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The American Cauldron

If each of all the races which have been subsisted in the vast Middle West could contribute one dish to one great midwestern cauldron, it is certain that we'd have therein a most foreign and most gigantic stew: the grains that the French took over from the Indians, and the breads that the English brought later, hotly spiced Italian dishes and subtly seasoned Spanish ones, the sweet Swedish soups and the sour Polish ones, and all the Old World arts brought to the preparing of American beefsteak and hot mince pie.

Such a cauldron would contain more than many foods: it would be at once, a symbol of many lands and a melting pot for many people.

Many peoples, yet one people; many lands, one land.

—Nelson Algren, Illinois Office

America's culinary history is enough to make anyone scream. By which I mean the accepted line of thinking held mostly by the folks who write about food and who reside in the populated cities along our coastlines. You know the line I mean, the great lament concerning our national cuisine and the poverty of its heritage. It is not a pretty tale they tell at all. I have a feeling that at the heart of these hard appraisals lies a self-conscious regret that the food we think of as truly American—think pies and barbecues, thick stews, a good roasted chicken, a tender slab of steak—did not romantically develop over hundreds of years from the rustic charms of peasant fare through to the haughty demands of imperial refinements. Instead, our cuisine, like much of American life, developed on

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the fly, in a rush from one place to another, in a great confluence of necessities, contrasting agendas, and, most important, unprecedentedly varied cultural influences. Our dishes were bound by the imperative to survive. The strange things that were discovered growing along the way, tramping in the woods, or swimming in the streams could perhaps be made tasty, or at the very least palatable, with the addition of some dried herbs and spices, which by forethought or fortune had been tucked in a calico pocket or leather pouch for the long journey out from a distant home to this unfamiliar new land where another, possibly better, life could be made.

What else but a mess could develop in such a haphazard fashion? And a mess is what many have taken American food to be when compared to the glories of other countries' cuisines. Let me just clarify that I am not excusing the corporate adulteration of our national food supply and the resulting mess this has engendered to our health and palate. Nor am I forgetting any of our truly lamebrained cooking stumbles (white sauce—and its horrid sister, French dressing—as an accompaniment to everything; the entire health craze of the 1870s; and anything with potato chips or canned fruit in the recipe, to name some of my favorites). Instead, what I am trying to untangle from these knots are the roots of American cooking and the unique traditions that went along with sitting down at a table among our fellow countrymen.

The bad press that our national cuisine has received at times is partly due to timing. You can't tell me every other country in the world has not had its share of bad kitchen days. But, in comparison to others, ours is a decidedly young cuisine. Think about it—compared to our four hundred years of cooking, nearly every cuisine that is considered great has been developing for at least a thousand years. On top of this, our cooking has had the misfortune to develop just when mass media was beginning to flourish, which subsequently allowed our most egregious sins to be so widely broadcast. Yet, in its continuing development over the last few decades, a new reverence for some of our culinary treasures has taken hold. This, in turn, has spurred the increasing growth of fresh, well-grown fruits, vegetables, grains, and meats that are now being offered in most markets—from high-price chichi organic outposts to inner-city chain groceries. Greenmarkets chock full of local farm produce now take over many city streets and town squares, and a long overdue scrutiny of our food supply is increasingly being demanded. And yet, despite all this,



Forks and spoons laid out for the Junior Chamber of Commerce buffet, Eufaula, Oklahoma, February 1940. (Russell Lee)

there remains a stubborn conviction about the history of American cooking that it amounts to nothing more than a lowly inheritance of indigestible sauces, unhealthy lard-laced dough, and everything fried in killer fats to a flirtatiously golden fare-thee-well.

Thank God, then, for *America Eats!*, the manuscript written for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) by out-of-work writers during the Great Depression. The WPA, which grew out of the 1934 Civil Works Emergency Relief Act, employed nearly 9 million people who completed more than a million projects across the country, including the construction of roads, bridges, parks, and public buildings. Several art-related programs for the relief of writers, artists, and theater professionals were also set up. The Federal Writers' Project, alone, involved thousands of laid-off reporters, fledgling novelists and poets (some of whom would go on to greatness), country librarians, housewives, and recent college graduates. After a somewhat lengthy, and what many considered to be a personally invasive, financial screening process to certify they were poor enough, the

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writers employed by the project were paid—depending on the cost of living in their state or city—anywhere from \$50 to \$103 a week. For this, they produced such works as histories of local institutions and communities, nature guides, and, most famously, state travelogues and oral histories of former slaves and general laborers—from stonecutters to circus dancers.

