When I began gathering early ethnic American cookbooks, one by one, I assumed that as a collection they would come to represent a certain genre of American culinary history. And they do. But the more I examined the books, the more they forced me to see them as evocative chapters of the American immigrant saga, in which the personal experiences were more meaningful than the litany of recipes.

The stew in the American melting pot is spiced with many diverse culinary cultures. From the very beginning British, French, Dutch, German, Hispanic, and African American influences were added to the Native American. Thereafter as each group of immigrants—even each individual immigrant—arrived on these shores, they added to the olio. And they wrote cookbooks. The intrinsic value of these earlier ethnic American cookbooks is matched only by their scarcity. For many, only a few copies have been found and thus have not been widely recognized. Some of the books were written in English, and others, in the immigrant’s first language; some were bilingual. Sometimes the recipes were 100 percent American to help acculturate the immigrants; other times they were from the Old World to help preserve remembered culinary traditions. Often the books contained more than recipes. They might be directed toward those who went into service as cooks, housekeepers, restaurateurs, or waiters. They might offer “how to” advice on adjusting to life in America. Many books combining one or more of these features appeared after the Civil War. Although these books are similar in some ways, each offers a different, specific, and intriguing perspective on how the melting pot was created. The process worked both ways: the newcomer learned of “American” cooking and gave back some flavor, some savor of his or her own.

The British, French, Dutch, German, Hispanic, African American, and Native American books and contributions are known and recognized, and they continue to be more or less well documented. In this article, I will introduce some of the less obvious culinary cultures and the cross-fertilization of ethnic cuisines in America. Although some immigrants brought their cookbooks with them, many others bought them here, either published by the growing foreign-language press in America or imported. I examine here only the American imprints. What follows is a representative sample, some described in enough detail to offer a taste, others simply illustrated. Taken together they present a good introduction to this literature.

Hindu Dietetics: With Hints on Cooking and Recipes

Purity of thought depends upon the purity of food.

It was a bit surprising to discover that there was an Indo-Aryan press in Minneapolis early in the twentieth century. Details on the company and the book have been difficult to unearth, despite my best efforts and those of the Minnesota Historical Society. But the book itself perhaps reveals its raison d’etre.

In the foreword, Minnie Jensen of Omaha, Nebraska, lauds the author, Dr. K.D. Shastri (Renasres, India), whose lectures on “Food and Health Explained” she attended, along with “numerous men and women in various walks of life who were seeking after a more rational mode of living.” They urged him to prepare this treatise on Hindu dietetics. I have been unable to determine where and when these lectures occurred but theorize that they were at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, since Dr. Shastri mentions in his introduction that

The influence of Hindu thought on the life of the American people since the Columbian Exposition held in Chicago during 1893 has been immeasurably great. Thinking people stepped forward to discover, mostly out of curiosity, if India had anything to offer the west. They eagerly sought information. With the demand there came the supply.
Several movements of higher thought, one after another, occupied the field. The old Hindu maxim “Purity of thought depends upon the purity of food” was emphasized everywhere.

During the last few years, vegetarian restaurants and cafeterias have developed in this country.

While lecturing in different parts of the United States, I have found a great demand for such information (vegetarianism), especially among those who are aspiring to live a rational life.

In addition to an essay on the Hindu philosophy of life and food, the book contains a small number of vegetarian recipes, including Lentil Soup (Dal), Rice Pudding (Pius), and Cream of Wheat (Hulwa).

Whether the genesis of this book was, in fact, the Columbian Exposition, and how widely Dr. Shastri’s influence extended, I do not know. There are few copies of this book extant. It is an unusual early Hindu culinary contribution.

Mount Lebanon to Vermont

Many formulas for Oriental delicacies which will appeal to all.

A classic American immigrant story underlies this book. A well-travelled and rather remarkable family from Syria emigrated to the United States in 1892 and found here fortune and the good life. In 1916 the author wrote this autobiography, fully covering his early life and family in “the district of Lebanon in Syria,” his travels to America, his life in America, and his many visits back to Syria. The chapter on his voyage to America, entitled “America At Last,” features a photograph of the Statue of Liberty. In all of his travels abroad, Haddad comments on foods and culinary behavior.

The author wrote this book partially to preserve his family heritage and partially to repay his adopted land for its blessings. What better way to do the latter than to share his family’s Syrian recipes with the American people.

The recipes include Stuffed Grape Leaves, Meat Balls a la Beyrouth, Fried Lambs’ Brains, Dandelions with Meat, and Turkish Coffee.

