



THE Chicago FOODCULTURA CLARION

AMAZING GREASE:
FINDING A CHICAGO
FRIED CHICKEN

DIVING INTO THE
TANTALIZING
WELL OF THE SEA



A HISTORY OF
INDIANS
AND
THEIR FOOD IN CHICAGO

ALBERTO AGUILAR'S
50 INGREDIENT MOLE
A SAUCE THAT
WELCOMES ALL

FREDA'S
POWERFULLY DELICIOUS
LEGACY

SOUTH SIDE SANDWICHES
AND
HOW TO ORDER THEM

MEDITERRANEAN DREAMIN'
IN CHICAGO
OR
HOW ONE LEARNS TO
COOK LIKE A GREEK

EDITORIAL

FoodCultura:

By Stephan Palmié

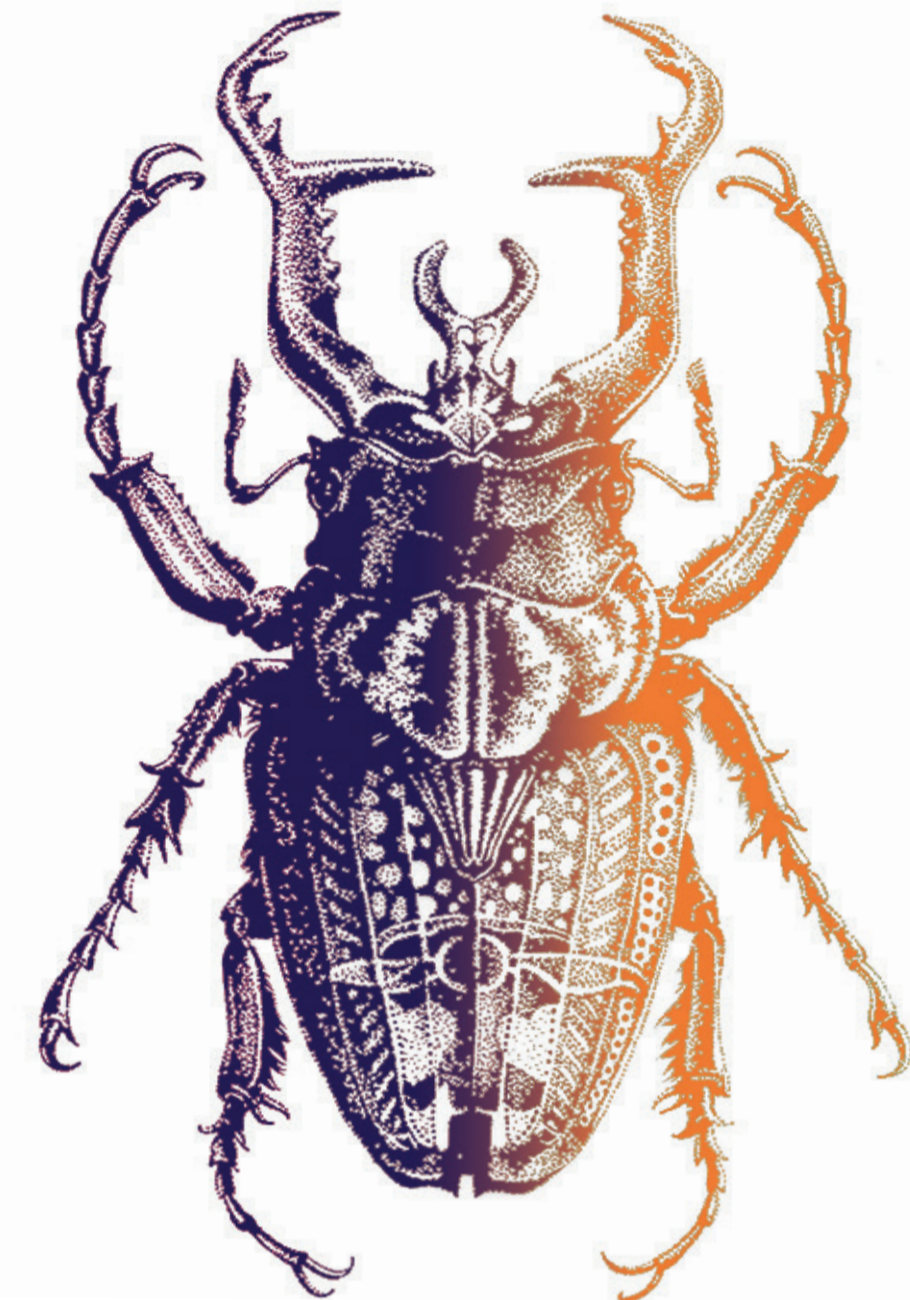
The art and anthropology of food and cuisine

