollen most commonly available on the market, largely because it is relatively easy to gather using a small device attached to the hive door that knocks the pollen off the returning bees’ legs.

But bees do not consume their pollen fresh. Instead, they take it into the hive and pack the granules into empty comb cells, mixing them with nectar and digestive fluids and sealing the cell with a drop of honey. Once processed in this way, the pollen remains stable indefinitely. Beekeepers call this form of pollen ‘perga’ or ‘bee bread.’
Fresh pollen is high in moisture and protein and, especially when brought into the hive—which stays around an internal temperature of 37°C (98.6°F)—becomes an ideal environment for mold growth. The bees’ digestive fluids, however, are rich with lactic acid bacteria (LAB), which come to dominate the pollen substrate when it is packed together and sealed from the air with honey. The bacteria metabolize sugars in the pollen, producing lactic acid and lowering the pH from 4.8 to around 4.1—well below the generally recognized threshold for pathogenic microbial growth of 4.6.
These LAB come predominantly from the bees themselves, rather than, for example, the plants from which they forage, and the difference in microbial ecology of fresh pollen vs. stored is great. Furthermore, many of the genera which come to dominate fermented pollen are also some of those most common in fermented food products made by humans. In addition to preservation, the pollen fermentation process also renders its nutrients more available. Some proteins are broken down into amino acids, starches are metabolized into simple sugars, and vitamins become more available. In this sense, bee bread is even more health-giving than the more commonly available fresh bee pollen.

Yet the sensory transformation of the bee pollen into bee bread might be most remarkable. The floral and herbal notes of individual granules become enhanced; the powdery, sandy texture becomes firmer and moister; the acidity from the lactic acid brightens the flavor and tempers possible bitterness; and the fermentation also produces secondary aromas that generate new flavors of fruit—some, for example, gain the distinct taste of mango. The particularities of the fresh pollen, depending on the season and its plant sources, become enhanced, and new qualities that were not present before are revealed.

We have used the bee bread in different recipes: ‘Peas ‘n’ Bees,’ a soup of fresh pea juice with bee larvae, some fried until crisp and some blanched with lovage, garnished with fresh lovage and bee bread; or ‘The Whole Hive,’ a dessert of beeswax ice cream, sauce of honey kombucha and bee bread, crystallized honey crisp, propolis tincture and apple blossoms. Bee bread is also excellent at initiating the transformation of cream into crème fraîche or butter.
Our interaction with *Apis mellifera* is one of the oldest co-evolutionary relationships between insects and humans—and yet there is still so much we don’t know about the bees. For example, despite the current explosion of interest among scientists to study the complex microbiota of bees, we still do not know exactly which species of microbes drive the transformation of pollen into bee bread, or exactly how.
Though as fascinating, delicious, and versatile as the bee bread is, my favorite part about it might be the realization that humans are not the only ones who ferment our food. *Apis mellifera* might have gotten there long before.

Bee bread is typically available to harvest throughout the summer months. Ask a local beekeeper for more information. If you’re lucky, they might be willing to share some of this potent, delicious treat.

**Acknowledgements**

Thanks to Annette Bruun Jensen at the University of Copenhagen for sharing with us a wealth of information about bees and their products over the past few years. Also thanks to Oliver Maxwell and the rest of the team at Bybi in Copenhagen, who have been one of our regular suppliers of both bee brood and bee bread and who go out of their way to help us in our research. To the many more beekeepers we have worked with in Denmark, the Nordic region, and the world: we salute you!

**References**


Posted in *Events* | Tagged *bee bread*, *bees*, *Eating Through Time*, *food*, *Food 2015*, *guest post*, *Josh Evans*, *Nordic Food Lab*, *perga*, *pollen* | Leave a reply
Three giveaways, three chances to win!

Set your kitchen timer: the countdown to our October 17th festival, *Eating Through Time*, is less than a month away. We’re looking forward to seeing you there, along with Bryant Terry, Jacques Pépin, the Snowday food truck, and a host of other culinary personalities offering talks, demonstrations, and panels.

Today we’re announcing three chances to win two VIP tickets to the festival this month. The tickets will include entrance to hear the legendary Jacques Pépin.

First up are our friends at the Brooklyn-based *Food Book Fair*, who will be hosting an Instagram challenge on their excellent feed starting today, September 21. Follow them at [@foodbookfair](https://www.instagram.com/foodbookfair) for details. In addition to the tickets, you’ll win a signed copy of Pépin’s new cookbook.

Website-with-wanderlust *Atlas Obscura* will also launch an Instagram contest on September 30th. The winning photo will be announced on Monday, October 5th. Follow them on *Instagram* and *Twitter* for more details. You’ll also win a year’s membership to our *Friends of the Rare Book Room*.

And finally, we’ll be hosting our own caption contest the week of September 28th. Pull out the stops to caption an image from one of our 18th-century cookbooks, and you’ll earn two free VIP tickets for October 17th. We’re [@nyamhistory](https://www.instagram.com/nyamhistory) on *Twitter* and *Instagram*, and you’ll find us here on Facebook.

The full schedule of Eating Through Time can be found [here](https://www.nyam.org/calendar/event/17046).