In the later years of the program, one more assignment was added to the docket: writers, sometimes with photographers from the Federal Artists' Project in tow, were asked to find out how America ate. Specifically, they were told to produce “an account of group eating as an important American social institution; its part in development of American cookery as an authentic art and in the preservation of that art in the face of mass production of foodstuff and partly cooked foods and introduction of numerous technological devices that lessen labor of preparation but lower quality of the product.” It was to be called *America Eats!*—that final exclamation point a critical cue for the exuberance the subject was intended to arouse.

It was not to be a cookbook—the editor and chief motivator behind the book, Katharine Amend Kellock, was adamant about this point. In fact, she forbade any former cookbook writers or cooking teachers from submitting material for the book. What she envisioned, instead, were stories about local events where food was to be served: political, church, and community fund-raisers; religious revivals; possum dinners at Elks Lodges; ladies' tea socials; family reunions; rodeos; state fairs; harvest festivals; cemetery-cleaning parties; and hobo encampments. The great theme of *America Eats!* had little to do with food—very few recipes were to be included—as it was to celebrate the “importance of social gatherings that glorify the non-professional cook and keep traditional cookery alive.”

The timing of the project was particularly fortunate. In the 1930s, people were still alive who, as pioneers and immigrants, crossed the Great Plains in wagons or worked their way as miners, loggers, and saloon keepers. There were old Native Americans whose memories held faint traces of daily lives and rituals before their tribes were shattered. There were cowboys and chuck wagon cooks who once roamed along the cattle trails. In the 1930s, the family farm was still producing much of what the country ate and, although grocery shelves held some processed and engineered foodstuff, it was hardly what it would be even five years

later. In the window of time the federal writers were out gathering material for *America Eats!*, the dishes set on many of the nation's tables could be traced back in ingredients and structure to our forebears. No matter how humble the circumstances, a delicious meal could still be gathered from the land—hunted or foraged, grown in garden patches or out in fields that were tended the way they had always been tended for generations.

In the course of several months, and sometimes expanding on research conducted for other projects, such as the slave narratives and travel guides, the writers filed hundreds of evocative stories that captured as never before the role food played in forming America's society. These stories—often less about particular dishes than about what swirled around them—showed how singularly important it was to our traditions to congregate around a table with one another and enjoy the meal at hand. This practice is stronger in our country than anywhere else because, in a nation inhabited by strangers, sharing a meal lessened the loneliness of wandering across unfamiliar landscapes and enabled us to quickly form alliances and governments where none had existed before. The stories written by the federal writers displayed all our peculiarities, devotions, and inclinations; the social, racial, and ethnic prejudices of the period; our inventive natures honed from our frontier-age experience that led to some glorious creations, but also the growing threat posed by that very ingenuity, which was increasingly leading us astray in a new age of technology. When strung together, these stories formed a picture of a lively people still uneasily coming together as a nation—and yet coming together indeed with the help of an ever-evolving and intriguing cuisine.

“If the book has a basic purpose, it is to make people appreciate a much-neglected aspect of our culture, the American table, as much as a few expatriates do the French,” wrote a supervisor in a memo to the state offices. “If we can make Americans realize that they have the best table in the world, we shall have helped to deepen national patriotism.”

And yet *America Eats!* never saw the light of day. The Federal Writers' Project (as was true of all the WPA's arts programs) was always a contentious program that was continually attacked by Congress as both frivolity and a haven for communist reprobates. The *South Bend Tribune* in Indiana singled out the *America Eats!* project in October 1941 for particular scorn, calling it a “foolish boondoggle.” With World War II looming on



*Women cutting cakes and pies at barbecue dinner, Pie Town,
New Mexico, October 1940. (Russell Lee)*

the horizon, funding for the project was gradually withdrawn and, in 1943, cut altogether. State offices were told to box up whatever WPA papers they had on hand—including all of *America Eats!*, which had been in the final editing stages—and to send the material to the Library of Congress. A few states ignored Washington's directives and kept the material in their own archives. In other regions—as in Rhode Island, where the great New England hurricane of 1938 flooded coastal offices—material was completely lost.