Gentle Reader,

By now there ought to be no need any more to introduce the *Chicago Foodcultura Clarion*, but for those of you who have fished it out of their neighborhood *Reader* box for the first time, here's a brief recap: the twelve page insert you just pulled from the latest issue of the *Chicago Reader* is the fruit of a collaboration between the Barcelona/Miami-based multidisciplinary artist Antoni Miralda, the University of Chicago anthropologist Stephan Palmié, and our tireless co-editors: the artist and chef Eric May, the indefatigable South Side food sleuth Peter Engler, and our new managing editor Evan Williams (bye bye to Paige Resnick our former spiritus rector! And thanks for all, Paige! We airheads couldn't have done without your many gentle nudges towards sanity).

The result of a generous Mellon Foundation grant awarded to Miralda and Palmié by the University of Chicago's Gray Center for Art and Inquiry, the *Clarion* was born in dark pandemic times. Miralda, Palmié, and their students in an experimental course on "The Art and Anthropology of Food and Cuisine" at the University of Chicago had originally planned to hold a symposium at the Chicago Cultural Center. But as in so many other areas of all of our lives, Covid-19 made hash of the best laid plans of mice and men. Enter *The Chicago Foodcultura Clarion*, a whimsical newspaper published as an insert in three thousand copies of the venerable *Chicago Reader* a few times a year. Our Mellon funds were just about enough to cover three issues, and so *Clarion* #3 which we published in the spring of 2021 might have been the last – had it not been for the enthusiasm and generosity of Palmié's colleagues in the University of Chicago's department of anthropology who took the *Clarion* under their wings, and helped us finance this fourth and now likely final issue. But who knows. The phoenix has been known to rise from the ashes! At any rate, for now special thanks go to Joe Masco, the current chair of the department, and to Sue Gal, the head of the department's Lichtstern committee.

As always, we have prepared a rich feast for you, dear reader. This time the menu includes contributions about the history of South Asian and African American culinary interchanges, *Ebony Magazine's* longstanding



food editor Frida DeKnight, the lost glory of Richard Koppe's *Gesamtkunstwerk* Well of the Sea, a how-to guide for ordering classic Chicago sandwiches, Alberto Aguilar's 50 ingredient mole project, and chef David Nikolaos Schneider's quest for Aegean food beyond gyros, béchamel, and that great, spectacular, and utterly Chicagoan Greek Town-fakery, saganaki.

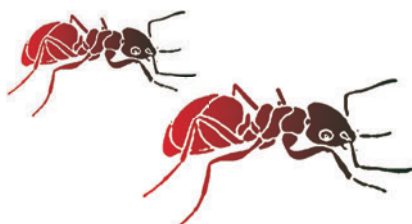
But before we'll ask you to the table, dear reader, let me once more serve you an aperitif in the form of a story. It concerns a largely unsung hero of a bygone era of Chicago's world of gourmet foods whom the otherwise excellent *Chicago Food Encyclopedia* utterly fails to mention. Ever heard of Max H. Ries? I bet you haven't. Neither had I, until I revisited the University of Wisconsin entomologist Gene de Foliart's wonderful *Food Insects Newsletter* (published between 1988 and 2000) in search for materials on entomophagy for my course The Anthropology of Food and Cuisine. There, in the second issue of 1988, I came across a note entitled "Query: Are processed insect products still commercially available in the United States?" mentioning that, as of 1975, Reese Finer Foods, Inc. had counted among the largest purveyor of imported canned insects, but had since discontinued these products. My next step was to google the

