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# Op-Ed: The Influence of New Technologies, Foods, and Print Media on Local Material Culture Remains in Nineteenth-Century America

Marie-Lorraine Pipes and Meta F. Janowitz

*This opinion piece is a brief discussion of documentary and graphic sources, such as cookbooks, works of fiction, advertisements, and genre paintings, available to archaeologists for use in interpreting food-related artifacts and faunal materials from 19th-century domestic deposits. At that time American society experienced a surge in print and visual media that shaped the consumption and preparation of new foods. The scale of influence a particular form of media has on consumers varies in relation to the time sensitivity of the media. This article considers the range of sources that exist and suggests a comprehensive approach to the analysis of archaeological assemblages that includes potential short- and long-term media influences on consumers.*

*Ce texte d'opinion se veut une brève discussion des sources documentaires et iconographiques, telles que des livres de cuisine, des œuvres de fiction, des publicités, et des scènes de genre, qui sont à la disposition des archéologues pour interpréter les artefacts liés à l'alimentation et les restes fauniques provenant de contextes domestiques du XIXe siècle. La société américaine a connu une forte augmentation des médias imprimés et visuels durant cette période, ce qui a influencé la consommation et la préparation de nouveaux aliments. L'influence qu'une forme de média a sur les consommateurs varie en fonction de la durée d'exposition et d'utilisation du média. Cet article se penche sur l'éventail des sources existantes et propose une approche globale de l'analyse des assemblages archéologiques qui comprend les effets potentiels à court et à long termes que peuvent avoir les médias sur les consommateurs.*

## Introduction

At present, there is much discussion among social scientists and the public at large about the ongoing information revolution, and people recognize that new media tools are available that facilitate the acquisition of knowledge about particular subjects. The present information revolution is a self-conscious phenomenon, and the rapid pace at which new applications and devices are being developed is driven by eager consumers who want faster and more convenient access to all kinds of information. The 19th century had a more modest, but still significant, information revolution based on printed rather than electronic means of communication that, in regard to food and food technologies, targeted the growing middle class, particularly women. As a result of changes in the organization of work and the separation of the home and workplace, middle-class women were increasingly segregated from the work environment and became firmly planted in the house (Hayden 1982; Blumin 1989; Wall 1991, 1994; Fitts 1999). As the historian Barbara Welter stated, “[W]oman ... was the hostage in the home” (Welter 1968: 151). The cult of domesticity

revolved around home, family, and household rituals, and food and cooking became a major market for retailers. Nineteenth-century print and graphic media promoted not only new foods, kitchen technologies, and methods of food preparation, but also introduced novel culinary traditions and ideas, influenced social behaviors, and contributed to a rapidly evolving culinary landscape. The present “opinion piece” discusses a range of media types and encourages researchers to seek out media materials whose purposes included providing the public with information as well as influencing consumer behavior. The use of print and graphic media by archaeologists is, of course, not a new idea (see, e.g., Janowitz 1993; Yentsch 1994; Yamin 2000; Fitts 2001; Clancy 2004) but this article aims to discuss these sources of information in relation to foodways and to consider the kinds of information each source can provide.

The 19th century witnessed change at a rapidly accelerating pace in the United States. The rise of literacy and the growth in print media, especially newspapers, but also cookbooks, imagery, and novels, attracted a public willing to experience new ideas and new products. At

the same time, technological developments and the introduction of new foods and food products had an impact on cooking methods, consumption practices, and material culture. Print media offered consumers an ever-changing assortment of kitchen equipment and patented products, while affecting social aspects of food consumption in terms of table settings, room adornments, and dining paraphernalia in general. The influence of print and visual media on social ideologies and behaviors should not be underestimated.

When considering these influences, three factors are especially important: the amount of time they are available to consumers; their geographic range; and the types of products discussed or illustrated. Different media vary in the amount of time they have to influence consumers. For example, a daily newspaper advertising food availability and prices has a shorter period of influence than a billboard plastered on the side of a building to promote a new food. Daily papers and advertisements have short “view lives,” because the consumer information they provide concerning prices and availability of goods is quickly outdated. Other media, such as cookbooks, paintings, engravings, and even magazines, are more enduring, providing useful information over a longer period of time. Cookbooks in particular had long use-lives, and the most popular books were reprinted many times. Another factor to consider is the intended geographic scope of the media. For the archaeologist, different media offer different scales of information: newspapers and their advertisements are tied to local markets, while books and magazines stretch regionally and nationally. Nineteenth-century media sources offer insights into the meaning of archaeological deposits on national, regional, and local levels, depending on their intended audiences. Products developed for the national domestic market could be advertised regionally via magazines, newspapers, and billboards, and consumers could order them from manufacturers or suppliers. These products could also be sold by vendors at the local level, however, with their use, value, and availability announced in hometown print media. Some advertisements and announcements were intended only for a local audience, such as city-directory advertisements or notices of area sales events. The types of foods, food-preparation

equipment, or other commodities offered to consumers also affected how information was conveyed. For example, mail-order catalogs sent out at regular but infrequent intervals offered stoves and other kitchen equipment, and operated on a scale different from city-directory advertisements for a local pottery or dry-goods store. It is most useful, therefore, for archaeologists to sample a range of media with varying temporal and geographic scales and relevance to different food-related issues, such as perishable foods, dry goods, major kitchen appliances, and cookware.

