A Soldier’s and Sailor’s Thanksgiving in 1864

Dan Vernia recounts this Civil War story starting on page 3.

Front cover of the Library of Congress copy of the Union League Club’s 1865 Report.
JACKIE: A TASTE FOR BOTH COTTAGE CHEESE AND CAVIAR

In 2019 Sarah Morgan, Asst. Kitchen Manager at the Nashville Food Project, ran across a copy of The First Ladies Cook Book: Favorite Recipes of All the Presidents of the United States and embarked on a quest to prepare all or most of its recipes. (The book was written by Smithsonian curator Margaret Brown Klapthor in 1965, and updated by editor Robert H. Doherty in 1982.) Now, Ms. Morgan has been collaborating with the National First Ladies’ Library (Canton, OH) to present a series of Zoom programs about the life and times of these women as she simultaneously prepares their recipes in her home kitchen. On July 19 I watched her episode about Jacqueline Kennedy, as summarized below. A recording of the talk, and the set of recipe cards for it, have since been posted—

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdV96Twbd08

Jacqueline Lee Bouvier Kennedy Onassis (1929-1994) was born to a wealthy Long Island family and became famous for her glamorous life, cultural refinement, and high fashion. But when it came to food, she actually didn’t know her way around a kitchen, and she didn’t really cook! That’s because, from a young age, she envisioned herself not as a housewife but as a woman with an influential career. (Her career in journalism and publishing was interrupted by her successive marriages to Sen. Kennedy in 1953 and shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis in 1968, but she resumed it in 1975.) She was a picky eater, very image-conscious, dieted a lot, and disliked eating in public.

The year that Jackie studied abroad in Paris and Grenoble—part of her undergraduate degree in French literature—left her with a lifelong preference for French food and design. She and the President believed that the White House should be a place to celebrate American culture and the arts—but, controversially, she had the Frenchman René Verdon hired as head chef there. The nation’s newfound obsession with Julia Child, “The French Chef”, was part of the same trend.

Ms. Morgan presented six recipes to us, beginning with two cocktails. The Clint, a version of The Negroni consisting of Campari liqueur, vodka, and soda water, is named after Clint Hill, the aide who rushed to protect Jackie when JFK was shot in Dallas. Meanwhile, The Femme Fatale, created for Jackie by a hotel during one of her trips overseas, reflects her love of fruit with its strawberry liqueur, cognac, and Champagne. Jackie was fond of Strawberries Romanoff, strawberries with Devonshire cream, fruit salads presented in a hollowed pineapple, and fruit served with cottage cheese.

From a platter of crudités of the type that Jackie enjoyed assembling for guests, two of the most attractive elements are marinated cubes of feta cheese, and cherry thyme butter, a compound butter made with fresh thyme leaves and dried tart cherries (rejoice, Michigan Cherry Committee!). Jackie Kennedy’s Green Risotto is a spinach risotto, relatively plain, as she preferred it. She never had cheese cooked with risottos, but would sprinkle Parmesan on top before serving. The baked potatoes that she liked to eat were large ones baked in the oven, split in half, and topped with sour cream and caviar.

The sixth recipe was a dessert: Boston Cream Pie, as made, and apparently invented, at the Omni Parker Hotel in that city. Not really a pie but a cake, it is made with layers of sponge cake and pastry cream and topped with chocolate fondant icing, then further decorated with white fondant piping. My mouth is watering just describing it!

—RKS
CHAA member Daniel Vernia, of Grand Blanc, MI, has headed kitchens in restaurants across Michigan and in Montreal, Chicago, Phoenix, and New Orleans. He describes himself now as “kind of semi-retired and doing some freelance work in banquets and catering.” Dan was raised in North Oakland County and studied visual and culinary arts at The Center for Creative Studies and at Wayne State Univ. in Detroit. Five years ago he wrote a personal memoir for Repast, “Family and My Search for Food Heritage” (Spring 2016).

Early in 2011, while doing research at the William L. Clements Library (Univ. of Michigan) and preparing for a trip to New York City, I discovered a booklet published by the Union League Club of New York detailing its work in November 1864 to send a Thanksgiving dinner to tens of thousands of the enlisted members of the Union Army and Navy then engaged in the Civil War.

The scale of this event would impress any cook, as it was possibly one of the largest off-site “catered” events in history. The recipients included the majority of the army soldiers in Virginia and West Virginia, as well as many sailors serving on naval vessels along the Atlantic coast. Whole towns gathered up what they could in provisions and monetary donations. The amount of poultry alone was estimated to have been roughly 375,000 pounds.

Included in this article are some of the many details that I found in the 84-page report[1] that was published by the Union League Club of New York in January 1865 after a presentation to its membership at a regular meeting on December 14, 1864. As related below, this booklet included correspondence between Club members and some of the highest-ranking officers of the Northern forces, as well as records of the amount and variety of foods contributed and shipped for this special meal.

What Was (and Is) the Union League Club?

The Union League Club of New York City was founded in early 1863 as a patriotic organization to counter antipartheid and pro-Southern sentiments in that city and in the Northern States. The Club viewed itself “as a civic forum for the frank discussion of public issues … to dignify politics as a study, to reawaken interest in civic affairs, and to enforce a sacred obligation of citizenship.” It included many prominent New Yorkers, and many of “the men who conceived, organized and co-founded the United States Sanitary Commission … were also the originators of the Union League Club.” The USSC, which had been established by Congress in June 1861, was a private, volunteer-run charitable agency to provide food, medical aid, and other forms of relief for sick and wounded soldiers. From the start, local women’s organizations played a prominent role in the USSC.

In addition to New York, another chapter of the Union League Club was founded in Philadelphia during the Civil War. Today, the Club operates in Chicago as well as the two original cities. The New York chapter’s clubhouse was first located at No. 26 E. 17th Street. Shortly after the war, in 1868, the headquarters was moved to a new building on the corner of Madison Avenue and 26th Street, and it is currently located on the west side of Park Avenue between 36th and 37th Streets.

Over the years the Union League’s membership roster has included a variety of local and national political and business leaders. It finally began to accept African American members in 1974, and women in 1986. Over the years, guest speakers presented on a range of civic-oriented topics, in keeping with the founders’ vision. An interesting part of the Club’s early history was its advocacy for establishing African American regiments to serve in the Union Army, as part of a commitment to change local sentiments of political leaders as well as of citizens:

We can hardly exaggerate the importance of the honor showered by the worth and patriotism of the city upon the Negro regiments raised by the Union League Club

continued on next page
THANKSGIVING IN 1864

... when nearly three companies of the 31st regiment U.S. Colored Troops had been recruited, then suddenly ordered away to join the Ninth Corps in the Army of the Potomac.

Later the following year, these same troops would be acknowledged again among the many recipients of a Thanksgiving dinner sent from home.

“The food would be far more valuable than its mere money’s worth”

As recounted in its report, the Union League Club began its campaign around Thanksgiving Day early in the Fall of 1864 when Club member George W. Blunt suggested in local newspapers:

the propriety of a movement to provide a Thanksgiving Dinner for the Soldiers and Sailors. … It was justly deemed that away from their homes in the service of the Country, the evidence that they were remembered on the day specially consecrated to home gatherings and domestic abundance, and made partakers in its festivities, would strengthen their patriotism. Moreover, it provided those who profited from their sacrifices, an opportunity of expressing their gratitude and watchfulness over them.

At the Club’s regular meeting on Nov. 3, Mr. Blunt moved for a resolution to form a committee to cooperate in this effort. The proposal was unanimously adopted, with Blunt becoming Chairman of the Executive Committee.

In a letter to George Blunt, Naval Commander and Union League member John Rodgers lobbied for this project to also include the sailors:

Sailors are cosmopolitan in their habits— they are acquainted in every port, and have a home nowhere. To most of them no family ties are known— they have outlived away from home the offices of kindred. If now to these hermits on the blockade, the Committee could send a Thanksgiving Dinner, the food would be far more valuable than its mere money’s worth. … What I propose is, that every vessel of the blockading fleet on our coast have a Thanksgiving Dinner sent. If it should arrive after the regular Thanksgiving Dinner it will not be the less acceptable to men to whom any dinner fresh from New York will be matter of thanksgiving.

The organizing group also included Theodore Roosevelt Sr. as Club Treasurer, and a “Committee on Cooking” consisting of James Kelly, Charles A. Stetson (proprietor and host of Astor House, the luxury Manhattan hotel), and Lorenzo Delmonico (the famous restaurateur).