Every now and then, though, parts of *America Eats!* have surfaced. Culinary historians and social scientists have long combed through the papers to use as source materials and to add color to their own theses. A wonderful cookbook, *A Gracious Plenty*, by John T. Edge, incorporated snippets of text, recipes, and photographs. A number of years ago, the University of Iowa published the Midwest region manuscript of *America Eats!* reputed to be written by Nelson Algren, who worked as the supervisor of the Illinois office, but it was more likely the work of many hands—including Richard Wright and Saul Bellow.

But the general public has not had the pleasure of sinking deep into the best of *America Eats!* with its cheerful, colorful writing, so filled with tasty tidbits and lore (ever wonder who stirred the first American cocktail? Or how the Plains Indians made jerk meat?), strange recipes (anyone for that entrails-and-cow-heart-laden cowboy favorite “son-of-a-bitch” stew?), and affecting songs and chants (“See dese gread big sweet pertaters/Right chere by dis chicken’s side,/Ah’m de one what bakes dese taters/Makes dem fit to suit yo’ pride”). The FWP was the first professional writing job for many of the people employed by the project, and the Washington editors’ main directive to avoid “effusive style and the clichés adopted by some writers on food” and to have “a keen interest in sensory perception and in their fellow-men, their customs and crotchets,” was hard for many of them to follow. Frankly, a lot of the notes and stories in the *America Eats!* archives, apart from those submitted from the big cities (New York City, especially) and pockets in the South where there was a glut of professional writers employed by the project, can be pretty flat. The editors in the Washington office were always chiding the local state offices to produce better copy—make the stories more enticing and to the point, more grammatical and better spelled. Yet even the most pedestrian entries for *America Eats!* manage to capture a spark of found knowledge, a bit of whimsy lent by distinct characters or a chance line of dialogue that brings the subject and the times alive.

The difficulty of bringing *America Eats!* to full life in an accessible way has dampened what the surviving papers came to celebrate so clearly: a lively cuisine that is always evolving with the continual influence of a changing populace. One of the most contentious yet most important themes rumbling through the papers was how a region’s cooking manners were influenced by different people, especially foreigners, moving into a territory and gradually rubbing one method of doing something against another until it became incorporated as a local tradition. What immigrants shared with the people who had settled before them was the hard experience of leaving behind their homelands and being faced with the prospects of a vast wilderness filled with unfamiliar plants and animals that forced them to be imaginative about the ingredients they used. Drawn together out of necessity and loneliness, out of the need to create something beyond themselves simply to survive, all these strangers—the constant flow of newcomers weaving among the people who preceded

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them—slowly inched toward conceiving a common table and helped to give birth to an inimitable national identity.

I found *America Eats!* the way most people do—seeing it first mentioned in a book I was reading for research and becoming intrigued enough by the passage to get on a train and take myself to the manuscript room at the Library of Congress. Three days later, I emerged wanting nothing more than to tuck a sheaf of the *America Eats!* stories under my arm and take off in pursuit of our national cuisine. I was certainly hungry enough after reading about Aunt Orianna’s heap of spicy chitlins, which she made to help her niece put on a rent party down in North Carolina. I wanted to taste raw sugarcane juice bubbling in tubs in Barbour County, Alabama, and have a say in who should be crowned the next Sauerkraut Queen at the harvest fair in Forreston, Illinois. I knew a good political season was shaping up and, as someone in the Oklahoma office wrote, “Politics and barbeques go so naturally together because it takes the same amount of time to cook the meat as it does to stroke the voters,” so I figured there was bound to be a richly sauced, slowly smoked pig somewhere. There were salmon roasts to savor in the state of Washington, fish fries to attend in Louisiana, clambakes on Long Island, and pancake breakfasts in Vermont. And I imagined that would just be the start of a really great drive.

In my enthusiasm, there was a lot I was conveniently forgetting about the Federal Writers’ Project and the experience of its writers. Take, for instance, the fact that, except for the Library of Congress holdings, the *America Eats!* papers are spread across the nation and in varying degrees of preservation, most typed on fading, fragile onionskin paper. Of the original five sections (Northeast, South, Middle West, Far West, and Southwest) only the South’s was fully completed when the project was suspended. At first glance, this isn’t at all surprising, considering that the South is thought of to this day as the heart of American cooking. It was and still is naturally blessed with a vivid agricultural and social heritage, its people rooted to their communities unlike anywhere else in the country. This formed deep veins of traditions the staff writers could readily draw from. However, the section’s completion had more to do with Lyle Saxon, the South’s editor who was also put in charge of the entire project, and who finished his work in record time so the other

regions would have a working example of the content and style he expected from them.