Most archaeologists working in North America use local histories to provide social contexts for household deposits. At the individual household level, archaeologists can evaluate kitchen trash not only in the context of local history, but, using information found in hometown sources, also in terms of household members’ group affiliations, such as religious institutions or political and social clubs. Census data (used by all historical archaeologists) yield information about household size and composition, but the more ephemeral data in newspapers and their advertisements act as frames of reference for local events. They also document the growth of businesses, ideologies, and key public players, as well as their effects on local consumers and, potentially, on archaeological deposits. Institutional records from churches or social groups may exist, such as weekly newsletters containing notices of current events, that provide information about neighborhood composition and generational differences, as well as data concerning life cycles within households. While extensive research into local newspapers and, when available, local directories and newsletters/bulletins requires more rigorous investigation and increases the cost of public or private archaeological projects, these sources should be taken into consideration whenever possible.

Political, religious, ethnic, and class agendas were promoted through advertisements, cookbooks, and fictional stories (FIG. 1). How people incorporated these things into their daily lives depended on who they were, in what they believed, and to which groups they belonged, as well as their economic resources and family life cycles. To a large extent, group affiliations influenced what people bought and



Figure 1. Ca. 1856 advertisement for cookbooks written for German Americans (Herline & Co. [1856]). (Image courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.)

ate, as well as their assimilation of new ideas. In the pages that follow, we outline briefly some of the most significant developments of the 19th century and the range of relevant contemporary print sources available to historical archaeologists.

### Technological Developments

The 19th century was a time of innovation and change in material culture associated with food preparation. Major technological changes over the course of the 19th century included the development of the cooking stove, increased availability of metal and glass food containers, canning for preserving foodstuffs, transportation of food by rail, and the development of new food products (FIG. 2). Cooking stoves with integral ovens were developed in the late 18th century and were widely available by the mid-

19th century (see also Yentsch, this volume). Stoves were first fueled by wood or coal, and later by kerosene, gas, electricity, or some combination of these fuels.<sup>1</sup>

During the 18th century, most foods were primarily local or regional products, with certain exceptions, such as cheeses, wines, and some preserved meats and fish. In port cities, food imports were more common and easily acquired; inland communities were more dependent on local producers to supply their needs. This changed as food preservation technologies, specifically canning and refrigeration, became widespread, and as canal and rail transport of foods became common. The heyday of canal transport was during the second and third quarters of the 19th century.

1. As recently as the 1950s, stoves fueled by a combination of coal and gas were common, as in the house in which one of the authors lived as a child.





Figure 2. Advertisement for Cook's Flaked Rice, from the September 1901 issue of *Cosmopolitan* (American Rice Food & Mfg. Co. 1901).

The building of railroads, which began in the early 1830s and expanded exponentially in the 1840s and 1850s, opened up new avenues for the distribution of goods. Miller and Hurry (1983), Purser (1992), Schuyler (1991), Spencer-Wood (1987), Whittaker (1999), and other archaeologists have documented the effects of improved transportation on the distribution of a variety of consumer goods.

Feeding off consumer desires for new products, mail-order catalogs emerged toward the end of the 19th century, such as Montgomery Ward, first issued in 1872 (Montgomery Ward 2012), and Sears, Roebuck & Co., beginning in 1894 (Sears Archives 2012). These catalogs offered an encyclopedic selection of new and improved goods. Without the railroad, the success of these companies would have been impossible. At the local retail level, businesses also benefited from rail transport, since they could obtain goods to be sold by their own establishments.

As the 19th century progressed, time itself became an ever more important commodity (FIG. 3). Timesaving measures resulted in the introduction of instant foods: canned soups, canned beans, quick-cooking oatmeal and other breakfast porridges, not to mention dry breakfast cereals (TAB. 1). Advertisements for new convenience foods that appeared in magazines, newspapers, posters, and billboards made consumers aware of these new products. Many of these foods were in bottles, cans, and jars with paper labels, and in cardboard or wooden boxes. Although paper labels and cardboard boxes generally do not survive in archaeological deposits, some of these foods had their own distinctive containers that do survive and can be identified. For example, the Society for Historical Archaeology bottle identification web site illustrates some distinctively shaped bottles manufactured to hold ketchup (Lindsey 2010). Both the Society for Historical Archaeology web site and Zumwalt (1980) have many examples of specialized food bottles.



Figure 3. Advertisement for "White Label" Always Ready Soups, date unknown (Armour Packing Co. 2014).

## Advertisements

Advertising, which rose in prominence starting at the end of the 18th century, became an extremely significant means of conveying information (FIGS. 4, 5). Advertisements appeared in the form of broadsides, as inclusions in city directories, and—especially—in newspapers and magazines. The number of newspapers skyrocketed in every urban area during the 19th century, and people became more connected than ever before. Newspapers were predominantly local in their distribution, so they provide insights into local buying and selling practices that can be useful to archaeologists in evaluating the meaning of particular household deposits. They can also be the number-one means by which assemblages within a given market are assessed and compared. Placing assemblages within the local market system is a key to interpreting them—what was available in New York City was not the same as in Baltimore or

Table 1. Timeline of patents, inventions, and the introduction of some food brands.