The Club’s public appeal stated, “We desire that on the twenty-fourth day of November there shall be no soldier in the Army of the Potomac, the James, the Shenandoah, and no sailor in the North Atlantic Squadron who does not receive tangible evidence that those for whom he is periling his life, remember him.” It was thought that the meal should be prepared and provided by the public through solicitations, with poultry and pies, or puddings, all cooked and ready for use. It would be a grand sight to see that army of brave men, loyal to the flag, feeding on the good things of the land they have fought for. Will not all who feel that we have a country worth defending and preserving do something to show those who are fighting our battles that they are remembered and honored? … The undertaking it was felt must be one of its expressiveness and value to the thorough comprehensiveness of the plan. The fowl that Franklin suggested [i.e., turkey] should be substituted for the eagle, as the National bird, and certainly the most welcome and customary of all edibles on the National Thanksgiving Day, was made typical in this plan … though we knew that it would receive little attention till after the excitement attending the pending election.

This last phrase expresses one of the many challenges faced by the meal’s organizers. In the 1864 national election, the votes in the remaining loyal States would be cast on Tuesday, Nov. 8, with Thanksgiving to fall on Thursday the 24th. Once the fanfare surrounding the presidential election was out of the way, this allowed only two weeks to coordinate the logistics of a fundraising event to feed tens of thousands of men spread across hundreds of miles, including receiving donations of provisions and money to buy any items not provided by the public, cooking and repacking much of the poultry, and shipping to the various positions of both the ground forces and as many ships as possible along the Atlantic blockade in time for the holiday meal.

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Chef Filippini on How to Carve a Turkey

The Swiss-born Chef Alessandro Filippini was hired by Lorenzo Delmonico in 1848 as both chef de cuisine and manager of the restaurant’s Pine Street location, in Manhattan’s financial district. He left for a year in 1863, and continued with the Delmonicos until the late 1880s. He was quite possibly in the kitchen at Delmonico’s in late Nov. 1864, helping to cook donated and purchased poultry before shipping it to the Northern soldiers. The following passages are from Filippini’s *The Table: How to Buy Food, How to Cook It, and How to Serve It* (1885).

No game is more highly prized or more eagerly sought after in Europe than our American canvas-back ducks, grouse and wild turkeys. It has become part of our history that during the late war twenty thousand turkeys were shipped by one firm in New York City to supply a Thanksgiving dinner to an army; while at present so plentiful is the supply that but a few days would be required to secure double that number.

Turkey. — Cut away the leg the same as with a chicken. The leg of a turkey being larger than that of a chicken, it would be advisable to cut into slices the leg and second joint. After the leg is cut off, stick your fork into the breast-bone; hold the fork firmly with the left hand; then, with the sharp knife in your right hand, starting from the outside of the breast, proceed to cut, carefully, thin slices, until you reach the bone. Then turn, and proceed the same as before.

Serve each person with a piece of the dark and a slice of the white meat. Should the turkey be stuffed, place a little of the stuffing on each plate. A capon, large chicken, or English pheasant should be carved the same way.

Mrs. Hale’s Sauces for Roast Fowls

Magazine editor, activist, writer, and cookbook author Sarah Josepha Buell Hale is considered by many as the Mother of Thanksgiving for her tireless pursuit to make the holiday a national celebration. President Lincoln rewarded her efforts with his proclamation on October 3, 1863, which provided momentum behind the Thanksgiving meal for Union troops the following year. The following passage is from Mrs. Hale’s *New Cook Book: A Practical System for Private Families in Town and Country* (Philadelphia, 1857).

Sauces for roast Fowls. — Stew any moderate quantity of ham, veal, and mushrooms, with sweet herbs, a shalot, a little allspice, and a piece of butter, until all become brown; then let the whole simmer gently for a long time in either weak broth or water, until they form a strong gravy; strain it, and season it with any additional flavor that may be given by some of the made sauces. Serve hot in a sauce-tureen.

Or: — Put into a small stew-pan two slices of ham, a clove of garlic, & laurel-leaf, and sliced onions; add a little good gravy, a sprig of knotted marjoram, and a spoonful of tarragon vinegar; simmer slowly an hour, strain off, and put into the dish or a boat.

The Carolina Housewife’s Turkey Hash and Corn Cakes


To hash a Turkey—

Mix some flour with a piece of butter; stir it into some cream and a little veal gravy till it boils up; cut the turkey in pieces, not very small, and take off all the skin; put them into the sauce with grated lemon-peel, white pepper, and pounded mace, a little mushroom catsup or powder, and simmer it up. Oysters may be added.

In the 19th Century, corn became the universal secondary crop in the South. It was raised on virtually every farm in South Carolina, as farmers paired corn with the prevailing staple. On Low Country rice plantations, corn grew on the high ground. One of the key naval battles fought early in the Civil War was at Port Royal, SC, located between Charleston and Savannah, GA.

Port Royal Corn Cakes.—

One pint of fine corn meal, four table-spoonfuls of wheat flour, one quart of milk, three eggs; salt to the taste. Mix the meal and flour with the milk; beat the eggs very light, and add them. Bake on a griddle, and serve hot with fresh butter.
Getting Poultry to the Fields of Combat

The plans were formulated as follows: “Those without the means to cook the poultry or meats should provide them by November 18 and everything should be provided by November 20 to reach the troops by November 24.” The Club also considered including the troops in western and southern regions, but decided that distribution would be difficult there due to distance and the various locations: “It is hoped that the armies at the West will be in like manner cared for by those nearer to them than we. It is deemed impracticable to send to our more Southern posts.”

To receive and coordinate the donated food, a large bonded warehouse known as The Getty’s Building, located in Trinity Place, west of Broadway and the Wall Street Financial Center, was donated to the Collector of the Port, who assumed the responsibilities of receiving the shipments. As the Collector would later inform the Club, “The numbers of boxes and barrels received by your committee was exceedingly large. It amounted to not less than 3800.”

Many express and shipping operations of the day volunteered to provide transport, free of charge, for donated provisions from towns across the Northern states to the collection center in New York City, including the American, Adams, Harden, National, Kingsley, Hop, Long Island, and United States Express companies.

By the time shipments started to arrive on Friday, November 18, Club organizers were already in correspondence with top Union Military officers to discuss the details of the plan. Admiral David D. Porter, aboard the U.S. Flagship Malvern anchored at Hampton Roads, VA, replied on November 16 with a letter to Union League Club member George Bliss, Jr., concerning the quantities needed to feed his men:

Sir— Your telegram has been received. In reply I beg to inform you there are seventeen thousand men in this squadron. Six men to a turkey will be two thousand, eight hundred and thirty three turkeys. I don’t know how you propose on sending them, but I suppose on ice. I will see them distributed, and you can send them when it suits you.

There are a couple of things of interest in the Admiral’s response. First, in his mention of transport: the plan was to send the poultry to the naval vessels uncooked, as the ships had kitchens equipped to prepare daily meals for those on board and, as club member and Naval Commander John Rodgers informed George Blunt in a letter, “The means of doing this is already provided so far as transportation is concerned, since supply steamers run regularly.” Second, in his estimate of six men to a turkey: the average size of a raised or “tame turkey” sold for the table at the New York Public Markets and through wholesale purveyors was around 8-10 pounds, and confirmed by Union League Club records of the event.

The poultry received and purchased also included chickens, and perhaps even some wild game birds. In 1867, when New York butcher and historian Thomas F. De Voe published The Market Assistant[2], he listed over 70 types of game birds appearing during the year in the public markets in New York City, including the wild turkey:

This fine bird is occasionally found in our markets, in its season— generally in the months of November, December, and January. They are chiefly sent from Pennsylvania, and sometimes further west, arriving here in a frozen state. The flesh of a fine young wild turkey is darker, and considered more delicate, more succulent, and better, or more gamey tasted, than that of the tame turkey. They are in the best condition in the month of November. When found in our markets they have all their feathers on…. Their usual weight is from nine to twenty pounds, but I have read of their weighing above forty pounds. The “Commercial Advertiser,” September 9, 1801, notices — “A remarkable large wild turkey, weighing twenty-two pounds dressed, was shot, on the 1st inst., by G. L. Barret, within a short distance of Mr. Scriba’s seat, Newark, N. J.” We also find in Archdale’s North Carolina, that in the year 1707, was purchased “a wild turkey of forty pounds, for the value of two-pence, English value.”