The other regions were—and remain—a little harder to complete because of a more mobile, and in some places (especially parts of the West) sparse, population. The Great Depression forced people to leave their homes—sometimes out of necessity with the Dust Bowl or foreclosures or unemployment; sometimes because of our inherited belief there is always someplace, anyplace, better than where we find ourselves. People roamed about the country, lost contact with where they had been, wished to put the past behind them. And yet the past was still alive in old memories and a wistfulness for the seeming stability and bravery of years gone by.

The writers in many of the state offices had a time hunting people down and, when they found them and succeeded in getting them to sit still for a talk, found it difficult to sort out truth from fables. The writers were handed imprecise recipes and unreliable sources as if they were written on stone tablets. So, too, when push came to a deadline shove, the writers (as practitioners to this day are wont to occasionally do) weren't above making up whole stories and characters. So while my arms were filled with a pile of stories from the library, I soon realized I would have to search out other holdings to fill in the gaps, and spend considerable time distinguishing truth from myth and sorting out the differences between a pinch and a dab.

The bigger challenge I faced, though, was to try to stay true to the original spirit, as well as the guidelines, that were set out by the Washington editors for the project. Delving into the correspondence, it soon became clear that, strictly from a structural point of view, *America Eats!* was wobbly from the start. There was a fairly deep divide between the editors and writers about what exactly constituted American food. The editors, sitting in their offices, had strong (and sometimes contradicting) opinions about what food and traditions to include, while the writers, in their travels about the countryside, were simply recording what they were finding or personally knew about specific regions and their dishes, and which many times ran counter to what the editors dictated.

Kellock, herself a strong and directive personality, had her own ideas about how the book was to be put together. But she was less than effective in making her wishes and desires understood by her editors and writers, and the correspondence reveals much to-ing and fro-ing between an increasingly hassled Kellock to her fraying staff about what she

wanted and what she was not getting. If there had been time to bring the book to fruition, she would most likely have rewritten the final copy herself. Most times, this would have meant treating the writers' stories merely as notes, extracting lines of information, using snips of dialogue for color, but leaving much of the original writers' styles and substances on the cutting-room floor.

For my purposes, then, I would have to find a way to bring the narrative together that would explore the original ideas behind the project, but would honor what the writers eventually uncovered. I tried to stay within Kellock's directive to discover "the part [American cookery] has played in the national life, as exemplified in the group meals that preserve not only traditional dishes but also traditional attitudes and customs." I decided the best way to do this was to follow the papers, to go to the places the original writers went to, and to find the group meals they recorded. If the events or gatherings no longer occurred, I would attempt to find a modern equivalent.

What this also meant was that I would have to forgo any meaningful discussion about ideas and trends in American cooking that have emanated from sections of the country the FWP editors considered at the time to be unnecessary for their purposes. I would not, for instance, be able to explore much of California, even though it has contributed so much to our culinary table in the last forty years. The state is woefully underrepresented in the original papers because the editors considered it (particularly the Los Angeles region) to be a culinary wasteland. One editor fumed: "What these contributions exemplify is the mongrel character of Southern California today—its eagerness to have traditions, the commercial character of its attempts to make such traditions."

Cities would be hard to cover, as well. There are few, if any, papers specifically on Chicago, San Francisco, or Miami—places we take for granted today as having a robust culinary style. The federal writers' New York City office was the only one asked to produce material about eating in a city because it was, at the time, considered the epicenter of urban life in a way the editors considered other American cities were not. Even the unrivaled culinary traditions of New Orleans—long established and honored—are told in the papers not as a product of city life but as part of a unique ethnic culture.