Year	Patent, invention, or food brand
1825	1st U.S. patent for tin cans
1829	Graham crackers invented
1841	Cornstarch patented in England
1843	1st U.S. patent for an ice-cream maker
1848	Commercial pasta produced
1851	1st commercial ice-cream factory
1856	Borden patent for condensed milk
1869	Tabasco sauce shipped
1872	Patent for dried milk
1873	Navel oranges introduced to California
1873	A. Busch pasteurizes beer
1874	Oleomargarine made in the U.S.
1873/6	Canned sardines sold in the U.S.
1876	Hires Root Beer at the Centennial Expo.
1885	Florida grapefruit shipped north
1886	Horlick's Malted Milk
1887	Patent for Coca-Cola Syrup
1889	Aunt Jemima Pancake Mix
1890	Peanut butter developed
1893	Cream of Wheat
1893	Juicy Fruit chewing gum
1894	Bottled Coca-Cola
1895	Patent for Shredded Wheat
1895	1st shipment of canned pineapple
1895	Jell-O
1895	Postum Food Coffee
1897	Campbell's condensed soup
1898	Post's Grape Nuts
1898	Nabisco Graham Crackers
1899	Carnation Evaporated Milk
1900	Chiclets gum
1900	Hershey's Milk Chocolate Bar

Dates compiled from Ehler (2014); another general source is Olver (1999).



Boston or Philadelphia. Nineteenth-century newspapers and directories, increasingly available online, are an extremely useful resource. Urban directories can reveal when a business was in operation, what particular products (such as imported foods) firms dealt in, and from what local sources consumers had to choose to obtain their household goods (see also Metheny, this volume).

One online reference for the history of advertising is to be found in the Duke University archives, the Emergence of Advertising in America 1850–1920 collection of the John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising, and Marketing History (Duke University Libraries 2013). Although the bulk of the collection deals with the 20th century, some 19th-century advertisements and bills of sale for foods and other products are included, such as a bill of sale for a Baltimore wholesale dealer in “fish, cheese, vinegar, etc.,” and an advertisement for “cream-suet butter,” patented in 1874 and said to be superior to butter for use as shortening (Huntemuller & Cousins 1870; Waverly Butter Co. 1874).

City directories also contain advertisements that can provide information about foodways

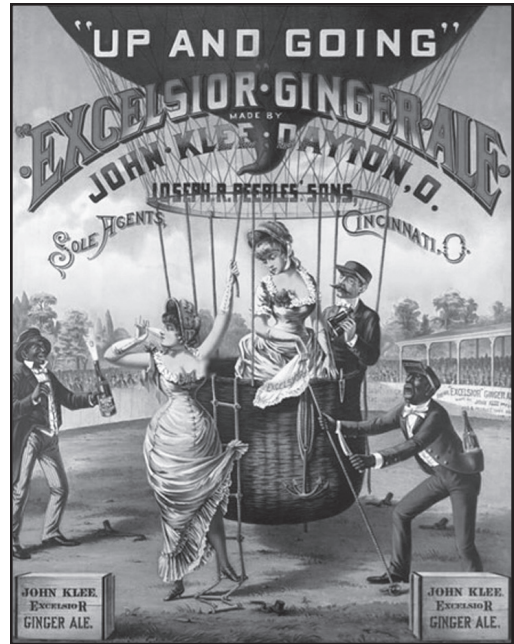


Figure 4. Advertisement for ginger ale. The racist and sexist attitudes of the time are obvious (John Klee 1885). (Image courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.)

