

Early Iowa Cooking

BY SUZANNE BEISEL

The kitchen has changed, but the food remains the same. So be it for the past 100 years in America. People still get hungry and eat just like our grandparents and great-grandparents did, but food preparation is not at all what it used to be.

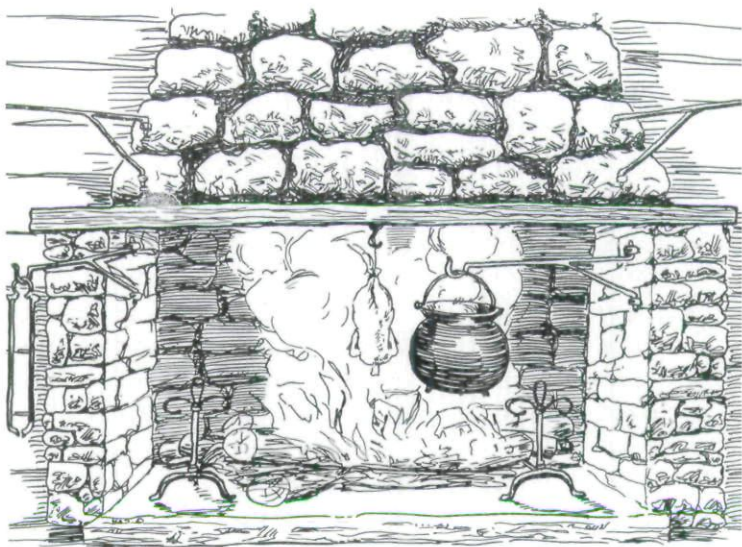
It appears that since the Civil War, the kitchen has been a haven for inventors. Utensils so important in the making of johnny cakes and hominy are now relics, bought, wondered at, looked at, and admired by antique collectors. No longer are they necessary in keeping the family fed.

Among these are wood burning stoves with their hot water reservoirs and warming ovens. A homemaker was very fortunate to have one of these things. Also gone from the kitchen are water buckets, spider kettles, hugh fire places, wash boilers, wood boxes, flour bins, butter churns, cabbage cutters, ash barrels, coffee grinders, cherry pitters, and nutmeg graters. Ice houses are gone and smoke houses are now luxuries.

Today's homemaker has available to her appliances which make the preparation of even the most exotic dishes an after-thought rather than an all-day project. With enough cash (or a little credit) one can easily purchase an electric refrigerator that not only makes and deposits its own ice cubes, but defrosts itself, swivels its own shelves, and keeps butter at spreading temperature while the freezer is at least 30 degrees colder preserving last week's stew, tonight's pie, next week's South African lobster tails . . . and a couple TV dinners.

Replacing the old woodburning stoves, are ovens that tell time and temperature, griddle, broil, bake, simmer, boil, fry and French fry. It even has its own rotisserie and will turn on and off all by itself . . . with an outlet for an electric coffee pot to do the same.

Automatic dishwashers, garbage disposals, electric mixers, toasters, ice crushers, can openers, knife sharpeners, electric knives, juice squeezers, blenders, and carefully marked measuring spoons and cups, considered necessities by some, were at one time only a housewife's exasperated wish.



Someone might think that our underprivileged ancestors might have been rather thin and undernourished, lacking the added vitamins and minerals which our food producers pack into and "fortify" our edibles with today, and assure us are so necessary to our well being. This wasn't so. Recipes from the last half of the 1800's were mouth-watering, nourishing, and complicated enough to bring a blush to a confused '64 bride.

During this period when pasteurized, homogenized, fortified Vitamin A milk wasn't delivered to the back door and if you wanted bread you had to bake it yourself, recipes weren't the simplified, detailed, almost fool-proof, pre-boxed

ones we now have. For instance, today a recipe might read: open box and put contents of package A into a one-quart sauce pan, add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup plus 2 tablespoons of water. Bring to boil. Turn down heat and simmer for 3 minutes. Remove from heat and add contents of can B. Stir and serve 4.