What, exactly, to do about immigrant dishes was another contentious area between the writers, Kellock, and her editors that I would have to



Chitterlings, fish, and sugarcane on a street in the Negro Section in the Delta, Clarksdale, Mississippi, November 1939. (Marion Post Wolcott)

accommodate. The raw reporting notes and manuscripts from the writers reveal that, from the start, our dishes—deriving from the traditions of the original settlers and conquerors (British in the North; French in the northern Midwest and Louisiana; Spanish in Florida, the West, and Southwest)—were always being tweaked, and at times wholly transformed, by the arrival of other traditions. Yet, the heavily edited final manuscript (or what is left of it) clings pretty much to the standard British image except, that is, when the editors felt otherwise. Much of the correspondence between Washington and state offices about *America Eats!* suggests that, in most cases not settled on an editor's personal caprice, a dish's national identity—whether it was sufficiently distinct to our country or remained foreign—depended on the region and how the editors felt about the particular immigrant group or the length of time the group had been settled in America. For instance, the editors allowed the Wisconsin office to write about Norwegian lutefisk dinners in November but not German sauerkraut festivals during the cabbage harvest, although they did ask for the inclusion

of German booya suppers (which, when the arguments start, are generally decided to be more French than German) as a great example of traditional American eating. Another editor insisted the writers find what he called a “German New Year’s Dinner” that he had once read about in a memoir. For years, the writers hunted for such a dinner but never found that one even took place. Unconvinced, the editor continued to demand an account of the dinner up until the end of the project.

Finally, I came up against the hard fact that I wouldn’t be able to count on an army of fellow workers who would help me scout the countryside for good modern-day stories. Many of the people on the FWP payroll lived in the communities they wrote about. They knew the people they interviewed—or had enough local experience to know exactly who to turn to when they needed information. If they didn’t know the communities, the writers traveled in teams, with one of them going in first to scope out the territory and get names and addresses of people to talk to. (In an interview on NPR’s *The Kitchen Sisters*, Stetson Kennedy, one of the few remaining FWP writers, talked about having to use Zora Neale Hurston as a front runner because, as a black woman traveling through rural Florida, she’d be safer if she wasn’t seen in the company of the white writers.) The best I could come up with was a thin membrane of friends stretched across the country who had friends of their own to send my inquiries to. The Internet, of course, became a huge help—as was calling up local newspapers, chambers of commerce, and government offices and needling them for information and contacts.

Eventually, though, I just decided I was ready to go out there and let the story find itself.

“You’re going to do what?” was the common response when I revealed my plan—to follow in the federal writers’ footsteps—contemplating as I was a land of pulled pork sandwiches, coconut layer cakes, roasted corn, Brunswick stews, pecan pies! My friends’ disbelief reflected their acceptance of the belief that “our food sucks,” augmented by a widespread (and, let’s admit it, snobbish) belief that nothing remains of regional food anymore—let alone good food—west of the Hudson River and east of California’s Interstate 5. It’d be strip malls and fast food as far as the eye could see out there, I was warned.

I’m not a bubble-headed fool: I knew I’d encounter mountains of fried foodstuff and streams of rehydrated, reconstituted, and carbonized concentrated something or other, but I was also dead certain I’d find plenty of

goodness, too. So I'd pull out the federal writers' stories and explain how I would use them as guideposts, traveling to the same towns and communities, many of them down unmapped country roads, some even off the grid. I'd tell them I would be attending the same fairs and dinners the 1930s writers went to, all the while trying my best to discover similar local blue-ribbon dishes and cooks. After I'd get through my explanation, I'd invariably invite my listeners to come along on the ride with me, especially if they promised to help me eat whatever we came across. As often as not, my generous offer was met with a dubious look and a polite refusal.

Well, fine then, I said and went out and bought a lot of maps. In lieu of payment from any farsighted federal arts program, the home-equity loan on the house was increased to supplement my way, and then I stopped at the drugstore and stocked up on Tums and Pepto-Bismol and a host of other stomach remedies (just in case). I arranged piles of *America Eats!* stories and an equal pile of Internet searches and newspaper clippings on the car's front seat, and at least a dozen different maps on the dashboard. And then, on a hot day in May, filled with an optimist's giddy spirit, I took off across America, looking for good things to eat.

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Traditional Polyglot

by *George Natanson, Oregon Office*

There was a controversy going on in Prineville Church circles. Mrs. Cyrus Montcalm had scoffed at the idea that Oregon had produced anything in the way of traditional foods. The argument waxed hot among the members, especially the ladies, who prided themselves on being of pioneer stock. They were certain that many present day dishes must have been originated by the old settlers who came to Oregon in the great migration period.

Mrs. Cyrus Montcalm was adamant. She insisted that there were no dishes that could be called distinctly Oregonian. The upshot was, that the indignant members decided to show Mrs. Cyrus Montcalm that she didn't know what she was talking about. They decided the best means of settling the argument was to give a church supper featuring what they considered traditional Oregon cookery.