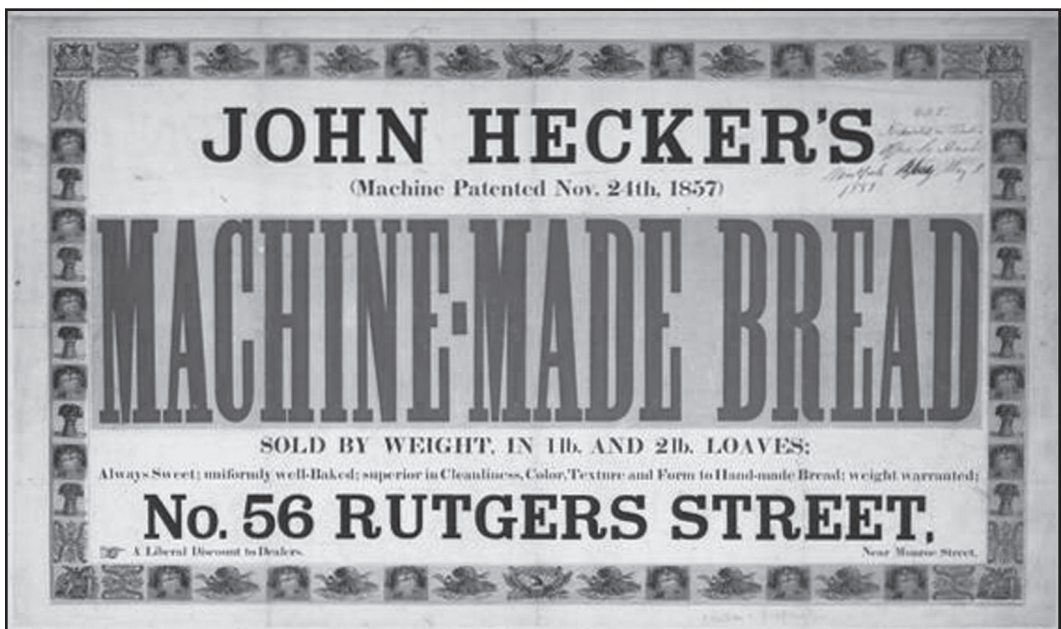


Figure 5. Advertisement for machine-made bread. (John Hecker's Machine-Made Bread [1858]). (Image courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.)

(albeit indirectly for the most part). In the Philadelphia 1885 and 1886 city directories (James Gopsill's Sons 1885: 742, 1886: 713), for instance, the Northern Liberty Pottery advertised that the firm made "all kinds of Earthen and Stoneware" and "Portable Furnaces," which were bucket-shaped objects made of fireclay with supports for grills (Myers 1980: 20). Portable furnaces were used with charcoal or wood fuel for cooking or heating washing water outside, thus eliminating the need to add heat to already warm kitchens during the summertime.

### Graphic Sources

Visual arts also played an increasingly important role in promoting societal ideals and information. Prints, such as those by Currier & Ives or D. W. Kellogg & Co., were cheap and widely available. Genre paintings were popular, and reproductions were sold cheaply. Genre paintings and their printed reproductions and imitations were critical elements in the process of building national identity (McElroy 1991; Johns 1993; Lubin 1996; Weinberg 2009). For example, Lilly Martin Spencer, who lived from 1822 to 1902, was a successful painter, although she is almost unknown today. A talented artist, she supported herself and her family with her work; she did not paint for art's sake, but for her livelihood. Her art was practical and commercial. Her husband, who was her business manager and occasional artistic assistant, and their seven children depended on "both a rapid production of paintings and a specialization in popular genre scenes ... since societal norms and maternal duties kept her in the home, she found her subjects close at hand" (Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester 2002–2010). She sold her art in studios, but she also did many illustrations for magazines, in particular for the popular *Godey's Lady's Book*, and a large part of her income came from the sale of inexpensive engraved copies of her paintings (National Museum of Women in the Arts 2012).

Many of her pictures are of women engaged in housekeeping activities. The painting titled *Shake Hands* is one of her relatively early works (FIG. 6). It drew criticism from the art establishment for what was perceived as its coarseness; the woman in the painting is too forthright and indelicate for the aesthetic tastes of the time.

Spencer responded with a painting coyly named *Kiss Me and You'll Kiss the 'Lasses* (FIG. 7), a visual pun on the words molasses and lasses. Audiences were charmed by this bright-eyed coquette and her preserve making as much as they had been repelled by the toothy smile, floury hands, and reddened arms of the woman making what looks like a chicken pot pie. By inference, preserving fruit is a more genteel and gentlewomanly food-preparation activity than stuffing meat and vegetables into a piecrust. Both women are engaged in food preparation, and archaeologists can take an inventory of their kitchen equipment and foodstuffs, as well as attitudes toward different types of foods.

Some other 19th-century genre painters whose works are worth perusal by archaeologists are Francis William Edmonds, Enoch Wood Perry, and William Sidney Mount. The still-life paintings of members of the Peale family show food and artifacts in upper- and middle-class settings. The art historian Margaretta Salinger noted that Raphaelle<sup>2</sup> Peale's 1818 *Still Life with Cake* "has an air of propriety, like that of a dining table recently crumbed and ready for

2. The male children of Charles Wilson Peale, one of the first American-born artists of note, were all named after famous artists.



Figure 6. Detail of *Shake Hands*, by Lilly Martin Spencer (1854). (Figure courtesy of Ohio Historical Society Selections.)





Figure 7. Detail of *Kiss Me and You'll Kiss the 'Lasses*, by Lilly Martin Spencer (1856). (Figure courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum, A. Augustus Healy Fund, 70.26.)

dessert” and has “an air of reticent refinement” (Salinger 1986: 53), which in this case illustrates for archaeologists the foods and artifacts considered to be elegant at that time: small cakes with white icing, embellished with red- and green-colored sugar patterns, cut into small portions, and resting on a pewter plate; green grapes and raisins; and pale wine in an elegant wineglass.

The representation of food in advertisements and graphic media offers a pathway to understanding socially complex ideas about food and can provide direct insights into the processes

of accepting new technologies and artifacts, the homogenization and standardization of the production of foods, and the composition of meals and their social settings. Foods are imbued with social values, ranked by cost, cleanliness, health, ethnicity, religion, and other charged relationships. The price of new foods is often tied to novelty, not cost of production. Nineteenth-century advertisers promoted new foods by stressing positive associations. Graphic representations illustrated not only new foods and products, but also the social contexts in which they should be consumed or

used. Graphics also imparted explicit and implicit information about the people portrayed (TAB. 2). Other ideas promoted include the right food combinations, the proper timing for eating certain foods, as well as where and how certain foods were eaten.