George Haddad enhanced his new country in other ways. He was head of a large and extended family of contributing and successful citizens. He felt that Vermont maple syrup was a superior product and introduced it to friends in France and Syria. In 1897, he introduced imported Oriental rugs and kimonos [sic] to Vermont. In 1902, at the Rutland County Agricultural Fair, he displayed Turkish embroidery and was awarded a premium certificate. On one of his trips to the East, Haddad uncovered a fossil fish, which he sent on to the American Museum of Natural History. There, it was examined and identified to be the only known
specimen of a prehistoric fish, *Coelodus syriacus*. The museum made a cast of the specimen and thanked and acknowledged Haddad’s contribution; a copy of the letter is included in this book.

John A. Mead, governor of Vermont, wrote the introduction to the book. He praises George Haddad as a man “industrious and trustworthy, honorable and patriotic, being very loyal to his adopted country.” He postulates that one way Haddad had of generously paying back his adopted country was by sharing his autobiography and “many formulas for Oriental delicacies which will appeal to all housekeepers, for the confections of the Orient are famous.”

Haddad’s last words in the book are: “I thank God my children were born here and are getting their education in Rutland.”

**Jewish Cookery Book**


*Jewesses have not disdained attending to culinary matters.*

The first Jewish cookbook published in America was Esther Levy’s *Jewish Cookery Book*. Few details are known about the life of Mrs. Esther (Jacobs) Levy, but we know she compiled a remarkable cookbook. She wrote for Jewish housewives who were tempted to abandon Jewish dietary laws in an effort to assimilate. At the time her book was published, the American Jewish community was being pulled in many competing directions: should one keep the old traditions, attempt to assimilate, or perhaps join the emerging Reform movement? She wanted her readers to understand that “Without violating the precepts of our religion, a table can be spread, which will satisfy the appetites of the most fastidious.”

In this respect, Mrs. Levy followed in the footsteps of *The Jewish Manual*, a work printed in England a quarter of a century earlier. This first English-language Jewish cookbook was published anonymously but is credited to Lady Moses (Judith) Montefiore, a prominent Jewish philanthropist. She, too, wanted to demonstrate how to achieve the ultimate in culinary refinements within the restraints of *kashruth* (keeping kosher and following Jewish ritual requirements).

Since the Jewish presence in England is of very long duration and in America dates back to 1654, it is not surprising that references to Jewish cooking and culinary practices can be found in earlier cookbooks on both sides of the...
Atlantic, well before the publication of the first cookbook devoted solely to Jewish culinary arts.

In America, comments on Jewish culinary practices can be found in the first southern cookbook, Mary Randolph’s *The Virginia Housewife* (1824). Both of Thomas De Voe’s classics on the markets of New York, *The Market Book* (1862) and *The Market Assistant* (1867), mention Jewish recipes and practice. Mrs. Croly’s *Jennie June’s American Cookery Book* (1866) has a complete chapter of “Jewish Receipts.”

Mrs. Levy’s book contains more than recipes. There are suggested menus, diets for invalids, chapters on making cheese and wine and pickles and vegetables, household hints, a month-by-month listing of seasonable foods, information on culinary utensils, and a Jewish calendar.

[Great American Cookbook]

*I found him very honest and exceedingly anxious to please and not afraid of long hours of duty.*

This book was written by a professional chef of many years’ experience in both the Old World and the New. Testimonials from previous employers on both sides of the Atlantic are included. The earlier ones, in Greek and French, are from Greece and Egypt; the later (1914 on), in English, from hotels in Florida and New Jersey. They all testify to the professional skills and work ethic of the author. They indicate that he is capable, honest, exceedingly anxious to please, not afraid of long hours on duty, reliable, and a willing worker. He is also an experienced pastry cook, conversant in both French and American cooking, and has some “extra-fine” dishes, especially entreés and soups. The book includes both the author’s experiences and his recipes. It is probably also intended as a guide for other Greek immigrants who might want to work in the restaurant business in America. The recipes are all in Greek with both Greek and English titles. They range from the full complement of French and international specialties to regional American dishes. They include *Bouillabaisse Marseillaise, Boston Clam Chowder, Crab Gumbo Miami, Hiawatha Soup, Indian Pudding Banana Sauce, Boston Cream Pie, Lady Baltimore Cake, and Corn Fritters Maple Syrup.*

The book is charmingly illustrated with black-and-white drawings and photographs, including one of the author. It includes a Greek-English glossary and many sample menus for a prospective restaurateur.