For the ground forces, then camped in Virginia and West Virginia, the poultry was to be cooked before being sent to the Armies by rail. During the Fall of 1864, The Army of the Potomac, under the command of Maj. Gen. George Meade and his superior, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, was stationed in southern Virginia at City Point, just north of Petersburg at the confluence of the James and Appomattox Rivers. City Point was a vital transportation center for railroads such as the Norfolk and Petersburg, and a well-established inland port on the James River and Kanawha Canal at the onset of the Civil War. City Point’s transportation advantages and proximity to Richmond, the longest-enduring capital of the Confederacy, led Grant to establish a supply depot for his army here. The Army of the James was headquartered nearby on the Bermuda Hundred Peninsula. The Army of the Shenandoah was situated further north, in Harper’s Ferry, WV, and had been under the formal command of Maj. Gen. Phil Sheridan since Aug. 6.

For the Army of the Potomac, the cooked poultry and other foods were to be shipped to City Point by the day before Thanksgiving, and the Army would then distribute it to the Corps. Another part of the original plan was to have the Union League Club in Philadelphia take charge of cooking the poultry for The Army of the Shenandoah, as Harper’s Ferry is roughly 200 miles away. Perhaps because of time and transportation constraints, the cooking in Philadelphia was not possible, and the Army of the Shenandoah would have to cook the turkeys themselves. For the troops near Harpers Ferry, the estimate was, “6000 uncooked turkeys or their equivalent, say 60,000 pounds of poultry.”

Citizens and Businesses Rose to the Challenge

Union League member George Bliss, Jr., in a letter to Gen. Grant, referred to the nation’s overwhelming patriotic response to his Club’s campaign— and to the consequently heavy responsibilities that fell upon the Army in delivering the
Amid news of the successful holiday meal for the troops, the New York-based artist Winslow Homer created this engraving, “Thanks-giving Day in the Army.— After Dinner: The Wish-Bone”. It was published by Harper’s Weekly in its issue dated Dec. 3, 1864.

The public, now that the election is over, are coming forward nobly. But our time is short, and we are therefore obliged to trouble you more than we otherwise would. … From present appearances we shall have 80,000 to 100,000 pounds of cooked poultry, besides several thousand pies, some cheese, apples, cakes, &c., &c., for our soldiers.

The final total in donated poultry included around 225,000 pounds. In addition, the Union League Club purchased 148,586 pounds of poultry from Messrs. A. & E. Robbins, one of the largest wholesalers in the city, spending $51,502.93 of the $56,565.83 raised through donations. The Robbins company donated their profit margin of $3386.64.

Much of the Report is an itemized list of these thousands of donations of food and money, summarized from records kept by the Union League’s Treasurer. Here are a few examples:

Miss H. Burt, 1 box of gingersnaps, 1 barrel do-nuts
Neal & Co., 5 barrels potatoes
J. Simpson, 9 barrels and 1 box of turkeys and geese
Rev. Samuel W. Brown for the citizens of Groton, Conn., 30 meat pies, 12 pieces raw pork
Clerks in Post office, Station E, 368 Eighth Ave., 23 turkeys
A young lady, Beattystown, N.J., box sundries
Jas. S. Fowler and other citizens of Fowlerville, Livingston County, N.Y., 2 barrels poultry and pigs, 5 boxes cakes, pies, preserves, pickles, &c.

Citizens’ monetary donations ranged from 25 cents to 500 dollars, with at least half the donors contributing 5 dollars or more. (Five dollars in late 1864 was worth the equivalent of about $84.50 in 2021 dollars.)

Also listed in the Club’s records are over 60 establishments in New York City that “generously offered their services free of charge, and after consultation, suggested the best mode of cooking and packing it. … The master of an English Ship and his wife volunteered to cook a considerable amount of poultry, and when that was done sent for more. A German restaurant keeper and his Wife heard of the movement rather late, but themselves devoted two entire nights to cooking a large amount.” A few other examples of hotels and commercial bakers who volunteered to cook the poultry:

The Girard House
Metropolitan Hotel
Breevoort House
Astor House
Libby & Bacon
Maison Doree
St. Nicholas Hotel
Delmonico’s
Walduck & Son, Bakers and Confectioners
Capt. Thomas, ship Victoria.

Strict Orders: Only for the Enlisted Men

In letters to Generals Grant and Sheridan, the Union League Thanksgiving committee stated its intention in no uncertain terms: “These contributions are intended for the brave soldiers in the field. We do not want the sutlers[3] to get them, nor the officers unless there is more than enough for the Men.”

Club organizers assigned agents to accompany the shipments of food and to oversee distribution to the enlisted troops. Jerome Chapelle aboard the Kensington steamer wrote back to the Club on Nov. 28, along with receipts of distribution to over 60 vessels: “The poultry was received with great satisfaction by the Sailors, who more than once broke into cheers continued on page 18
A CIVIL WAR OFFICERS’ REUNION BANQUET IN 1869 DETROIT

by Randy K. Schwartz (Editor)

Henry B. Voigt of Wilmington, DE, kindly sent me an optical scan of an interesting Reconstruction Era menu from his large collection. The menu is from a banquet held at the Russell House hotel in Detroit in Dec. 1869 as part of the first annual reunion of the 24th Michigan Volunteer Infantry Regiment.

Looking at the menu is like looking through a magical window to glimpse dining customs in the U.S. from 150 years ago. For Mr. Voigt, feeling that kind of magic is a now-familiar sensation. The goal of his menu collecting is to allow people to touch nearly-vanished aspects of culture, and to gain insight into everyday life in the American past (see sidebar on p. 9, “Calling All Culinary Historians!”).

The 1869 reunion in Detroit is significant as one of the earliest such gatherings held anywhere in the country following the Civil War. A report on the event was the lead article the next day in The Detroit Free Press, the city’s top daily newspaper. That story, which took up most of the front page, noted that about 200 veterans and 50 guests were in attendance, and included detailed summaries of entire speeches. By the 1880s, such Civil War veterans’ gatherings would become common occurrences in the U.S. and a key factor in promoting civic, regional, and national pride.

In 1871, just two years after this gathering, Michigan became the first state to make Decoration Day a state holiday (May 30). Decoration Day, which evolved into the national Memorial Day, had been launched as a patriotic celebration by the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.), a fraternal organization of Union veterans founded in Illinois in 1866. By 1890, membership in the G.A.R. was about 410,000, with hundreds of local posts across the country. As one of the first political lobbies in the U.S., it promoted patriotic education and events, supported Republican political candidates, and advocated for voting rights for Black veterans.

The war and its aftermath had helped advance both agriculture and industry in Michigan and other states of the North (see the sidebar, “Michigan, a Prosperous State”). Examining the banquet menu will give us insight into how this growing prosperity and industrialization had begun to affect dining customs. The expanded output of grains and vegetables, orchard fruits, and meat and dairy products, together with the proliferation of firms capitalizing on new technologies of steel making, rail transport, canning and bottling, temperature-controlled ovens, and chemical leavening agents, gave restaurant and home cooks in the North access to a much more lavish spread of ingredients than before. This was an important facet of life during the years of Reconstruction and the subsequent Gilded Age, and it would help shape American food habits in the next century.

On Hallowed Ground

Before looking into the menu dishes, there’s a question that needs to be raised: What was the context of this veterans’ reunion? What was the significance of its date and location?

The reunion and banquet were scheduled on Monday, Dec. 13, 1869, the seventh anniversary of the battle at Fredericksburg, VA, which was the first combat in which this regiment had been engaged. The iron cross emblem on the first page of the menu was intended as a symbol of the Iron Brigade, of which the 24th Michigan Infantry was one of five regiments. The Iron Brigade, a component of the Army of the Potomac, was made up of volunteer (unpaid) soldiers from three Midwestern states (Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana); it played a heroic role in the pivotal Union victory at Gettysburg, PA, in July 1863, as well as in other important battles. In 1865, the 24th Michigan was honored by being selected as escort for the casket bearing assassinated Pres. Lincoln at his funeral in Washington.

The regiment had been organized in a flurry of patriotic speeches and enlistments on Aug. 15, 1862. The recruiting event
Calling All Culinary Historians!