### Cookbooks and other Works of Non-Fiction

The domestic revolution, the archaeological correlates of which have been discussed by various authors—most notably, Wall (1994)—created an audience for and was sustained by the plethora of cookbooks and domestic advice manuals published during the 19th century. Similarly, many writers have drawn attention to *Godey's Lady's Book* as the premier example of admonitory and inspirational writing for middle-class women (see, e.g., Okker 2008).

Cookbooks, both printed and personal handwritten manuscripts, were of course available to American cooks before the 19th century, but their availability increased significantly after the turn of the century, at least in part because of rising literacy, the development of the middle-class household, and the stay-at-home wife/mother. British cookbooks, brought over with settlers or imported from the home country, were available throughout the colonial period, as were those of some other nationalities, but the first cookbook actually published in the colonies appeared in 1742, a reprint of the 1727 British work *The Compleat Housewife* (Comer 2000: 1,311). The first cookbook written by an American for Americans was Amelia Simmons's *American Cookery* (1796). An important online source for many cookbooks is the site Feeding America: The Historic American Cookbook Project, sponsored by Michigan State University Libraries (2012). Another useful site is Vintage Cookbooks (2011). A variety of online sources and digital archives make period cookbooks easily accessible to historical archaeologists, thus the contextualization of recipes, ingredients, and prescriptive literature can become a necessary step in archaeological research.

During the 19th century, cookbooks published in the United States evolved from simple collections of recipes, in which abundance was considered the ideal, into a self-standing

Table 2. Information conveyed by food in literature and art

<b>Set in Opposition</b>
Shared/Denied
Given/Obtained
Nourishing/Damaging
Delicious/Disgusting
Good/Bad
Fragrant/Smelly
Fresh/Stale
<b>Used to Convey</b>
Mood
Relationships of characters (to each other and the viewer)
<b>Used to Identify</b>
Ethnicity, nationality, religious affiliation
Social status of characters
Special moments or events

literary genre. They became venues for expressing political and social viewpoints, and places to advertise new kitchen equipment and introduce new food products. The cookbook was more than just a source of instruction promoting culinary competency; it became a venue for spreading ideologies. Cookbooks not only guided the cook through new cooking methods, they also introduced consumers to new foods—many of which, such as citrus fruits, were imported to and later grown in the United States—and chemicals, such as baking powder, that could be incorporated into foods.

Cookbooks set the standard for dining rituals: how to properly set a table for different meals, what foods to serve at different times and occasions, and what foods harmonized with others (see, e.g., Wall 1994). They advised women about the practical matters of purchasing foods, cleaning all kinds of household items, and treating illness, as well as less tangible issues, such as how to deal with melancholia and unresponsive husbands. Social hierarchy, political ideals, morality, and gender expectations are clearly seen in cookbook titles, recipe lists, ingredients, and directions (see also Yentsch, this volume).

An 1831 cookbook published anonymously in Watertown, New York, serves as an example. This work appeals explicitly to ideas of American exceptionalism, national pride, and acceptance of regional differences (FIG. 8). In the preface to this book, the author states that

a work on cookery should be adapted to the meridian to which it is intended to circulate. It is needless to burden a country Cookery Book with receipts for dishes depending entirely upon seaboard markets or which are suitable only to prepare food for the tables of city people, whose habits and customs differ so materially from those living in the country. Still further would the impropriety be carried were we to introduce into a work intended for the *American Publick* such *English, French and Italian* methods of rendering things indigestible, which are of themselves innocent, or of distorting and disguising the most loathsome objects to render them sufferable to already vitiated tastes.

These evils are attempted to be avoided. Good *Republican dishes* and garnishing proper to fill an everyday bill of fare, from the condition of the poorest to the richest individual, have been principally aimed at (*The Cook Not Mad* 1831).

Another example of the comprehensive nature of cookbooks and their wide-ranging impact on housekeepers is found in the title of the first alphabetically arranged cookbook to be printed in America (originally printed in 1832):

*The Cook's Own Book: Being A Complete Culinary Encyclopedia: Comprehending All Valuable Receipts For Cooking Meat, Fish, And Fowl, And Composing Every Kind Of Soup, Gravy, Pastry, Preserves, Essences, &c. That Have Been Published Or Invented During The Last Twenty Years. Particularly The Very Best Of Those In The Cook's Oracle, Cook's Dictionary, And Other Systems Of Domestic Economy. With Numerous Original Receipts, And A Complete System of Confectionery.*  
By A Boston Housekeeper (Lee 1832).

The "Boston Housekeeper" was a Mrs. N. K. M. Lee. The book went through at least a dozen printings between 1832 and 1865. The title explicitly acknowledges the borrowing from other books that was common at the time, in the same manner that so many current food blogs cheerfully and unabashedly reproduce recipes from other authors. Compilation and tweaking of recipes, rather than invention, was the norm in 19th-century cookbooks as it is

today on food blogs; similarly, the processes of compilation and replication contributed then, as they do now, to the spread of new ideas about food and new technologies, as well as a range of ideologies.