One hundred years ago this recipe might have read: "add a medium - sized cup of milk, butter the size of a lemon, mix until the consistency of cake batter, and put into a quick oven and bake until done."

Where it appears that anyone could whip up the first without much worry of failure, the latter would take a good deal of previous knowledge, instinct and many hours of mother-watching.

Iowa contributed its share to the cooking cause after the Civil War. Recipes and recipe books by homemakers in this state were numerous.

Right before the turn of the century a group of women, Sisters of the Brethren, O Dunker Church, contributed recipes to form the Inglenook Cook Book which was published by the Inglenook magazine, a Dunker publication. The following are a few which were contributed by Iowans. Most of these lack details and are proof that the authors had boundless confidence in the culinary talents of their readers.

BEEF LOAF

Take two pounds of raw beef and one half pound of pork chopped fine and thoroughly mixed, one cup of cracker crumbs (rolled), two well-beaten eggs, one cup of sweet milk, piece of butter size of walnut, add salt and pepper. Mix and bake two hours. Sister Naomi Shaw, Des Moines, Ia.

OYSTER AND CRACKER DRESSING FOR FOWL

Break the crackers in a bowl, pour over then the oysters, and the liquor from them. If now moist enough, a little broth from the bowl may be used. Stuff the fowl and heap the remainder

around it in the roaster, and bake. Sister Mamie Sink, Lenox, Ia.

SNITZ AND KNEP

Take three handfuls of dried sweet apples, soak in water three hours. Then add a lump of butter the size of a hen's egg. For the Knep; Take a large teacupful of butter milk, two eggs, one teaspoonful of soda, pinch of salt, thicken with flour until a little stiffer than cake batter. Boil in a porcelain kettle until thoroughly done. Sister Joannah Mason, Clarksville, Ia.

ROAST TURKEY WITH OYSTER DRESSING

Pick and draw a turkey, then wash in three waters, adding a little soda to the last water to sweeten; dry it well with a clean cloth; then tie skin over neck, fold the wings over back, tie legs down tightly, put in a baker with water to cover and bake for four hours; sprinkle with flour several times while baking; salt and pepper to suit taste. Dressing; take one gallon of bread broken in small pieces; first cut the bread in slices and let dry out well, then put it in a crock, pour over boiling water enough to moisten, cover, let steam for fifteen minutes; then add three well-beaten eggs, one quart of fresh oysters, salt and pepper to taste. One hour before the turkey is ready to be taken from the oven, fill turkey with the dressing and let bake one hour. Sister Mary Rihard, Altoona, Ia.

SAUERKRAUT AND KNEP

Boil one quart for twenty or thirty minutes, after which add a batter made as follows: take one well-beaten egg, three tablespoonfuls of flour one half teaspoonful of baking powder, a pinch of salt, add milk sufficient to make a good batter just stiff enough to drop from the spoon. Add

this to the boiling kraut, by spoonfuls, and boil all together for twenty minutes. Sister Catherine Snyder, Robins, Ia.

In 1884, another cook book appeared on the Iowa scene, *Mrs. Welch's Cook Book*. Mary B. Welch was an instructor in Domestic Economy at the Iowa Agricultural College, now Iowa State University. She was very concerned with nutrition in the planning and preparation of meals. In the introduction she said:

"Coarse food, even though perfectly digested produces coarse natures. Indigestible food is even worse in its effect, for it results in actual disease, and disease of such a character as to influence in marked degree the whole mental outlook. A sour stomach is apt to produce a sour temper. Melancholy, suspicion, envy, false and distorted views of man and things, follow dyspepsia as the shadow follows substance.

"The effect of diet in stimulating evil passions is well known. Its effect also in disease is acknowledged and respected. The wise physician supplements his medicines by carefully selected and skillfully prepared food.

"No one will deny the further proposition that the sensualist, the drunkard, the debauchee in general, is the victim of over-indulgence in eating and drinking, and that his vice cannot be cured and self-controlled re-established without a minute and persistent attention to the needs of the stomach."