The menu discussed in this article is one of 21 from Michigan during the Civil War Reconstruction Era that are part of Henry Voigt’s collection:

- **1868** Biddle House (Detroit) – ‘Board of Trade’
- **1868** Biddle House (Detroit) – ‘Boat Club Ball’
- **1868** Biddle House (Detroit) – ‘St. Andrew’s Society’
- **1868** Biddle House (Detroit) – ‘Masonic Ball’
- **1868** Bancroft House (East Saginaw) – ‘Christmas’
- **1868?** Railroad Dining Hall (Adrian) – promotional handbill
- **1869** Sweet’s Hotel (Grand Rapids) – ‘Grand Opening’
- **1869** Taylor House (Saginaw City) – Reopening Banquet?
- **1869** Reading House (Niles) – ‘Old Settlers’ Festival’
- **1869** Biddle House (Detroit) – ‘Canadiens-Francais des Etas Unis’
- **1869** Biddle House (Detroit) – ‘Burns Festival’
- **1869** Biddle House (Detroit) – ‘St. Patrick’s Society’
- **1869** Russell House (Detroit)
- **1869** Russell House (Detroit) – ‘24th Michigan Infantry Reunion’
- **1869** Russell House (Detroit) – ‘Odd Fellows 50th Anniversary’
- **1870** Biddle House (Detroit) – ‘Sigma Phi’
- **1870** Biddle House (Detroit) – ‘Qui Vive Social’
- **1872** Burdick House (Kalamazoo)
- **1875** Cook’s Hotel (Ann Arbor) – ‘Univ. of Michigan Class of 1877’
- **1876** Methodist Episcopal Church (Jackson) – handbill for a tea party
- **1877** Sweet’s Hotel (Grand Rapids) – ‘Christmas’.

For culinary historians— whether in CHAA or elsewhere— who would like to examine and write about any of these, Mr. Voigt generously offers to provide optical scans. He suggests that this might make a good long-term project for CHAA. Another idea is to use the menus as the basis for a CHAA participatory theme meal about Michigan in the Reconstruction Era.

Voigt began collecting historical American menus seriously in the late 1990s, and since 2010 he has been maintaining an excellent blog about historical meals and menus, “The American Menu” (www.theamericanmenu.com), based anecdotally on his collection. A retired DuPont chemical company executive, Voigt lives in Wilmington, DE, with his wife Julie.

His curated exhibit, “A Hundred Years of Dining Out: The American Story in Menus, 1841-1941”, was postponed by the Covid-19 pandemic but has been rescheduled to open in May 2023 in the main hall of the Grolier Club in New York City. In the meantime, there’s an online version of the exhibit (https://grolierclub.omeka.net/exhibits/show/dining-out) that includes beautiful images and notes for more than 100 menus. Grouped into 11 chronological periods, they provide views of everyday life and social developments across a century of U.S. history. A die-cut menu from 1920 has magnificent comic illustrations about Prohibition; it’s from a banquet in San Francisco that was hosted by the American Can Company nine days before the country was supposed to go dry. Another menu is from a “War Banquet”, a jingoistic church supper that was organized by the Ladies’ Aid Society of the Presbyterian Church of White Bear Lake, MN (1899), featuring dishes imagined to be from islands recently conquered and occupied by U.S. military forces: Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. A lacto-ovo vegetarian menu from the Kellogg Sanitarium in Battle Creek, MI (1895) includes such categories as “Grains”, “Breads”, and “Liquid Foods.”
was held at Cadillac Square, a downtown boulevard intersection with a series of large plazas where the Detroit Farmer’s Market, City Hall, Russell House, and other buildings were located. The 24th Michigan signed up about 1,000 men grouped into 10 divisions. Mark Flanigan, an Irish immigrant selected to command the regiment, was a butcher by trade and had become a Detroit city alderman and the Sheriff of Wayne County.

Young Men’s Hall, a grand downtown lecture hall that seated about 500 people, was the venue for the reunion meeting and had been decorated with streamers, flags, and banners bearing mottoes and names of battles. Business got underway there at about 2:30 with some welcoming remarks, a prayer, and music by a military band. The men listened to a report from the Committee on By Laws, elected association officers, and agreed to meet again on the same date one year later. (Brig. Gen. Flanigan, the regiment’s former commander who had lost a leg at Gettysburg, was elected as the group’s President and would play an active role in these reunions for years to come.) There followed two lengthy speeches by officers summarizing the history and valor of the regiment, the recitation of a military poem, and a prayer of benediction, before the reunion meeting adjourned for the banquet dinner held at the Russell House one quarter-mile away.

Russell House, which had been opened in 1857, was the city’s premier hotel and the center of Detroit’s social scene throughout the 1860-1900 era. During the Civil War, city residents gathered in front of the Russell to listen to the latest reports from the battlefields. At this same Cadillac Square, the Michigan Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Monument—still today the state’s leading Civil War memorial—was unveiled in 1872 following seven years of fundraising, artistic commission, and construction.

Above, the main page of the 1869 banquet menu.
[Image: Henry Voigt Collection of American Menus.]
Sumptuous Fare

Knowing that the banquet was held at a Midwestern hotel restaurant less than five years after the Civil War, the refined food and the elegant presentations suggested by this menu are notable. Other menus from the same restaurant and era convince me that the elegant 1869 meal was not an aberration. Whoever was the Russell House chef—I’ve been unable to find his name—it’s clear that he was being paid to reach toward the same standards as fine restaurants in New York, London, and Paris.

French gastronomy enjoyed a preeminent reputation in the western world, and the Russell House offered many dishes drawn from that cuisine—while omitting certain others (such as green salads) according to local preferences. A few entrees that perhaps need some translation for modern readers:

- Filet of Beef, Larded, Sauce Périgueux—beef tenderloin studded with lardons (morsels of pork fat) by use of a larding-needle, then baked and basted in an oven. Sauce Périgueux, named after a town in the Dordogne region of southwestern France, is a thick brown sauce classically enriched with truffles and wine.
- Suprême de Volaille, à la Zingara—a boneless, skin-on breast of chicken or other poultry, garnished with chopped lean ham, beef tongue, mushrooms, truffles, tomato sauce, and tarragon.
- Fricandeau Piqué, à la St. Cloud—rump of veal, sliced along the grain of the meat to a thickness of 1-½ inches, then piqué (studded) with lardons of fine bacon fat, braised and glazed in meat stock, and elaborately garnished.
- Bouchées de Dames, à la Reine—vols-au-vent (hollow cases of puff pastry) filled with diced tender meat (such as veal sweetbreads or chicken), mushrooms, truffles, and rich, creamy sauce suprême.

Beef and pork were by far the most commonly eaten meats during this period in the U.S. The inclusion of poultry dishes (chicken, goose, and turkey) in many places on this menu is striking, because poultry was one of the most expensive meat commodities; it would remain so until the industry adopted intensive breeding methods in the next century.

Also notable are the offerings of Cold Ornamented Dishes such as aspics (“à la Gelée”). As Henry Voigt explained to me, “In the days before refrigeration, the aspics and cold ornamented dishes were regarded as the true test of the chef’s skill. These dishes signaled the refinement of the cuisine.” Here, I translate a couple of them (while continuing to correct their spellings):

- Jambon Décorée, aux Croutons—salted and smoked ham that has been poached and then cooled in aspic jelly and surrounded with decorative garnishes. To make the garnishes more visible, the ham is placed atop croutons, slices of bread that have been grilled or butter-fried.
- Mayonnaise de Volaille, à la Delmonico—slices of skinless, cooled chicken, arranged on a bed of lightly dressed, shredded lettuce, then covered smoothly with fine mayonnaise and surrounded with items such as capers, olives, and quartered hard-boiled egg.

This last dish, made in a variation apparently borrowed from the famous Delmonico’s restaurant in Manhattan, is about as close to a fresh vegetable salad as can be found on this menu. At this time, most Americans preferred to eat their vegetables, even fresh ones, thoroughly cooked and then topped with butter or a sauce. This would begin to change around the turn of the century thanks to the influence of new immigrants, especially Italians.

Seven sculptures fashioned out of sugar further indicate the high culinary art achieved by the Russell House kitchen. A sugar artist cooks the sugar until it liquefies and reaches the “hard crack stage” (ca. 300°F.), then works quickly with various tools to pull, press, blow, or spin the syrup into the desired shapes, and finally fuses together these solidified components by the pinpoint application of more heat. We can imagine the banquet tables graced with these centerpiece; the exquisitely crafted eagle, military emblems, pyramids and other figures would have taken our breath away! One of the sugar sculptures represented Fort Donelson in Tennessee, the site of the first major Union victory (Feb. 1862). That battle propelled Ulysses S. Grant, until then a little-known brigadier general, to greater prominence; Lincoln promoted him to major general of all volunteer forces, and eventually to commander of all Union forces, including the Army of the Potomac.