**Svensk-Amerikansk Kokbok: Swedish-American Book of Cookery and Adviser for Swedish Servants in America**
Second revised edition.

*You must get out of bed at six o’clock.*

This is one of a number of books addressed to Scandinavian immigrants. Many of these books were published in Chicago and the Midwest and were more relevant for homesteaders, but a number appeared in New York for those who were looking for employment as servants. This book is bilingual, with page-by-page matching columns in Swedish and English. The book consists mainly of recipes, many with an American slant: *Green Corn and Tomato Soup, Long Island Brook-Trout, Brunswick Stew, West Point–Cornbread, New Orleans–Cornbread, Wisconsin–Cake,* and *Connecticut–Electioncake.* There are also a few recipes designated as Swedish: *Meat Pudding, Biff-Farce, Apple-Cake, Swedish Plum Pudding, Orange Pudding, Applechalotte,* and *Brulée Pudding.*

The most interesting part of the book is a bilingual section devoted to “Instructions for Servants.” Below is a sampler of instructions the lady of the house might issue:

For Servant for general house-work: “Welcome! I will show you your room....You must get out of bed at six o’clock....Open the window, and let in the fresh air, before you go down.”

For the Nurse: “The baby shall have a bath every evening at 7 o’clock....Put on her night-clothes as quick as possible....Mind, she doesn’t catch cold.”

For the Cook, Washer and Ironer: “I expect a couple of ladies for lunch....I’ll get you a helpwoman....You need not iron the wash today....Tomorrow we will have some relations to dinner; I hope you will do your very best.”

For the Housemaid: “The stoop and sidewalk should be washed with broom and cold water before breakfast.”

For the Waiter: “The first thing you do, is to look after the furnace....You must wear dress-suit and white cravat when serving.”

For the Coachman: “Mr. John’s and Miss Bessy’s riding horses should be saddled at a quarter to seven in the morning, when it is clear weather....The horses and the big carriage shall be ready at half past ten on Sunday morning, for driving the family to church....The groom has to keep the children’s goat and waggon [sic] in good order.”
Chinese and English Cook Book
San Francisco: Fat Ming Co., 1910.

What is your name?
My name is Ah Quong.
Well, I will call you Charlie.

This dehumanizing conversation appears in a very early Chinese-American imprint written to teach employers how to communicate with their Chinese cook and to teach the cook how to prepare American foods. The book consists of 516 numbered recipes with titles in English and text in Chinese. The recipes are clearly American—from Iroquois Biscuits, Florida Muffins, and Boston Brown Bread to French Chocolate Cake, Gumbo Soup, and Calf’s Liver and Bacon. There appears to be little or no Chinese influence.

The thirty-four pages following the recipes are most enlightening: conversational phrases in both languages to aid cooks and waiters and their employers. Each phrase is written three times: the upper line is the literal translation of the phrase in Mandarin; the middle line is the original English; the lower line is in Chinese characters, approximating the phonetic rendering in Cantonese. The preface explains that most of the Chinese attracted to a culinary vocation in America are Cantonese. It further indicates that no previous book satisfied the requirements of teaching Cantonese how to cook American dishes. “The present work is the first thorough compilation of recipes on foreign cookery, especially designed for the use of Cantonese.”

The phrases cover the hiring and duties of a cook or waiter; the serving of breakfast, dinner, and supper; a bilingual listing of specific foods and dishes, and kitchen and other household apparatus. There are also sections on railroad and steamship travel (“What is the fare from New York to San Francisco?”).

Following is a sampling of questions and requests that a prospective employer might ask:

Who did you cook for before?…Are you willing to do other work?…Please open me a bottle of claret….And bring me some cigars….Carry up a scuttle of coal for the parlor stove….Let me see your references….You will have to sleep at home, but can get your meals here….You must be here every morning punctually at seven o’clock….Your hours will be from seven in the morning to nine at night.

And, the infamous, “What is your name? My name is Ah Quong. Well, I will call you Charlie.”

SOURCE
The following titles are just a sampling of other hard-to-find culinary documents. Yet others exist, representing still more cultures.

[Norwegian/Danish]

NOTES
1. For the Dutch contributions, see, for example, Peter Rose, The Sensible Cook (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1989).
2. A major history of culinary imprints by the foreign-language press in America remains to be written.
3. All of these books, as well as others of a similar nature, will be available for research at the Janice Bluestein Longone Culinary Archive at the Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
5. Further information on the history of Jewish cookbooks can be found in the works of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Joan Nathan, among others.