She also brought to light to her readers the importance of serving meals:

"The table should be set according to a fixed method and the dishes follow each other in regular succession. While, in the parlor, a certain elegant and apparently careless arrangement is allowable, on the dining table straight lines, right angles, and a strict attention to geometric figures should be the rule. We must trust to a pleasing variety in the forms of dishes, to sparkling glass, highly polished silver, spotless linen, and the charming effect produced by contrasting yet harmonious colors, for attractive and artistic effect."

Here are a few of her "receipts":

PIE PLANT PIE

Stew the pie plant as for sauce, sweeten well, press through cullender or sieve, add to a quantity sufficient for one pie the yolks of three eggs and half a tea-cupful of milk; bake with one crust and cover with meringe.

This can scarcely be told from a lemon pie.

FRIZZLED BEEF FOR BREAKFAST

Brown a piece of butter the size of an egg in a saucepan, add a cup of cream or milk, one teaspoon of flour, mixed with a little cold milk. Have ready one-half pound of thinly shaved smoked beef, add it to the mixture, let it just to a boil.

MOCK OYSTER SAUCE

One tea-cupful of good gravy, one tea-cupful of milk, three dessert-spoonfuls of anchovy sauce, two dessert-spoonfuls of pounded mace, whole black pepper. All to be boiled until thoroughly mixed.

MOCK OYSTERS

One pint of grated green corn, three table-spoonfuls of milk, one tea-cup of flour, one half tea-cup of drawn butter, one tea-spoonful of pepper, one egg. Drop a table-spoonful into hot butter and fry from eight to ten minutes, or can be baked on a griddle. Can be made without eggs and butter.

PICKLED CABBAGE

Take the red cabbage, remove the outer leaves, and shred; sprinkle thoroughly with fine salt; let it remain with salt two days, removing the water; make a pickle with vinegar, four ounces each of

ground pepper and ground ginger, and one ounce of cloves and boil it; put the cabbage in jars, packing closely; when the vinegar with spices is on the boil fill up the jars. Will be good to eat in a week.

Perhaps the one Iowan to gain the greatest recognition in the field of cookbooks was Annie Wittenmeyer. During the Civil War she worked with the U. S. Christian Commission in improving the diets in military hospitals. In 1864, she created the booklet entitled "A Collection of Recipes For The Use Of Special Diet Kitchens in Military Hospitals." The introduction reads as follows:

"Since the beginning of the present war, ten of thousands of our soldiers have become inmates of military hospitals. The provisions of the government for their comfort are very liberal; but the circumstances of war, the constant changes occurring among hospital managers and attendants; the absence of much that is essential in the preparation of delicate food, and the inexperience of those who are mainly intrusted with the important duty of preparing special diet for the sick and wounded, have made it difficult to keep up the supplies, and absolutely impossible to always secure an adequate supply of appropriate food properly prepared.

"That hundreds of our brave soldiers have died of debility, who, if sustained at the proper time with suitable food, might now be in the front ranks of the army, no intelligent medical officer will be likely to deny. The leading medical men of the West express the opinion that in a majority of cases, the diet of patients is of more importance than medicine."

Here are a few of the recipes she created for this purpose:

BOILED HAM

Carefully trim, and wash the ham in clean soap-suds until thoroughly cleansed; soak in cold

water half an hour; parboil one hour, change water and boil until done, adding red pepper, or if red pepper cannot be obtained, use black. When taken from the vessel, remove the skin; best served cold.

COD FISH

Soak well in cold water; remove the bones, and pick into small bits; stew in sufficient water to cover until thoroughly done; add a little pepper a spoonful of fresh butter, some milk and a spoonful of paste.

RICE APPLE DUMPLINGS

Pare and core apples, and fill the space of the core with raw rice. Tie each apple in a separate cloth, and boil till well done. Eat with butter, sugar, and nutmeg.

MULLED WINE

Half pint of wine to same measure of boiling spiced water; beat an egg, a little sugar and orange juice; stir it into the hot liquid, and serve hot, with toasted bread.