Among the desserts listed, the menu gives pride of place to “Ornamented Cakes”, while relegating other cakes to the less exalted category of “Cakes, Jellies, Creams, Etc.” Why the distinction? Baked goods of larger volume had become possible thanks to the commercial introduction of gas ovens in the 1830s and 1840s (whose temperatures were easier to control than with wood- or coal-fired ovens) and of new chemical leavening agents like cream of tartar and double-acting baking powder in the 1850s and 1860s (whose action was stronger and more reliable than with earlier leavens). Atop and around such lofty cakes, a more elaborate decoration was feasible. Instead of seeds or jelly or powdered sugar or a thick, fluffy frosting, a cake intended for ornamentation would be coated with a thinner, glossier “icing” (sometimes food-colored) that could be formed into floral patterns or other images. The new leavens worked well even when citric acid or food morsels were introduced into the dough, as seen on this menu in Citron Cake, where thin slices of citron dredged in flour were added to the batter. French Cake is a pound cake rich with eggs and milk or sour cream, while Lady Cake (also called White Lady Cake or Silver Cake) is similar to it but adds almond paste and rosewater, and is left snowy-white by using only the egg whites, excluding the yolks.

Cabinet pudding and Plum pudding are both molded, steamed, sweet puddings of English heritage. Cabinet pudding, also called Chancellor’s pudding, is light in color, with ingredients such as sponge cake, egg whites, and blanched almonds used in the batter. Before this batter is poured into the mold, the inner surface is decorated with cherries or other morsels; these adhere to the surface of the finished pudding and stand out in colorful, textured relief. By contrast, Plum pudding (also called Christmas pudding) is very dark with ingredients such as molasses, stout, and raisins.

continued on next page
Planning a Banquet like a Military Campaign

About 150 regiment veterans and 50 guests attended the banquet at Russell House. It’s likely that most of the veterans were former officers from the regiment. “This would have been a subscription banquet,” Mr. Voigt advised me, “meaning that everyone paid their share of the cost in advance, perhaps $5 a person.” For comparison, an entire one-year subscription to The Detroit Free Press, home delivered, cost $10 at the time.

According to the news report, the meal was up to the usual high standards of the hotel, with its “well-known excellence of style and abundance of good things. … The ornaments of the table were gotten up expressly for the occasion, and were highly emblematic and creditable. An hour and a half was spent in doing justice to the viands ….”

Only 90 minutes?! Why was such a grand meal— featuring a dozen or so food courses, and attended by 200 diners— shoe-horned into such a modest timeframe? A key reason was to allow enough time for what followed it: a series of 19 formal toasts in the dining hall, no doubt with much smoking of cigars and drinking of coffee throughout. The toasted honorees began with President Grant, who was nearing the end of his first year in the White House; the State of Michigan; and the U.S. Army and Navy. They proceeded to others such as the Civil Service, the Rank and File, the Press, and the Ladies. This process most likely took 2-3 hours, since each toast was met with a prepared speech, the singing of an appropriate song, or the reading of letters from men who could not attend the banquet. After final

Michigan, a Prosperous State

Michigan lands and waters were luckily untouched by the combat and devastation of the Civil War, and almost no battles took place in surrounding states, either. In fact, during this era Michigan’s economy expanded in diversity and roughly doubled in size. Specifically, between the census years of 1860 and 1870, the number of farms increased by 58.3%, the value of farmland by 147.6%, the number of factories by 174.2%, and the value of manufactured goods by 262.1%. The population of Detroit surged by 74.4%, from 45,619 to 79,577.

Agriculture was still the leading economic activity in Michigan, and during the war the state vastly increased production in every key category: wheat, corn, hogs, beef cattle, sheep, dairy products, and orchard fruits.

- Even before the war, Michigan’s geography and climate had made it a national leader in growing wheat, the most important single crop.
- Midwestern states such as Michigan had by far the heaviest concentration of hog production. Barreled salt pork was the easiest way to feed the Union troops, and corn was important as feed for hogs.
- Michigan’s bean production surged thanks to the spurt that the war gave to the American canning industry.

In the state’s agricultural census of 1860, Washtenaw County— which includes Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor, just west of Detroit— was noted as the state’s leading producer of apples and other orchard products. In the 1860s, a major Fruit Belt was established in western Michigan, where the lake coast climate is ideal for peaches, plums, and other stone fruits.

Vast forests in northern Michigan were being felled for wood. After the war, the state emerged as the country’s leading lumber producer, and would remain so until the 1890s. The state’s Upper Peninsula, which had already been shipping iron ore since 1846, was the site of a huge copper find in 1864 (copper was used mostly to line the hulls of marine vessels as protection from barnacles). Lumber, iron, and copper tycoons were among the most wealthy and politically influential men in the state.

Most of the Michigan iron was used in the transportation industry for ships, locomotives, and especially rail tracks, which were forged from iron and, starting in the 1860s, from steel. When the war broke out, the Federal government had barred shipping up and down the Upper Mississippi River as part of blockading the Confederacy. Michigan used this as an opportunity to grow its commercial traffic with the East via the Great Lakes and the Erie Canal, and especially to expand its railroad network.

Other Michigan iron was used in the burgeoning stove industry, which was beginning to make open-hearth cooking obsolete. Between 1861 and 1871, three of the country’s leading stove manufacturers were established in Michigan: the Detroit Stove Works (famous for its Jewel stoves), the Michigan Stove Co. (Garland stoves), and the Round Oak Stove Co. Two others would be established later: the Peninsular Stove Co. (1881) and Glazier Stove Works (1891). By 1908, there were 12 stove-making firms in Detroit alone.

Acute labor shortages from the war created markets for new labor-saving machines and more efficient methods of manufacture and commerce. In 1864, the first commercial steel manufactured in the U.S. came from the Eureka Iron Works in Wyandotte, MI, just south of Detroit, made using the new Bessemer process. Detroiters invented the first successful railroad refrigerator car (1868) and the first practical automatic lubricating cup for steam locomotives (1872). Certain perishable foods were already being shipped in cooled railcars before the war; for example, by 1852 fresh, in-the-shell oysters from the Eastern seaboard were available in major cities of the Midwest, and by 1870 even in Leland, MI, a remote northern fishing village on the shore of Lake Michigan. The first experiment in transporting fresh meat in a cooled railcar was made in the early 1860s by the Michigan Central Railroad, which had been operating since 1852. That experiment, which used boxcars filled with ice bins at both ends, failed, but the 1868 Davis Patten refrigerator car was successful because the meat was placed in direct contact with the ice.
cheers and the singing of “Auld Lang Syne”, the company adjourned “at a late hour”.

Only with careful planning was it possible to carry out the large feast itself in just 90 minutes. A banquet menu such as this one combined certain features of both a table d’hôte menu and a tasting menu. For one fixed price, the diner selected one item of his choice from each category, i.e., one type of soup, one fish dish, one joint of meat, etc. The custom, then, was that diners were offered a very small serving of each dish to enjoy. The small portions meant that within about a 10-minute increment of time, a trained, efficient, well-deployed serving staff could distribute each meal course for the entire mass of men, and remove the spent tableware.

The kitchen operation at Russell House must have been conducted with a similarly efficient dispatch. In the “brigade” system (as it was called) that had been adapted from France, a large kitchen was under the overall command of a chef de cuisine. He supervised a number of separate units each with its own commander and a clearly defined structure and duties: one for grilling and roasting meats, one for preparing sauces, one for sweets, the garde-manger area for the larder and prep cooks, another area where waiters picked up plates and platters of prepared food, etc. Thus, just as an army had specialized units (infantry, cavalry, artillery, medical, etc.) with their hierarchies of officers and troops, these restaurant kitchens also had specialized units and were run with military-style hierarchy and discipline.

Incidently, it’s worth noting that based on this 1869 menu, and another one from Russell House from 1858, we can tell that in U.S. restaurants the term “entrée” was already shifting in meaning. In French, entrée is essentially a synonym for hors d’œuvre, “appetizer”, i.e., the starting dish for a multi-course meal in a home or restaurant; it can be anything from a bowl of soup to a canapé or other savory morsel. In America, however, “entrée” had evolved to the point where it could refer to the featured dish, the central and most refined dish of a person’s meal. (But again, in the context of a large banquet such as this one, the serving size of even a featured dish would have been small.) The new meaning was solidified by the 1890s, but until then it developed unevenly across time, space, and social contexts.

Michigan Points of Pride— and Shame

A few characteristic Michigan foods were included in this banquet, such as whitefish, pork, beef, mutton, celery, potato, apple, and an ample selection of game meats. But in general, the menu relied on widely available American ingredients, and this was the customary practice for restaurants in that era. “As usual for the times,” Mr. Voigt commented, “the regional influences on this menu are muted. The menu could be from anywhere in the country, which was the point in that there was a much different mentality about such matters than today. They weren’t locavores.”

