

[研究ノート]

Two Cookbooks

— Dishing Out the Doggerel and Dodging Death —

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Abstract

The utility of cookbooks is not necessarily confined to their primary function, which is, of course, didactic—teaching the novice or the creatively averse how to prepare a given dish. A wealth of information about a country, its values, and even its travails can be gleaned by perusing such books. This paper examines two divergent North American cookbooks from the early twentieth and mid-nineteenth centuries, respectively.

Kitchen Kitsch:

*Rhymed Receipts** [sic] for Any Occasion

The genre of food poetry is marked by bifurcation. On one side of the divide the curious reader finds poems about food, many of which are of the highest caliber, as is Robert Burns' paeon to pluck "Address to a Haggis": it does justice to both the dish and the "pudding race" that produced it. On the other side, the hapless reader finds himself in a land in which recipes are presented as poems. From what this writer has seen this is a benighted place in which poetasters hold sway. A fine example of such lack of refinement can be found in the cookbook under review—*Rhymed Receipts for Any Occasion* by Imogen Clark, which was published by H. M. Caldwell Co. in 1912.

According to Jan Longone, writing in the Fall 2002 issue of *Gastronomica* in an article entitled "The Mince Pie That Launched the Declaration of Independence, and Other Recipes in Rhyme," such poetic atrocities as are found in the book under review and similar publications enjoyed a great deal

of popularity in the United States: “At the turn of the nineteenth century [sic],...a new genre of food poetry appeared, which over the next sixty years became very popular in the United States. This poetry consisted of recipes expressed in rhyme...” (Longone, p. 86).

Imogen Clark is neither an aesthetic assassin nor a culinary criminal. She is simply a compiler of assorted detritus that once made their respective appearances in other publications; e.g., *Woman’s Home Companion*, *Good Housekeeping Magazine*. Before one gets to the first recipe, it becomes apparent that, by 21st-century standards, there is a great deal of profligacy in this book, at least with respect to paper. Many pages are blank or contain a paltry number of words. This is also true for the back of the book, where the reader is provided with pages on which she is encouraged to write her own recipes. This writer suspects that this was done to “fatten up” the publication, to make it look bigger than it actually is.

Each recipe is preceded by a citation, and Shakespeare is the favored author here. Copious quotes from the Bard’s many works can be found throughout, *Hamlet*, *The Tempest*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Richard II*, *Macbeth*. The semiotics are revealing. The primary market for the publication was middle-class American housewives. Working-class women would have had no time for such frivolities, nor would they have been predisposed to spend money on a cookbook of any kind, money being in short supply. Upper-class women would have been unlikely to purchase the book for two reasons. First, many had servants to prepare their meals, obviating any need on their part for a cookbook. Second, they, being better educated than their middle- and working-class counterparts, would have been ashamed of being associated with the doggerel therein. Shakespeare is present to give a patina of intellectual and poetic respectability to an otherwise embarrassing display, on the part of both writers and readers, of lack of knowledge and/or inadequate education.

From this writer’s perspective the most noteworthy and truly bizarre recipe in this book is the one for “Japanese Salad,” which goes as follows:

In Chrysanthemum Land, far over the sea,

They gave me this salad for Sunday night tea,
And, I'm sure you'll believe, I ate it with glee.
Shredded apples, and truffles, and celery white.
Well seasoned and mixed, as I saw with delight.
With Chrysanthemum flowers all glowing and bright;
These covered with mayonnaise, golden of hue.
With hard-boiled eggs garnished, and green olives too.
Were served in a bowl of rich Japanese blue (Clark, p. 4).

True, the chrysanthemum is especially important to the Japanese, as their royal family sits on the Chrysanthemum Throne and their passports are embossed with the flower. True, chrysanthemums are edible. Aside from those points, everything else is highly suspect. This writer knows of no tradition for "Sunday night tea"; olives were not commonly eaten by the Japanese at the time the recipe was written; and, though the Japanese are rather fond of mushrooms, truffles are not a favored fungus, nor are or were they widely available. Furthermore, the recipe bears an uncanny resemblance to Waldorf Salad.

Confederate Receipt Book:

A Culinary Culture Born of the Crucible of War

Santich (2013, p. 1) succinctly defines *culinary culture* as "the values, traditions, practices and beliefs of a community that shape the ways in which its members cook and eat." The development of such cultures in the vast majority of cases is slow moving and evolutionary in nature. However, there are examples of culinary cultures that have appeared suddenly in response to the exigencies of war. To facilitate the survival of the citizenry living under such dire conditions recipes and even whole cookbooks have been produced, the output of which has nothing to do with epicureanism in the layman's sense of the word and everything to do with averting starvation or at least temporarily assuaging a gnawing stomach. An especially shocking example of the latter can be found in a recipe that circulated among the be-

sieged residents of Leningrad during World War II.

Leather-Belt Soup

It's better to use undyed belts. Cut the belts into small pieces, then rinse them in water and let soak. After boiling, season with nettle, saltbush, chickweed, or other herbs. It's good to add a little bit of vinegar (*Harp-er's*, p. 18).

Cookbooks and recipes directed at peoples living under less desperate conditions often feature ersatz consumables, not of the Cool Whip for whipped cream variety, to be sure, as the substitutes were almost always natural, and therefore, either healthful or not injurious to one's health. Such was the case with residents of the Channel Islands, which were occupied by the Germans during World War II, where "parsnip, sugar beet, green pea pods, camellia leaves..." stood in for tea, "acorns, chicory, barley..." for coffee, and "sea water" substituted for salt, to cite just a few examples (Toms, 1967, p. 120).