brand – which brought me to the website of World Finer Foods, Inc. (<https://worldfiner.com/history>) which had bought Reese's Finer Foods in 1994. There we are told that in 1939 "Max H. Ries, a German immigrant who operated a textile firm in his native Munich, left Germany and intended to develop another textile firm in Chicago. When he arrived in the U.S., he believed he could make a greater impact importing foods and sharing the flavors and ingredients of the world with U.S. consumers." Under the heading "1947 – Unheard of Delicacies" the website states that that in this year "Max founded Reese Finer Foods along with its signature "Reese" brand of specialty products. He began importing delicacies such as Pâté de Fois Gras, Kangaroo Steak, Japanese Fried Butterflies, Chocolate Covered South American Ants, Canned Hornets and Fried Baby Bees." Needless to say, I was hooked. I next wrote to World Finer Foods, and a Consumer Relations Representative named Julie Brown kindly pointed me to Max's long-time sidekick Morrie Kushner's book *Morris H. Kushner on Specialty Foods* (1996). She also sent me archival photos of classic Reese canned products such as Reese's Fried Grasshoppers, French

Helix Snails, or Dominique's Snapper Turtle Soup. Kushner, it turns out, appeared on none other than Groucho Marx TV show in 1960, talking about, guess what? Reese's specialty foods. His book is a great read, exploring as it does, the psychology and economics of gourmet food marketing. But it features very little information on Max Ries himself.

For a time, I was stumped. Peter Engler sent me more photos of Reese products. Food critic Mike Sula threw up his hands in despair. Online I found Max's 1984 *Chicago Tribune* obituary, his lifetime award from the National Association for the Specialty Foods Trade, and honors that he received from Chicago's Temple Ezra Jewish community in 1966 (locusts are kosher, after all! Besides: successful textile manufacturer that he once was, Max hadn't left Nazi Germany just on a whim to set up a cheese shop on Randolph Ave.). But even though Julie Brown had told me that Max must have been quite a character, and that there were many great anecdotes, my research failed to progress. Until, that is, I hit upon *New Yorker* staff writer Dana Goodyear's book *Anything that Moves: Renegade Chefs, Fearless Eaters, and the Making of a New American Food Culture* (2013). Goodyear doesn't give her sources, but it seems like she was able to interview Max's son and great-nephew, and what follow is greatly indebted to her work.

The picture that Goodyear paints is very plausible. Obviously, the early pioneers of what came to be known as specialty foods around the 1940s would have been immigrants exploiting their fellow émigrés' yen for products from the "old country". But different from other legendary immigrant figures in the specialty food trade like the Italian Mario Foah and the Dutchman Ted Koryn, visionary that he was, Max early on set his eyes on Asia and Latin America. He was the first to market teriyaki sauce, water chestnuts and baby corn in the U.S.. But given his – astonishingly anthropological – insight that "eating habits are in the mind" (as he proclaimed at a mid-1950s "Fashion Show of Foods" in Milwaukee), he "took great food that nobody knew they wanted and got them to buy it" as Max's great-nephew Stewart