Cookbooks which appeared between the Civil War and the turn of the century were often more of a household "how-to-do-it" book than a recipe book. One such book contributed by Iowans was "76" *A Cook Book*, edited by the Ladies of Plymouth Church, Des Moines, 1876.

For instance, in their book they included everything from recipes for fried chicken to recipes for restoring gilt frames.

The following are a few examples:

WHITE CLOUDS

One and a half cups of white sugar, a half cup

of butter, a half cup of sweet milk, whites of four eggs, a small half-teaspoon of soda, one teaspoon of soda, one teaspoon of cream of tartar and two and a half cups of flour. Flavor with almond or rose.

WEDDING CAKE

Ten eggs, one pound of butter, one pound of sugar, one pound of flour, four pounds of raisins after stoning, four pounds of currants after washing, two pounds of citron, one ounce of nutmeg, one ounce of cinnamon and a fourth of an ounce of cloves.

WHIGS

One quart of milk, five eggs, one and one-fourth quarts of flour, butter the size of an egg in the flour, salt. Bake in cups, three-fourths full, for one hour. Nice for tea.

DES MOINES CRUMPETS

Three teacups of raised dough, four table-spoons of melted butter beaten to a cream, three eggs, one coffeecup of milk. Pour in buttered pans and let rise one-half hour. Bake till done.

ENGLISH CURE FOR DRUNKENNESS

Five grains of sulphate of iron, ten grains of magnesia, eleven drachms of peppermint water and one drachm of spirits of nutmeg; to be taken twice a day. This preparation acts as a stimulant and tonic and partially supplies the place of the accustomed liquor, and prevents that absolute physical and moral prostration that follows a sudden breaking off from the use of stimulating drinks.

EYE WATER RECIPE

Cut a fresh hard-boiled egg into halves while hot, remove the yolk, fill the cavity with white vitroil, close the egg again, place in a vessel and cover tight to prevent the steam from escaping. Let it stand ten minutes, then take off the shell and strain the other part through a cloth. Add one teaspoon of sugar, one teaspoon of salt and a gill of rain water.

RING WORM

Put a penny into a tablespoon of vinegar, let it remain until it becomes green, and wash the ringworm with this two or three times a day.

TONIC

One drachm of pulverized colombo, one drachm of rasp. d. quartia, two drachm of peruvian bark, one drachm of orange peel, one drachm of ginger, two ounces of loaf sugar and a half pint of liquor. Let it stand twenty-four hours and then add a half pint of water.

STARCH

Mix with cold water; pour on boiling water till it thickens; then add two teaspoons of sugar and butter the size of a nut. This gives a good gloss.

COLOGNE WATER

Two drams of English oil of lavender, two drams of oil of cloves, two drams of oil of bergamot, twenty drops of otto of rose, twenty

drops of oil of cinnamon, one dram of essence of musk and one dram of rectified spirits.

GOOD CEMENT

Alum and plaster of Paris well mixed with water, and used in a liquid state, will form a very useful cement. It will be found quite handy for many purposes. It forms a very hard composition, and for fixing the brasses, etc., on lamps, nothing could be better.

FOR CLEANING HAIR

Make a thick suds with castile soap and one pint of soft water; add one egg well beaten, two tablespoons of ammonia and two teaspoons of pulverized borax. Bottle it; pour a little on the hair and rinse it off with clean water.

So, it is obvious that ladies of the house *haven't always* been able to run to the store for a jar of jam, a bottle of catsup, a can of string beans, a carton of frozen strawberries or a box of noodles. Everything in their kitchens from mustard to molasses was "homemade."

Today the meaning of the term "homemade" has certainly been drastically distorted if not completely lost. Yet it is treasured by the hucksters who delight to imply that somehow wonderful old Aunt Jemima personally stirs up each batch of pancake flour, Mrs. Smucker cooks each jar of preserved peaches on her venerable old gas range, Uncle Ben gathers the rice in his leaky old row boat, and that Fanny Farmer personally dips each soft center into a big old copper kettle of soft chocolate and then gently and lovingly packs each scrumptious bon-bon into its individual corrugated paper nest.

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