In the 19th century, food as an indicator of the moral, even religious, state of the family became a popular topic in works written by domestic reformers, such as Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe (1869). Morality and religion were an important part of how people were defined socially, and food was an outward manifestation of inner grace.

*Common Sense in the Household: A Manual of Practical Housewifery* by Marion Harland, the pen name of Mary Virginia Terhune, sold over a million copies in ten printings between 1871 and 1892. It was praised in a review in the newspaper *Watchman and Reflector* (reprinted

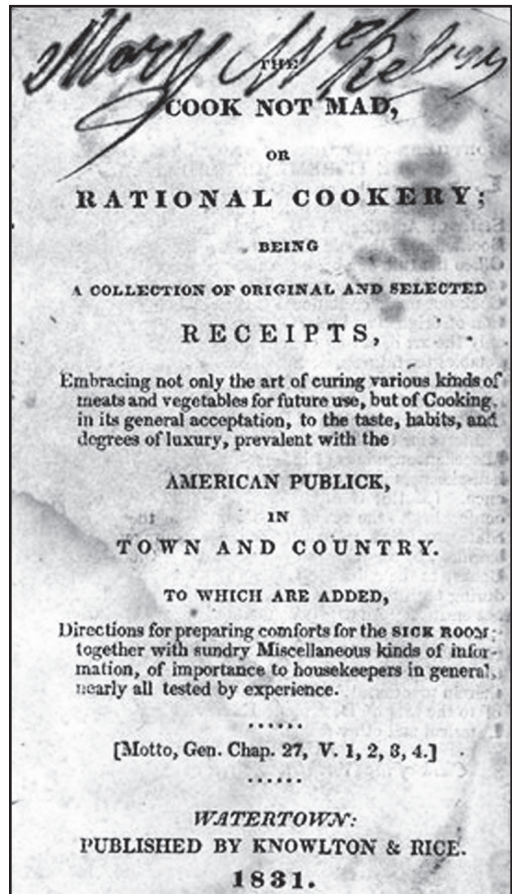


Figure 8. Title page of *The Cook Not Mad, or Rational Cookery* (*The Cook Not Mad* 1831).



in Harland [1873]) as “[t]he very best, the most sensible, the most honest book on this matter of getting up good dinners, and living in a decent Christian way, that has yet found its way in our household.” Religion, as such, is not mentioned in the book, but there is a constant underlying premise that its readers wish to live a godly life. The reader is advised to “order your household, then, so far aright as you can by the help of common sense and grace from on high” (Harland 1873: 378). “Decent Christian way[s]” will not be recognizable in the archaeological record, except under very unusual circumstances,<sup>3</sup> but consideration of the general moral ideals of a society at least helps to put an assemblage into a context.

Cookbooks were practical guides not only to foodways, but also to being a true American and, for some, to eventual salvation through proper daily activities. Knowing the religious affiliation of a household and looking at the kinds of cookbooks potentially read by the cook may shed some light on the composition of archaeological assemblages.

## Fiction

Fiction was another venue through which girls and young women were taught the essential role that proper food, properly prepared, had in maintaining a family’s happiness and well being. Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888), whose books were read by girls in the 19th century with the same avidity as J. K. Rowling’s are in the 21st century, used her characters to embody womanly ideals, including those of the model housekeeper and preparer of family food. One of the daughters in the 1868 book *Little Women* (2004) is the personification of these domestic virtues. Set in the outskirts of an unnamed New England city ca. 1860 to 1870, the four sisters in the book represent different 19th-century American, female, middle-class virtues. Meg, the eldest, marries young (but not too young) to a hardworking and moral man who works in the city. Jo, the next, is the independent female who seeks to earn her own living. She eventually marries an older but intellectual man, and together they

3. One possible example was the recovery, from the Five Points site in New York City, of a teacup with the transferred image of the priest Father Mathew, the founder of the Irish temperance movement (Cantwell and Wall 2001: 219–220).

run a school for boys. Amy marries a rich man and becomes a patron of the arts, in particular of young artists with talent but no money. Beth is the supremely good child: full of faith, loving, and kind. She dies an early, virginal death.

Considering Meg, the eldest, as the model of a moral 19th-century homemaker, her early mistakes and successes were informative for young housewives-to-be:

Like most other young matrons, Meg began her married life with the determination to be a model housekeeper. John should find home a paradise; he should always see a smiling face [and] should fare sumptuously every day ... [but] John grew dyspeptic after a course of dainty dishes, and ungratefully demanded plain fare. ... They were very happy. ... John did not find Meg’s beauty diminished though she beamed on him from behind the familiar coffee pot; nor did Meg miss any of the romance from the daily parting when her husband followed up his kiss with the tender inquiry ‘Shall I send home veal or mutton for dinner, darling’. ... While the cooking mania lasted, she went through Mrs. Cornelius’s receipt book<sup>4</sup> as if it were a mathematical exercise, working out the problems with patience and care. Sometimes her family were invited in to help eat up a too bounteous feast of success, or Lotty [her household help] would be privately dispatched with a batch of failures, which were to be concealed from all eyes in the convenient stomachs of the little Hummels [a poor immigrant family in the neighborhood]. An evening with John over the account-books usually produced a temporary lull in the culinary enthusiasm, and a frugal fit would ensue, during which the poor man was put through a course of bread-pudding, hash, and warmed-over coffee (Alcott 2004: 267–268).