In the Great Lakes region, whitefish has been the central focus of fishing since before the arrival of Europeans. Even today it accounts for more than 90% of the value of commercial fishing there. A Russell House menu from 1871 was more specific than this one, listing “Detroit River Whitefish” instead of simply “Baked Whitefish”. When baked, the fresh filets are delicious, perhaps topped first with a little butter, seasoning, and a fresh herb or two. In the 1800s, the shores of the Great Lakes were dotted with dozens of small commercial fishing villages consisting of boat docks, shanties, and smokehouses. Whitefish, along with sturgeon and others, were also plentiful in the Detroit River, a strait that flows past downtown Detroit on its way from Lake St. Clair to Lake Erie. Explosions of dynamite (invented in the early 1860s) were often used in conjunction with taking the fish. The calamitous effects of overfishing began to show in the river in the Autumn of 1868.

“Detroit Ham, Boiled” refers to a joint of salt-cured pork, such as a ham hock or shank, cooked in a way that leaves it moist and flavorful. To prepare these, a cook would leave the joints soaking in warm water for several hours to remove salt, then place them in stovetops of fresh water known as “ham boilers”, where they would be simmered for an hour, then boiled hard for several more. After removing the pigskin, the cook might sprinkle bread crumbs over the joints, and finally brown them in a moderate oven for one or more hours, which also removes excess fat and tenderizes the meat.

In the 1850s, celery became a leading export from western Michigan. Dutch- and British-immigrant “muck farmers” specialized in growing a local variety—much different from the industrial variety common today—by very labor-intensive methods that involved preseason greenhouses, small. The resulting fine “table celery”, praised as a sweet, tender culinary herb and even as a health restorative, was shipped by rail across the country. At posh dinner parties the stalks, served in special glass vases, were eaten raw with a little salt. Michigan celery also appeared on restaurant menus, sometimes listed as “Kalamazoo Celery”. The 1869 Russell House banquet menu included celery sauce and relish. The mild, white sauce, used mainly to accompany poultry (here, boiled chicken), was made by gently boiling the minced celery stalks along with butter, flour, nutmeg, mace, and perhaps some milk or cream. Celery relish, which is strongly flavored and goes well with a range of meat dishes, is a raw mixture of minced celery, mustard, vinegar, and powdered sugar.

The banquet menu is also notable for its selection of Autumn game, including haunch (loin) of venison and five wild birds: turkey, quail, partridge, prairie hen (a type of grouse), and gray duck (pintail). These and other types of game, even 350-lb. black bears (a favorite when roasted), were supplied to Russell House and other city restaurants and estates via horse-drawn wagon deliveries by H. T. Phillips and Co., located on Michigan Ave. in downtown Detroit and one of the biggest wild-game dealers in the country. Overhunting took its toll, especially on the turkey and the passenger pigeon, also known as the wild pigeon. The pigeon meat was often baked in pies or— as seen in a Russell House menu from May 3, 1858— stewed. A large migratory flock of passenger pigeons could occupy an area of 100 square miles or more while communally nesting in the Spring; in just a few months, a team of hunters could take literally a million birds from such a colony. Michigan was the site of the last known mass nesting of the pigeons, near Petoskey in 1878.

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TRADITIONAL

ALSATIAN CUISINE

text and photos by Sharon Hudgins

CHAA member Sharon Hudgins of McKinney, TX, is an award-winning author, journalist, and culinary historian whose articles about Alsatian foods have been published in Gastronomica, German Life, The World & I, European Traveler, and The Stars and Stripes. After completing a master's degree in Political Science at the Univ. of Michigan in Ann Arbor, she was married in Basel, Switzerland, followed by her wedding dinner (for only the bride and groom) at a small, traditional Alsatian restaurant in Strasbourg, France. She lived for nearly two decades in Europe and has spent many months eating her way around Alsace. She has also worked as a lecturer on overseas tours organized by National Geographic, Smithsonian, and Viking Ocean Cruises. Her books include Spanien: Küche, Land und Menschen [Spain: The Cuisine, the Land, the People] (1991); T-Bone Whacks and Caviar Snacks: Cooking with Two Texans in Siberia and the Russian Far East (2018); and (as editor and contributing writer) Food on the Move: Dining on the Legendary Railway Journeys of the World (2019). Sharon is a longtime contributor and subscriber to Repast; her most recent previous article was “Discovering English Farmhouse Fare” (Fall 2020).

“Bienvenue! Wilkommen! Willkommen!” trilled the two rosy-cheeked, matronly sisters— in French, German, and Alsatian— as they greeted each customer who came through the door of their little restaurant, the Bon Vivant, in Strasbourg, France. Tucked away on a tiny side street near the city’s landmark cathedral, theirs was the kind of traditional, old-fashioned eatery typical of Strasbourg back when I first started visiting the region of Alsace more decades ago than I care to admit.

Although Strasbourg was well known for its many fine, upscale restaurants, the Bon Vivant was one of those small, family-run places, chock full of dark antique furniture and ceramic tchotchkes, that weren’t mentioned in the guidebooks to good food. It was always a place you could count on for a hearty welcome and good home-style Alsatian comfort food— all served in well-used rustic Alsatian pottery handmade in the nearby village of Soufflenheim. The regional white wine was poured from little blue-and-gray stoneware pitchers turned on potters’ wheels in another Alsatian pottery village, Betschdorf. And the classic Alsatian wine glasses, with their long, slender green stems, were the only slim shape in that tiny restaurant filled with well-fed locals crowded around the little tables.

Meals often started with six snails in their shells, drenched with garlic-butter and served sizzling hot, with plenty of sliced baguette for sopping up the sinfully delicious drippings. In a region known for its plump poultry, the main dish was often Poulet au Riesling (chicken cooked in a creamy mushroom-and-wine sauce) or Poulet en Casserole Grand-Mère (a casserole of whole chicken cooked with peas, carrots, and white wine)— old-fashioned dishes like grandmother used to make. Dessert was usually a simple “tarte of the day” made with local apples, pears, or plums, followed by a little glass of chilled Alsatian eau de vie, the perfect digestif after that calorie-laden meal. Back then, that three-course meal cost less than $5 a person, plus a little extra for the wine and eau de vie.

Although very few of those old-style restaurants have survived into this fast-paced, electronics-obsessed, Instagram age, traditional tastes haven’t been forgotten. Modern Alsatian restaurant chefs have sought to reduce the butter, cream, and lard so prevalent in past preparations, and to lighten the load of pork products and heavy casseroles that once characterized the cuisine. Some have even fallen for the fancy foams and deconstructed dishes of the latest food fads. But most of the region’s modern chefs remain true to their roots, using fresh, local ingredients in creative ways that still pay homage to the established traditions of Alsatian cooking. And classic Alsatian dishes still remain popular in home kitchens, as evidenced by the many regional cookbooks that continue to publish recipes for the same dishes served at home a century ago.

Culinary Roots

Located in northeastern France, the Rhine River forming its eastern boundary with Germany, Alsace is a region of shifting borders where French, German, and Alsatian (a Rhenish dialect) are spoken, and both French and German influences can be seen in the cuisine. Alsace has long been known for the high quality of its cooking, from home kitchens to cozy bistro and brasseries to some of the top-rated restaurants of France. For decades this region boasted more Michelin-starred restaurants than anywhere else in France outside of Paris.

Based on locally grown crops, farm-raised animals, and wild game from the forests and fields, traditional Alsatian cuisine has always reflected the simplicity of rural life, influenced by next-door Germany (to which Alsace has belonged at different times in history), but with a decidedly French twist.

Alsace is an important agricultural region. Cabbages and vegetables grown on the fertile Rhine Plain form the basis of many dishes. Pork is the king of meats, made into hams, bacon, sausages, pâtés, and terrines, while poultry (notably chicken, duck, and goose) is likewise central in local culinary tradition. Freshwater fish— especially trout, salmon, pike, carp, and crayfish— is also popular, as is wild game such as venison, pheasant, and boar from the forests of the Vosges Mountains on the western flank of Alsace.

Alsace is also an important wine-producing region that makes some of the finest dry Rieslings in the world. Other wines are fermented from Gewürztraminer, Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir, Sylvaner, and Pinot Blanc grapes grown on the foothills of the Vosges Mountains. A large variety of fruits and berries are
Left, snails with garlic butter and local white wine are a popular appetizer in Alsace. Right, Choucroute Garnie (sauerkraut with pork and potatoes) is a traditional Alsatian dish made at home and served in many restaurants, too.

distilled into clear, aromatic eaux-de-vie (literally “waters-of-life”, a type of brandy with about 40% alcohol), as are evergreen needles that yield a piney-flavored liquor. Alsace is the main beer-producing part of France, too, brewing half of all the beer in that country.