Confederate Receipt Book: Recipes, Cures, and Camp and Household Hints, the book under review, was published in 1863 during the American Civil War, or should I say "The War Between the States," or the "The War for Confederate Independence," or the "War of Northern Aggression"? The naming of this event is of crucial importance and highly disputed, even today. A brief consideration of semiotics here will help clarify some essentials. There are regional preferences with respect to the naming of the war, with the non-South favoring "Civil War," and Southerners preferring "The War Between the States." The former signifies a war within one country; hence, delegitimizing the South's states' rights assertions. "The War Between the States," on the other hand, signifies to the reader the sovereign or quasi-sovereign nature of the individual state participants in the conflict. This writer prefers "The War for Confederate Independence," as it is an apt description of what the Southerners were attempting to achieve and what the Northerners were trying to prevent.

The precarious position that the Confederacy was in with respect to food

may seem odd to those with a cursory knowledge of the history of the Confederate States of America (CSA), as it is well known that the CSA was largely an agrarian society. However, there was a clear preference for cash crops grown for the export market, cotton and tobacco being among them, neither of which looks very appetizing on a dinner plate.

The new Confederate nation comprised a region with a long economic history of being dominated by the major plantation cash crops of tobacco, cotton, sugarcane, and rice, while yet being significantly dependent upon what is now the Midwest for essential foodstuffs, including pork, bacon, beef, livestock, flour, wheat, barley, corn, and oats to supplement its own harvests. ...Southerners also sought agricultural products like coffee, butter, cheese, Irish potatoes...from outside the region (Davis, p. 82).

As Northern imports withered and the Union imposed a blockade on the South, Southerners had to contend with the formidable Union navy. To secure overseas imports they relied on the often prodigious skills of their blockade runners, the most successful and famous being the captain and crew of the CSS *Alabama*. However, such efforts were not enough to alleviate the plight of the public with respect to provisions, and belt-tightening and alternative recipes were needed. The *Confederate Receipt Book* was meant to meet that demand.

The book was published in 1863 by West & Johnston of Richmond, Virginia, the Confederate capital. There is no authorship: it is an aggregation of recipes that appeared in the Southern press since the commencement of hostilities. According to Patricia B. Mitchell, the retail price was 75, presumably Confederate, cents. The number of copies sold is not known (Mitchell, 2011). As the subtitle suggests it deviates significantly from orthodox cookbooks, as it also features household hints and information concerning folk remedies, which are beyond the purview of this review. Of the more than one hundred recipes appearing in *Confederate Receipt Book*, this writer will examine a few that are particularly salient.

Considering the circumstances under which these recipes were devel-

oped—in a moribund nation under siege, desperately trying to avert starvation—some appear to be far from unpalatable, as in the case of “Table Beer,” which might prove viable even in today’s market. The anonymous author of the recipe is a minimalist, assuming that the reader possesses basic knowledge of the brewer’s art. It is not clear what he/she means by “work it with yeast.” Does this refer to yeast that has been bought on the market, or is it an exhortation to use wild fermentation? Considering the designation “Table Beer” and wartime conditions, this writer believes that it is the latter.

Table Beer—To eight quarts of boiling water put a pound of treacle, a quarter of an ounce of ginger and two bay leaves, let this boil for a quarter of an hour, then cool, and work it with yeast as other beer (*Confederate Receipt Book*, 1863, p. 9).

It is difficult to comprehend how a dish devoid of seafood can be reminiscent of oysters, but the author of the following, either through culinary conjuring or wishful thinking, thought it could.

Artificial Oysters—Take young green corn, grate it in a dish; to one pint of this add one egg, well beaten, a small teacup of flour, two or three tablespoonfuls of butter, some salt and pepper, mix them all together (*Confederate Receipt Book*, p. 7).

The recipe for ersatz coffee describes the beverage derived therefrom as “splendid,” and indeed, it probably is, owing to the addition of bacon fat, which holds the potential to make nearly anything taste good.

Substitute for Coffee—Take sound ripe acorns, wash them while in the shell, dry them, and parch until they open, take the shell off, roast with a little bacon fat, and you will have a splendid cup of coffee (*Confederate Receipt Book*, p. 17).

A curious omission from this highly practical cookbook cum survival manual is any mention of the goober, or pindar, or as it is commonly known among most speakers of English—the peanut. The legume featured promi-

nently on the plates of Confederate soldiers, making its appearance so often as to inspire a song—one of the most famous in the Confederate song-book—albeit one laden with sarcasm.

Sitting by the roadside on a summer's day,
Chatting with my messmates passing time away,
Lying in the shadow underneath the trees,
Goodness how delicious eating goober peas!
Peas! Peas! Peas! Peas! Eating goober peas!
Goodness how delicious, eating goober peas!

...

Just before the battle the General hears a row,
He says the Yanks are coming,
I hear the rifles now,
He turns around in wonder, and what do you think he sees,
The Georgia Militia eating goober peas!
Peas! Peas! Peas! Peas! Eating goober peas! Goodness, how delicious,
eating goober peas!

I think my song has lasted almost long enough,
The subject's interesting, but rhymes are mighty rough,
I wish this war was over when free from rags and fleas,
We'd kiss our wives and sweethearts and gobble goober peas! ... (Eating Goober Peas).

Confederate Receipt Book is a no-frills survival manual written by authors who were verbally parsimonious. Some of the recipes featured therein are likely to yield dishes that will prove sapid and salubrious and, therefore, worthy of revival in times of peace and plenty. The subtext here is one of “circling the pots and pans,” an allusion to the expression “circling the wagons,” a defensive tactic employed by American pioneers when confronted by Native Americans whose lands they were expropriating. It was a Southern expression of solidarity and a display of resistance at a time when the

specter of death by starvation loomed large in the larder.

*N.B. rural and now archaic for *recipe*

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