One evening, John brought home a colleague without notice on a day when Meg had spent all her time trying unsuccessfully to make currant jelly. No dinner was in the offing. John’s query was: “Where’s the beef and vegetables I sent home and the pudding you promised?” When Meg tearfully replied that there was no dinner, he responded with:

Don’t cry, dear, but just exert yourself a bit, and knock us up something to eat. We’re both as hungry as hunters so we sha’n’t mind what it is. Give us the cold meat, and bread and cheese.

4. *The Young Housekeeper’s Friend* by Mrs. Mary Hooker Cornelius (1859).

She tells him she will not serve “a bone and vulgar bread and cheese for company” and tells the men to go to her mother’s house for food (Alcott 2004: 271).

These brief exchanges show several things about middle-class foodways during the third quarter of the 19th century, at least in some urban areas in the Northeast. Marketing was done on a daily basis by the husband, who brought or sent the viands home. Women who prepared their own family’s food, in lieu of employing a cook, did not just rely on recipes they had learned from their mothers, but actively sought to increase their culinary repertoire by consulting some of the many cookbooks published at this time. Food judged to be substandard, or at least not suitable to serve to non-family members, included reworked leftovers, such as bread pudding and hash, as well as the perennial stand-by triad of preserved meats, cheese, and plain bread. Preserved meat, cheese (i.e., preserved milk), and bread had been European and European American culinary mainstays for centuries, but the reliance on cookbooks was new to the 1800s.

A sequel to *Little Women* was published in 1871. In *Little Men*, Alcott told stories about the pupils at the school run by Jo (the second daughter) and her professor husband. Alcott was an early advocate of coeducation, so even though it was a school for boys, there were two girls among the students. One was Daisy, Meg’s daughter, the next generation’s embodiment of domestic virtues. When Daisy was petulant because the boys would not let her play all their games, her aunt decided to teach her housewifely skills (for which the girl already had a liking) by buying a child-size, but completely operative, cookstove. As Jo explained, “I knew Asia [the school’s cook] wouldn’t let you mess in her kitchen very often and it wouldn’t be safe at this fire up here, so I thought I’d see if I could find a little stove for you” (Alcott 1887: 73). All the stoves were very costly, however, so the project was almost abandoned until the rich uncle happened into the store and purchased the biggest toy stove he could find. Jo’s explanation shows that realistic teaching toys were available to girls whose families could afford this form of domestic instruction, and that hearth cooking, even in the early 1870s, was still an option. The transition from

open hearth to stove was indeed a long and gradual one, and it would benefit archaeological analyses of domestic assemblages if it could be determined what cooking methods were employed by the households whose artifacts are studied (see Janowitz, this volume) for a discussion of the effect that the adoption of cookstoves had on the types of vessels, especially red earthenwares, used for cooking.

Another author whose works can be useful for archaeologists is Laura Ingalls Wilder (1867–1957), who wrote the *Little House* books about her own and her husband’s childhoods and early married years. This series contains many details of the families’ daily lives, including the foods they ate and how they were prepared. *Farmer Boy* (1953), the story of Almanzo Wilder’s (1857–1849) boyhood on a farm in upstate New York, first published in 1933, is particularly informative for non-urban Northeastern sites, with its many accounts of meals and food processing (Louis Berger and Associates, Inc. 1994).

### Implications for Archaeological Deposits

Nineteenth-century household deposits up and down the East Coast, especially those from urban areas, share a great deal of superficial sameness in terms of ceramic and faunal composition. While, to some degree, aspects of socioeconomic class can be distinguished, we archaeologists are often relegated to relativistic comparisons between deposits with more or less of this or that type of artifact and kinds of meat sources that are then equated with wealth or status. We lean heavily on presence/absence and quantities of certain artifacts, especially ceramics, to create a sense of distinction between households. The template usage of our most basic tools—identification and dating of artifacts and analysis of faunal materials—is problematic without consideration of geographical region, local history, and the household’s unique profile. Inattention to these factors is often found in the proposed research questions of public archaeology mitigation projects, where ideas are put forth based on their application at other sites. Too often, when research questions cannot be answered from a lack of applicable data, the questions themselves are not reconsidered.

Questions that could not be applied should be scrutinized to see if they are inapplicable as a result of local circumstances and events. Many projects have an end-of-work critique stating why research goals were met or not, and local conditions should be included in this critique. That might be as useful as anything else we as archaeologists do.