We’ve featured a handful of images from our French cookbooks below, to put you in the mood. Bon Appetit!
Frontispiece from F.J. Mayeux's *Le petit cuisinier français contenant la cuisine, l'office, la patisserie...* Bruxelles: Ferra aine, 1823.
ÉMILE DUMONT
AUTEUR DE LA BONNE CUISINE FRANÇAISE

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Cover of Émile Dumont's Le parfait patissier: recettes pour la ville et la campagne: entremets sucrés, patisserie, confiserie, glaces, liqueurs, vins en futs et en bouteilles, cidre et poiré. Paris: Degorce-Cadot, [188?].
Beyond the Pail: The Advent of a Hot School Lunch

Posted on September 15, 2015 by nyamhistorymed

By Johanna Goldberg, Information Services Librarian

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

It's winter in Minnesota, 1916. You have to walk six miles to school (uphill, both ways?). By the time you get there, your lunch is

Frontispiece and title from Louis Clerc’s Manuel de l'amateur d'huitres, ou, L'art de les pêcher ... : suivi des qualités alimentaires et propriétés médicales de ce mollusque, ainsi que de l'adresse des personnes qui les vendent. Paris: Chez l'Éditeur, Librairie Française Étrangère, 1828.

frozen. "In this condition," explained Nellie Wing Farnsworth in the pamphlet *The Rural School Lunch*, "it is not very appetizing and it is not much better even if it has thawed out."

*The Rural School Lunch*, which focuses on schools in Minnesota in 1916, and *The School Lunch*, which focuses on schools in Massachusetts circa 1920, both describe the challenges of feeding rural students hot meals long before the advent of the National School Lunch Program in 1946.

As the pamphlets explain, students brought cold lunches from home. The nutritional value of those lunches was a concern, especially as lunch was often the main meal for farm families—one school children missed. In contrast, wrote Farnsworth, "Little thought or attention is given to the school lunch in many cases. When the pail or basket is opened it is found to contain cold pancakes, salt pork, cold potatoes, pie and bottles of cold tea or coffee. None of these foods is suited to the needs of the child and, as a rule, they all prove unpalatable and indigestible."
While some schools figured out ways to heat up lunches brought from home—in Wisconsin and elsewhere, students were encouraged to bring lunch in canning jars, which teachers placed in tubs of water atop the school's heater or stove—efforts to provide nutritious hot meals made at school took hold by the 1920s.  

Supplementing the box lunch with a hot dish, wrote *The School Lunch* author Alzira Wentworth Sandwall, had enormous benefits. Student table manners improved, students and teachers had a forum for conversation (“current events can be discussed and helpful conversation can be encouraged”), and nutrition education became part of the school day.
But perhaps most important was that student performance improved. Afternoon discipline became easier once students had enjoyed a nutritious meal. And students who appeared to be lost causes began to shine, like this child in Holyoke, Massachusetts:

One girl in the third grade was especially anemic, and was in the habit of falling asleep every afternoon. She became a regular patron of the canteen, and after two weeks she ceased to fall asleep. She was thought to be mentally deficient until the advent of the canteen, when she began to receive 100 per cent in some of her work.³

But how could schools provide hot meals to students? Programs across the country varied greatly, and only some had public funding.⁴ In most places, like the schools described by Sandwall and Farnsworth, hot lunches came about through donations of time and labor. Both pamphlets contain ideas for fundraising to pay for ingredients and utensils, such as food sales or a "shower": a teacher selected utensils at a local store, asked women connected to the school to purchase them, and turned it into an afternoon party.¹³ And both have lists of recommended recipes, a large portion of them simple soups.

Farnsworth goes into great detail on how to create food and utensil storage areas on a budget. She also breaks down the process of meal management, recommending teachers assign four “housekeepers” each week, boys and girls who will cook, serve, set the table, wash the dishes, clean the storage areas and stove, carry in the water, sweep the floors, and take out the...
Providing a hot lunch required enormous effort on the part of teachers, students, and the surrounding community. But as Sandwall stated, "There are very few schools where it is absolutely impossible to serve at least one hot dish, and no better work can be done for the health of the school children than making it possible for every one of them to have a hot, nourishing luncheon."3

References


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Ad via The Colored American, Dec. 23, 1837, and accessed @nypl via Early American Newspapers, Series VI, Readex.

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News archive 2015. El Niño lowers early production outlook in Southern Africa. Crop and livestock production prospects in Southern Africa have been weakened by the El Niño weather phenomenon that has depressed rains and increased temperatures. While global hunger figures are decreasing, the number of food insecure people in mountain areas rose 30 percent between 2000 and 2012, according to a new study, released today by FAO and the Mountain Partnership on International Mountain Day. 11-12-2015. Align trade and agricultural development policies better to achieve food security. Recent research by Adelaide food Values Research Group’s Dr Jessica Loyer and University of Edinburgh’s Dr Christine Knight looks at the role of “nutritional primitivism” in selling “superfoods” such as Andean maca. In their article, published in Food, Culture, and Society, they investigate roles of nutritional primitivism both as a marketing tool and as a popular social-environmental [...].