Announcing the March Madness Food Fight Club Winner

Posted on March 30, 2016 by nyamhistorymed

Drum roll please...

The winner of the 2016 March Madness Food Fight Club is...

Vegetable Curry!

Thanks to all who voted throughout the competition. If you decide to make this winning recipe, please tell us about it and share some photos.
The four recipes in this competition—from a pamphlet, a manuscript receipt book, and two printed cookbooks—don't begin to scratch the surface of what our cookery collection holds. We acquired our Margaret Barclay Wilson culinary collection in 1929, and it now contains about 10,000 items. The collection includes manuscripts, menus, and pamphlets that demonstrate the way cookery changed over time, and a large collection of printed books, beginning in the 16th century. These include works by Scappi, Platina, and Carême, as well as many other milestones in culinary printing.

Our cookbooks offer aspirational recipes, practical recipes, and everything in between. Our collections hold a snapshot view of what daily cooking was like in a range of households across the world. These recipe books also reflect the changes that occur when people have access to new innovations—refrigeration, for example, or the gas range. We also have strong collections related to diet regimens and cooking for health, as well as cookbooks published during wartime when resources were scarce.

Interested in researching historic cookbooks? Our library is open to the public. To make an appointment, call 212-822-7315 or email library@nyam.org.

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**Food Fight Club Final: Snail Water v. Vegetable Curry**

Posted on March 23, 2016 by nyamhistorymed

It's the Food Fight Club final! **Snail Water won round 1** and **Vegetable Curry won round 2**. Now it's time for these two tough competitors to duke it out once and for all.
This final bout pits a recipe from a manuscript recipe collection against one found in a printed cookbook.

The recipe for Snail Water comes from *A Collection of Choise Receipts*, one of 36 manuscript receipt books in our collection. These collections of recipes, dating from the late 17th through the 19th century, tell stories about the ways food was prepared in a range of households. In many cases, they incorporate source material from contemporary cookbooks in print, showing us the kinds of recipes households valued and relied on. These manuscripts often include personal information about the families who kept them. One noteworthy case in our collections is a recipe for “How to make coffy of dry swet aple snits (slices),” found in a recipe book kept by a German-American family in Pennsylvania-Dutch country between 1835 and 1850. Manuscript cookbooks can also show us the kinds of cooking technologies used by families. Repeated references to coals and the Dutch oven indicate that Pennsylvania-Dutch cookbook’s author was cooking at the open hearth.
Publishers of printed cookbooks responded to demand from readers. These books—and the number of editions that were published—can tell us a great deal about cooking trends. Our 1917 copy of *101 Practical Non-Flesh Recipes*, for example, is the book’s second edition, the first published just a year before. Cookbooks could be aspirational, practical, or a combination of both. A 19th-century cookbook published in Milwaukee in German in multiple editions tell us that there was a demand for cookbooks written in the mother tongue for newly-arrived German immigrants. The mixture of German and American recipes in these books indicate a need for familiar recipes from the Old World, as well as instruction on how to prepare foods that were more typical of the New. A number of printed cookbooks in our collection have emended recipes or manuscript recipes laid-in to their pages, offering clues to how readers modified published recipes for personal use.

Which recipe should be crowned the 2016 Food Fight Club Champion? Vote for your favorite—be it the most appealing, least appealing, or one that just tickles your fancy more—before 5 pm EST on Monday, March 28.
This week, we pit Vegetable Curry against Ragout of Squirrel.

The innocuous-sounding vegetable curry comes from Margaret Blatch’s *101 Practical Non-flesh Recipes*, a nice little vegetarian cookbook from 1917. The title might sound a bit odd to modern readers and is an interesting choice, considering the term vegetarian was well-established by the 1840s. A 1908 physical education article sheds some light on the terminology of the time, saying the word vegetarian “usually suggests a person who abstains not on hygienic but on religious, ethical, or theological grounds,” preferring instead “flesh-abstainer.” It appears “non-flesh” was less provocative than “vegetarian.”

The Ragout of Squirrel recipe in *Recipes for the Jewett Chafing Dish*, 1896.
Our next contestant features two items not commonly seen on today’s dinner tables: Chafing dishes and squirrels. In the 1890s, chafing dishes experienced a surge in popularity in America, and *Recipes for the Jewett Chafing Dish* was just one of many cookbooks published featuring recipes specifically for the dish. The Waldorf-Astoria Hotel offered “chafing dish suppers” to top socialites, and stores sold table linens to match the cookware. Squirrel, too, was a common sight at the American dinner table due to its availability. One can track its rise and fall by looking at editions of *The Joy of Cooking* over time, where the numerous squirrel recipes of the 1930s gave way to recipes for chicken.

Which recipe should face Snail Water in the final round? Vote for your favorite—be it the most appealing, least appealing, or one that just tickles your fancy more—before 5 pm EST on Monday, March 21.

**References**


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