The comparative method is a fundamental tool of archaeology, but we historical archaeologists tend to overuse comparisons when we reach beyond the social interaction sphere of a site's inhabitants. Syntheses of multiple sites within an area, however, serve to correct or to realign research priorities by pointing out patterns in what was or was not found. For example, at the Wilmington Eastside site in Delaware, several lots between Seventh and Church streets were excavated (Louis Berger and Associates, Inc. 1992). Several lots yielded deposits contained in barrel privies dating to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Households were mixed, and included American-born people of European and African descent, Jews, Irish Catholics, and people of German and English birth. Incomes varied, as did employment. Some were laborers, while others were skilled and semi-skilled workers. Nevertheless, regardless of ethnic, religious, or social affiliation, all the households consumed the same range of meats and types of cuts. Some deposits were richer in volume of remains than others, but overall they were similar. By the end of the 19th century, Wilmington had butchers and grocers spread throughout the city. In this and other urban areas, butchers obtained their meat cuts from slaughterhouses, selecting what they knew would sell. All butcher shops do not carry the same range of meats, nor do they make the same cuts. They sell a predictable range of types of meats and meat cuts, occasionally offering specials, such as Christmas goose. The similarities observed in the faunal deposits at the Eastside site were due mainly to consumers selecting from what was available at the butcher shop, thus the overall variability seen across the entire assemblage was limited: everyone bought meat from a local butcher, so the faunal remains were similar. The relative amounts of specific higher- and lower-priced cuts were the main indicator of economic differences between households.

The small-finds artifacts from this site, although not the focus of this paper, were also interesting in terms of local conditions. All of the deposits yielded toys, writing slates, folding rulers, and other items that could be associated with schooling. By the start of the 20th century, Wilmington led the nation in requiring public education for both boys and girls, and was one of the first cities to regulate child labor. All the household deposits yielded materials that showed parents invested in their children's education and playtime. Knowing Wilmington's history regarding child-labor and education laws, as well as its regulation of slaughterhouses and butchers, provided a fuller context for the interpretation of the archaeological data.

A different sort of example is the analysis of privy deposits found at the Assay site in New York City (Louis Berger and Associates, Inc. 1990; Pipes 2013). The deposits, which were from one household (based on the presence of pieces of a monogrammed tea set in each) and accumulated over a short period of time, included a large number of creamware and pearlware dishes, along with faunal remains from large joints of meat. A housecleaning event could have been the reason for the discard of the ceramics, but the large amounts of meat represented by the bones were another issue. The household of the owner of the property was not large, but the owner, Courtland van Beuren, was an important official in the Tammany Society.<sup>5</sup> Contemporary newspapers reported on the many communal feasts shared by members of Tammany and provided archaeologists with a possible explanation of the remains as remnants of food consumed by a large group in the setting of a fraternal organization.

## Summary

Archaeological investigations of historical period sites often begin with a search through documentary records. This task yields information about site ownership and occupancy, household structure, inheritance, occupation and employment,

5. The Tammany Society, which later developed into the powerful political machine Tammany Hall, began as a fraternal organization whose members celebrated local and national events with military drills, parades, and feasts (McNamara 1997: 38).



and sometimes ethnicity and religion. It can also discover the presence of diaries, actions at law, and anecdotal stories. This is one of the great joys for us as historical archaeologists: that we can actually know, not just the names of the people whose household remains we are examining, but also, other facts about their daily lives. These personal facts, when considered within a specific question-oriented framework, become essential clues that may help explain both patterned and random, or non-patterned, data within assemblages. Interpretation of the data needs to consider the local consumer reality that might be revealed by sources of information relevant to that place and time. For example, how can the rank value of meat cuts be compared from one city to the next with any degree of certainty without considering local prices? Zooarchaeological investigations at mid-19th-century sites may reveal patterns in frequencies of meats and specific meat cuts that then should be tied to advertised prices by city and date. Without doing so, it cannot be shown that ranking meats and related cuts correlates with socioeconomic status.

In their discussion of consumer behavior in Wilmington, Delaware, LeeDecker et al. (1987) stated that "occupation of the head of the household ... household income strategy, the size and the composition of the household, and the household life cycle" were all linked to 19th-century consumer choices (Lee Decker et al. 1987: 233). The present op-ed piece would add to these factors knowledge of new products and technologies made available to consumers through various media in both words and pictures. In growing consumer markets, the replacement of food items and durable goods was influenced by availability, price, and consumer awareness. Advertisements, cookbooks, city directories, novels and short stories, and prints and engravings contributed to consumer awareness. From the immediacy of newspaper advertisements to the long-term effects of cookbooks, novels, and pictures, their scale of influence depended on the amount of time they were available and how pertinent they were to consumers.

The representation of food in various media offers a pathway to understanding socially complex ideas about food in the 19th century, as well as direct insights into the process of homogenizing and standardizing the production of foods, the composition of meals and their social settings, and the

embedded meanings in dining practices. The printed word and graphic materials in private holdings, libraries, archives, antique stores and, now, on the Internet, offer the insights we archaeologists need to better extract meaning from household remains. It is a matter of considering the information available about the household, and then looking for non-patterned, as well as the standard patterned data, to fill out the picture of the past. Archaeologists may think of media sources as ripples of influence affecting the kinds of foods and household goods consumers bought, how they were used and consumed, and what they meant within the local community. These sources should therefore influence our questions and research designs, and inform our interpretations of foodways in the historical archaeological record.

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