Reich recalled. Soon, the product range of Reese's Finer Foods came to include Japanese tinned sparrows, fried grasshoppers and whale meat, ants shipped from Bogota and covered with chocolate by an Illinois candy maker, but also canned Canadian muskrat, and reindeer steaks from Lapland. As Goodyear tells the story, from there on, Max's entrepreneurial antics took on on a fantastic, even surreal cast: He began to contact zoos to furnish him with lists of creatures that needed to be put down. He bought them, had their meat frozen and shipped to canning facilities. Whence his product line of canned lion, tiger and elephant meat. All this, of course, came crashing down with Congress's passing of the Endangered Species Act in 1973. But while it lasted, it was a whopping success, thanks, not the least, to Max's knack for showmanship: when the movie Jaws came out in 1975, he ran an advertisement for shark meat paté featuring himself in a scuba diving suit and the headline "This is your chance to bite back". Perhaps his wildest stunt was to reduce an overstock of his "Spooky Foods" gift set (chocolate-covered ants, bees, grasshoppers, and caterpillars) by hiring the ageing Bela Lugosi in full Dracula gear to advertise the product – which promptly sold out (Lugosi, by then, was a veteran in product placement: he also appeared in various beer, soda and cigarette ads <https://beladraculalugosi.wordpress.com/bela-lugosi-product-endorsements/>).

Those were the days! Then, Reese's insect products could still be found on the shelves of Marshall Fields, Bloomingdale, Macy, even Safeway and, I suspect, Dominick's and Jewell. Now, you can count yourself lucky if you find Reese's water chestnuts or baby corn in your local supermarket. Of course, there are Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, but not only do they not contain any bugs; rather, being a Hershey product, they have nothing to do with Max Ries. And as for the entomophagists among you, dear readers, times have become tough here in Chicago. While only a few years ago, larvae could be found on the menu of Spoon Thai in Lincoln Square, the only restaurant I know where you can satisfy a craving for a chitinous crunch these days is the Oaxacan Kie Gol Lanie in Uptown which serves crispy fried chapulines, but only when they are in season (when is grasshopper season?). This is not to say that the Chicago Health Department doesn't shut down a bunch of restaurants each year whose kitchens are crawling with bugs. But, of course, those aren't on the menu!

Time now to ask you to the table, gentle reader. We hope you will enjoy the bill of fare. Time will tell if there may be second helpings in the future. But for now the Clarion's kitchen is closed.



"SPOOKY FOODS"