Traditional Alsatian Dishes

► Pâté en croute: Pâté usually made from pork, seasoned with spices such as green peppercorns and sometimes with fatted goose or duck liver in the center, baked inside a mantle of bread dough and often served with spicy-hot mustard, small red radishes, and little cornichon pickles as garnishes.

► Choucroute garnie: Mild sauerkraut cooked in white wine, beer, or cider and seasoned with juniper berries and black peppercorns. Considered “the national dish of Alsace”, the big mound of sauerkraut is served on a large platter and topped with a variety of meats—especially ham, bacon, sausages, and other smoked pork products—along with cooked whole carrots and boiled potatoes. Other versions, including those associated with Alsatian Jewish cuisine, are instead topped with goose, game, or even fish. Traditionally eaten as the Sunday midday meal, choucroute garnie is now available on many restaurant menus every day of the week.

► Bäckeoffe [see recipe on next page]: A stick-to-your ribs casserole made with layers of sliced potatoes and leeks with two or three kinds of meats (beef, pork, lamb), cooked together in white wine inside a deep, oval-shaped, glazed-earthenware casserole hermetically sealed with a strip of bread dough. It was traditionally made on laundry days or at harvest time, when the women were busy with chores outside the kitchen. They would assemble the ingredients in the casserole early in the morning, then take the dish to the local bakery to be slow-cooked in the wood-fired oven after that day’s bread had finished baking, and while the women were busy doing their chores.

► Tarte flambée: The Alsatian answer to pizza, made from a very thin crust of bread dough topped with a layer of crème fraîche (slightly soured cream) or fromage blanc (fresh white cheese), thinly sliced onions, and lardons (small pieces of smoked bacon). Known in Alsatian dialect as Flammekueche, the best of these are baked in wood-fired ovens. Formerly eaten mainly as a Friday- or Saturday-night treat, tarts flambées are now also a popular festival food.

► A variety of seasonal sweet tarts made from rhubarb and strawberries in Spring to apples, pears, plums, blueberries, blackberries, cherries, gooseberries, and apricots in Summer and Fall. Savory tarts are filled with meats (pork, bacon, poultry), fish, vegetables, or eggs and eaten year round, often as the first course of a meal or as a light dinner dish.

► A variety of cakes and cookies baked in many shapes and sizes, some of which are traditionally eaten for holidays such as

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ALSATIAN BÄCKEOFFE

The name of this classic Alsatian stick-to-your-ribs casserole means “baker’s oven”. The dish always contains pork, and often two other kinds of meat, such as beef and mutton or lamb; these are marinated and then cooked in local white wine. I like to serve Bäckeoffe for dinner parties because it’s easy to make and the guests always enjoy the dramatic presentation when I break open the bread-dough seal on the casserole to release the heady aromas of meat and marinade.

Makes 6 to 8 large servings. This recipe requires advance preparation. Despite the long ingredients list and lengthy instructions, it’s very easy to make (especially if you use a food processor to chop the vegetables and slice the potatoes).

Serving suggestion: Offer this as the main dish on a plate by itself, with no other side dishes, followed by a fresh green salad made of butterhead lettuce (Bibb or Boston-type) dressed with a simple garlic-and-Dijon-mustard vinaigrette, which helps in digesting the casserole.

Meats and marinade:
- 1½ lbs boneless chuck roast, cut into 1½-inch cubes*
- 1½ lbs boneless pork shoulder, cut into 1½-inch cubes*
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 leek (white and light green parts only), finely chopped
- 1-2 cups finely diced carrots (optional)
- 3 large garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 Tbsp juniper berries
- 1 Tbsp salt
- 2 tsp dried thyme
- 1 tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 1 bottle (3 cups) Alsatian dry white wine (Riesling, Sylvaner, or Gewürztraminer)

*Or a total of 1 pound each of boneless beef, pork, and lamb

Casserole:
- Butter (unsalted) or rendered goose fat
- 3 lbs firm boiling potatoes
- 3 large onions, finely chopped
- 3 leeks (white and light green parts only), finely chopped
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1 whole nutmeg, grated
- 1½ cups Alsatian dry white wine

Dough seal for casserole:
- 1 cup flour
- 1 Tbsp vegetable oil
- 4-8 Tbsp water

Garnish: Snipped fresh chives or chopped parsley

➢ Advance preparation: Mix the meats and marinade ingredients together in a large glass bowl. Cover and refrigerate for 12 to 36 hours. Stir the marinade occasionally.

➢ To make the casserole: Preheat the oven to 400° F. Butter (or grease with goose fat) a 6-quart covered casserole. Glazed earthenware is traditional, but you can also use an enameled cast-iron casserole. (If using earthenware, start the casserole in a cold oven, set the heat at 400° F., and begin timing the baking after the oven has reached that temperature.)

- Peel the potatoes and slice them crosswise into large rounds, no thicker than ¼ inch. (Use the 4mm slicing blade of a food processor.) Salt the potato slices lightly and stack them in a large bowl. Mix the onions and leeks together in another bowl.
- Set aside enough potato slices to make a single layer on top of the casserole ingredients. Arrange half the remaining potatoes in an even layer in the bottom of the casserole. As you add each layer of new ingredients, sprinkle it lightly with salt, black pepper, and nutmeg. Spread half the onions and leeks in an even layer on top of the potatoes. Place all the meats in a layer on top of the vegetables.
- Pour in half the meat marinade, including all of its vegetables. Add another layer of the remaining sliced potatoes (except those set aside for the top), followed by the remaining onions and leeks. Pour in the remaining marinade, then arrange a single layer of sliced potatoes on top.
- Pour 1½ cups of Alsatian white wine into the casserole, and dot the top layer of potatoes with butter or goose fat.
- Combine the flour, vegetable oil, and 4 tablespoons of water, kneading the mixture to form a smooth dough. Add more water, if needed, 1 tablespoon at a time (depending on the absorbency of the flour). Roll the dough by hand into a “rope” long enough to fit completely around the rim of the casserole.
- Moisten the rim with water, then press the dough onto it. Carefully place the lid on the casserole, pressing it into the dough to make a tight seal. Some of the dough will ooze out between the lid and the rim of the casserole; use your fingers to press it against the intersection of the casserole and the lid, to seal the casserole well all the way around.
- Bake at 400° F. on the bottom rack of the oven for 2½ hours. Do NOT open the lid during that time.
- Carry the casserole, with the lid still sealed, to the table or sideboard for serving. Use a wooden mallet to gently break off the bread-dough seal. Serve the Bäckeoffe very hot, directly from the casserole, lifting the solid ingredients out with a slotted spoon. Garnish each serving with a liberal sprinkling of snipped chives or chopped parsley.

➢ NOTE: The winey, full-flavored meat broth remaining in the casserole, with its bits of onion and leek, makes an excellent soup stock. Use it within a day after making the Bäckeoffe, or freeze it until needed.
Museums with collections of traditional Alsatian tableware and kitchenware

- Musée de la Poterie de Betschdorf, including a 5-minute video about the stoneware of Betschdorf and earthenware of Soufflenheim, [https://www.visit.alsace/en/219006464-pottery-museum](https://www.visit.alsace/en/219006464-pottery-museum)

At left, traditional Kugelhopfs at a bakery in Strasbourg. Below, antique Kugelhopf molds on display at the Musée Alsacien in Strasbourg.

These oval casseroles for making Baeckeoffe are being offered for sale at a pottery in the village of Soufflenheim, near Strasbourg, Alsace. The shapes of such pots and cake molds haven't changed in centuries, but a comparison with the museum photo above shows that nowadays the items are often decorated with pastel colors and floral patterns, in contrast to the darker, stronger colors of the past.
ALSATIAN CUISINE continued from page 15
Easter, Christmas, and New Year, as well as for betrothals, weddings, and baptisms.

► **Kugelhopf**: A richly flavored, light-textured, yeast-raised cake studded with raisins and almonds, baked in a special fluted mold shaped like a Turk’s turban. Traditionally eaten for Sunday breakfast, accompanied by big cups of café au lait (coffee with milk), kugelhopf is also served in the afternoon with coffee or tea and sometimes after dinner as a dessert dressed up with sweet sauces and whipped cream. Kugelhopf salé (aka kugelhopf au lard or Spackkougelhopf) is a savory version made with less sugar and containing diced smoked bacon and chopped walnuts instead of raisins and almonds. Kugelhopf salé is usually served as an appetizer accompanied by wine, cocktails, or other aperitifs.