Tables set up for St. Thomas Church picnic supper, Bardstown, Kentucky, August 1940. (Marion Post Wolcott)

At the appointed day and hour in the church basement on rows of tables, a gastronomic display lay spread before eager eyes. Mrs. Showem exhibited what she termed was Oregon Baked Beans, despite the fact that Boston was credited with the recipe.

“Beans are beans,” said the determined Mrs. Showem, “whether they are baked in Boston or Prineville. There wasn’t any Prineville when my grandmother landed on this sage brush plain and cooked the first mess of beans in this part of the country. If that ain’t tradition, what is? And don’t forget, Mrs. Cyrus Montcalm,” said the lady with great emphasis, “Oregon can make just as much noise about it as Massachusetts can!”

Mrs. Peckem displayed what she termed Oregon Johnny Cakes. She had come prepared to serve them piping hot right off a griddle especially prepared for her. Her grandmother brought the recipe from Rhode Island. Mrs. Pettycomb displayed Oregon Hash. Her grandfather boasted of that dish. But, she admitted, he had remembered it from a New England boyhood.

Down the line they went. Dishes from the south, east, and north. Each

woman insisting that her contribution should be considered a traditional Oregon dish. Mrs. Cyrus Montcalm scoffed at them all.

“Ridiculous!” she cried. “Every one of these dishes is a copy of an original brought from another state. It’s remarkable how biased you Oregonians can be! If we are to abide by the word tradition, I fear, ladies, you are all doomed to disappointment. But if you insist upon being traditional, let us compromise by calling this tempting display, polyglot tradition. That is what it can be aptly termed and you must accept it as such.”

“Well!” piped up Mrs. Snaily. “I wouldn’t insult my parrot with that kind of a name.”

“However,” retorted Mrs. Cyrus Montcalm, “parrots come under the same category.”

“Hm,” whispered Mrs. Snickers to her neighbor. “Maybe parrots belong to that—that poly business—but I’ll bet theys [*sic*] more cat in her than in a catamount.”

“Ladies!” The sonorous voice of the Reverend Heavenly boomed forth. “I’m sure we can console ourselves with being polyglot. I dare say that puts us in a class by ourselves. Let us consider for a moment how very fortunate we are. Here in Oregon we have collected the best dishes from all over America. From those pioneer families we hail from our southland we have the best of southern cooking. From the east comes the traditional dishes that are so widely known. From the north the hearty foods of the woodsman and the trapper. Now let us put all these together and see what we have. We have the best that our sister states have boasted. We have a wealth of ideas that will in time become traditional with us. With this blend of gastronomic ideas, think of the opportunities for hospitality that lie before us. Yes indeed! Polyglot tradition will lead us to greater things! You ladies, by blending a delicious sauce of the south with a meat recipe of the east, will, in time, bring our state into epicurean glory.” He bowed.

The ladies applauded heartily. He raised his hand in dramatic signal that he was not yet through. Smiling broadly, he reached over and lifted a tempting looking dish from the table. Slowly and lovingly he pushed his spoon into the smooth and purplish substance. Lifting the spoon, he placed it in his mouth, drawing it out slowly with a delighted, “Ah-h!” He turned to Mrs. Surprise, who was watching him with apprehension, and bowed. The Reverend Heavenly then turned to the ladies. “Ladies, I am convinced that we may lay claim to a tradition. I have just tasted what

Mrs. Surprise calls Summer Pudding. In Oregon we claim that our wild berries have an exceptional flavor found nowhere else in America. Mrs. Surprise,” he turned toward her and held out his plate, “While I indulge in another plate of Oregon’s traditional pudding, will you tell the ladies how it is made?”

Mrs. Surprise happily helped his reverence to another plate, and said, “First you pick the berries.”

“Do tell!” piped up a sarcastic retort from somewhere in the room.

Mrs. Surprise realized she was not in favor. With her chin in the air and eyebrows arched, she continued. “Stew them with sugar to taste. Butter slices of white bread and cut the crusts off. Arrange alternate layers of bread and stewed berries in serving dish. Press a plate firmly on top of serving dish and drain off juice. Set the pudding aside for half a day, and serve cold with heavy cream.”

“Ah,” sighed the Doctor of Divinity, rolling the last mouthful of pudding reverently in his mouth as though he were loath to part with it. “We have tradition with us. This is indeed Oregon short cake.”