► **Pains d’espices**: Honey-spice cakes and cookies known as Lebkuchen in German, Lebküche in Alsatian dialect, and gingerbreads in English, made from a flour-and-honey spiced dough that is fermented (like sourdough bread) before baking. Traditional for Advent, Christmas, and New Year, and a popular treat at Alsatian Christmas markets.

► **A variety of breads and buns** in many shapes and sizes, some made with rye flour or oat flour, and some baked with poppy seeds or sesame seeds on top.

► **Munster cheese**, from the area around the Alsatian town of Munster (not to be confused with the German city of Münster). Made from unpasteurized cow’s milk, this round cheese with a red-orange rind is aged from one to three months and has a made from unpasteurized cow’s milk, this round cheese with a red-orange rind is aged from one to three months and has a

THANKSGIVING IN 1864 continued from page 4
for the donors.” And from John Noyes, who was with the shipment sent to Harpers Ferry:

He [Gen. Sheridan] issued strict orders that your gifts should be distributed only among the enlisted men, and by Wednesday night, through the active exertions of Col. Kellogg, Chief Commissary on his staff, and his subordinates, the distribution was fully and fairly made. To supply incoming scouting parties, and to meet any complaint of short allowances in any quarter, I requested Col. Kellogg to retain a few hundred pounds, so that all might fairly share your bounty. Thanks to the very cold weather of Tuesday and Wednesday we found the turkeys in first rate condition. I enclose herewith Col. Kellogg’s receipt and statement of distribution.

That record provided details of almost 50,000 total pounds of poultry distributed to nine different groups of the Army of the Shenandoah, including the hospitals. Most reportedly boiled or stewed their poultry, as they received it uncooked.

However the operation was largely considered a success. Anticipating the holiday and the arrival of the meal, The New York Times featured a front-page article celebrating the effort and occasion. Among the many thank-you messages was General Sheridan’s: “Permit me on behalf of the soldiers to thank the good people of New York, and to assure them that for occasion. Among the many thank-you messages was General Sheridan’s: “Permit me on behalf of the soldiers to thank the good people of New York, and to assure them that for

**Sources**


**Endnotes**


2. Thomas F. De Voe, *The Market Assistant: Containing a Brief Description of Every Article of Human Food Sold in the Public Markets of the Cities of New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Brooklyn* (New York, 1867); also available in digital form via Michigan State Univ., https://d.lib.msu.edu/fa/50#page/1/mode/2up.

3. Sutlers were civilian merchants who followed the armies, North and South, selling food, liquor, and other items to soldiers. For more information, see Philip M. Zaret, “Sappers and Miners of the Army: Sutlers in the Civil War”, *Repast*, 28:3 (Summer 2012), pp. 11-14.
Local readers might want to check out White Pine Kitchen (https://www.thewhitepinekitchen.com), a “virtual restaurant” working out of a commercial kitchen in Ypsilanti. World travelers Bryan Santos and Forrest Maddox, who launched the venture in 2020, select a regional theme each week and home-deliver not only the pre-cooked meal and any finishing instructions, but also a cultural and historical summary of the cuisine, relevant recipes, drink recommendations, and a curated musical playlist on Spotify. Recent themes have included Hanoi, Stockholm, Saginaw Bay native foods, Yerevan, Bavaria, Bali, Lahore, Nashville, and Guadalajara.

Four books dealing with the history and culture of food in East Asia have come out in the last few years:

- **Jin Feng**, who earned her Ph.D. in Asian languages and cultures at the Univ. of Michigan in 2000, has published *Tasting Paradise on Earth: Jiangnan Foodways* (Univ. of Washington Press, 2019; 232 pp., $95 hbk., $30 pbk.). Jiangnan, the region south of the Yangtze River where it flows into the East China Sea, is well-known in Chinese history for its natural beauty, rich resources, and economic prosperity; it includes huge cities such as Shanghai, Nanjing, Suzhou, and Hangzhou. Feng, a professor of Chinese and of literature at Grinnell College in Iowa, examines how the region’s cuisine has been portrayed in literature and mass media from late imperial times to the present, with a focus on the role of foodways as markers of ethnic and social identity. Miranda Brown, a UM Chinese Studies professor who spoke to CHAA in Jan. 2019 about the history of cheese and curds in China, has praised Feng’s book: “This magnificent piece of scholarship—imaginatively conceived, meticulously researched, and broadly interesting—will be read for years to come by food scholars as the standard reference on modern Chinese food nostalgia. It has huge potential to reach a broader audience, as it relates food culture to themes like nationalism, class, gender, and place.”

- **Brian R. Dott**, a professor of Asian history at Whitman College in Walla Walla, WA, is the author of *The Chile Pepper in China: A Cultural Biography* (Columbia Univ. Press, 2020; 296 pp., $32 pbk.). In this work, Dr. Dott—who has his own connection to UM, having completed his master’s in Asian studies there in 1991—combines methods from food studies, the history of medicine, and Chinese cultural history. He chronicles how the New World chile pepper quickly overcame the reticence of Chinese elites after its introduction in the 1570s. Its cultivation, which spread from neighbor to neighbor largely outside commercial production, displaced the native Sichuan peppercorn in the culinary sphere and also influenced medicine, language, and cultural identity. The book explores how the versatile chile became a fixture in various regional cuisines, how it came to be a symbol of both male virility and female passion and—under Mao—of military expertise and revolutionary success.

- **Oishii: The History of Sushi** (Reaktion Books, 2021; 224 pp., $24 hbk.) is the latest book from Eric C. Rath. *Oishii* in Japanese means “delicious”, an appropriate title for a book about one of the world’s most popular foods. But Rath, a widely recognized expert in premodern Japanese food culture who teaches at the Univ. of Kansas and serves on the board for *Gastronomica*, believes that sushi is basically a simple food of medieval character that is often exoticized today. He explains the importance of lactic-acid fermentation in the origins of sushi, and the role of preservative elements and time in creating sour and tart flavors. He chronicles how sushi was refashioned, from a snack and a street food to a delicacy at high-end restaurants. The book also includes recipes that allow the reader to see how sushi preferences have evolved over the centuries.

- In *Taste of Control: Food and the Filipino Colonial Mentality under American Rule* (Rutgers Univ. Press, 2020; 224 pp., $120 hbk., $27.95 pbk.), author René Alexander D. Orquiza, Jr., shows how changing the food of the Philippines was part of the U.S. colonial project of reshaping the islands into a mirror image of America. Filipino cuisine is a delicious fusion of foreign influences, but Filipinos living under U.S. rule (1898-1946) were told that their cuisine was inferior in taste and nutrition. Orquiza, an American history professor at Providence College in Rhode Island, uses some rare archival sources, including letters written home by American soldiers, cosmopolitan menus from Manila restaurants, and textbooks used in local home-economics classes. He also shows how certain Filipino cookbooks defended the nation’s traditional cuisine and culture. Yet the American colonial occupation left psychological scars that haven’t completely healed after 75 years.

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**1869 BANQUET** continued from page 13

It’s a shame that overhunting and overfishing—even the outright extinction of species—were associated with food practices that our ancestors were proud of. This was part and parcel of the spirit of the times, an era in America that combined boundless optimism with cynical extraction and exploitation. Other aspects of this are well known to readers. The same U.S. Army that fought heroically to defeat the slaveholding system in the South was, just a few years later, brutally suppressing native resistance to land theft and cultural extinction in the West. The same explosives used in building the transcontinental railroads were also used in blast-fishing practices that destroyed populations and their habitats. I believe it’s important that people view such things from two perspectives—that of yesterday and today—in order to gain a more balanced and penetrating understanding of historical developments. Culinary ephemera, such as the 1869 banquet menu from Detroit, are some of the materials that allow such assessments to be made.
Programs start at 4:00 p.m. Eastern Time.

Sunday, October 31, 2021
(Event held online-only via Zoom)
Antje Petty, Assoc. Dir., Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies, Univ. of Wisconsin–Madison, “German-American Foodways”

Sunday, November 21, 2021
(Event held online-only via Zoom)
Tammy Coxen, founder and director of Tammy’s Tastings, “Prohibition and Repeal”

Sunday, December 19, 2021
(4-7 p.m., Ladies’ Literary Club of Ypsilanti)
Members-only participatory theme meal, “The Cuisines of the Caribbean”

Sunday, January 16, 2022
Danielle Dreilinger, journalist and author, “The Secret History of Home Economics”

**On the Back Burner:** We welcome ideas and submissions from all readers of Repast, including for the following planned future issues. Suggestions for future themes are also welcome.
- Winter 2022: unthemed
- Spring 2022: Culinary History in England, Part 4
- Summer and Fall 2022: Fruits of the World and How to Use Them