Items from the

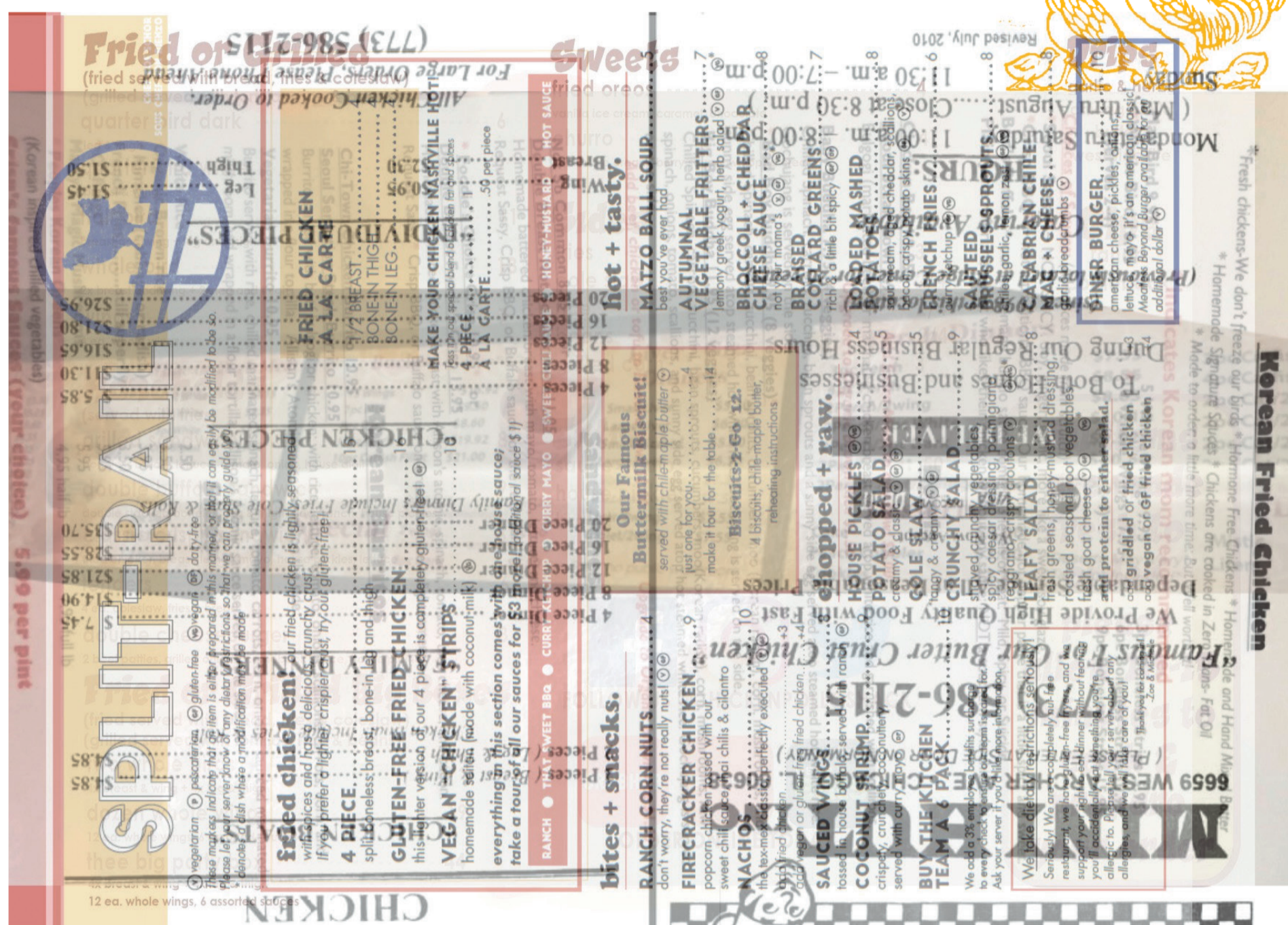
FoodCultura

ARCHIVE



AMAZING GREASE: FINDING A CHICAGO FRIED CHICKEN

By Maya Osman-Krinsky



It's rare to call eating fieldwork. Unless you're approaching a plate with the intention, intimacy, and keen eye of a cook or critic, it's likely that mealtime is defined by necessity, pleasure, and/or connection rather than investigation.

FOODCULTURA departed from the method of building knowledge characterized by interview transcripts and dusty stacks of books. Antoni Miralda and Stephan Palmié's interdisciplinary course encouraged us to go out and taste the city of Chicago as researchers rather than as students; we built a base of knowledge about how anthropology and art have dealt with human foodways, how to reconcile the over-determination and aestheticization of one of the most natural human acts, and how to deepen our understanding of Chicago's unique gustatory worlds.



We settled on exploring fried chicken. How did fried chicken come to be embedded in the city's landscape? How has its preparation shifted with the changing makeup of Chicago's immigrant populations? What would a "Chicago fried chicken" look like if it paid homage to all of the city's diversity?

To answer these questions, we visited several of Chicago's best-known fried chicken spots: Harold's, Mini Hut, Chicken Pollo Shack, Split-Rail, Honey Butter Fried Chicken, and Crisp. We ate and took notes

at each with the intention of creating a palimpsest of fried chicken experiences, including everything from the menus to the grease.

Having recently celebrated seventy years as one of the city's oldest Black-owned restaurants, Harold's Chicken Shack specializes in uniquely-prepared fried chicken and sauces. The menu is sparse and varies slightly by location but because loyal customers know what they're there for, they can order without much confusion. Mini Hut and Chicken Pollo Shack



function similarly, on implied knowledge and certain rootedness in their neighborhoods. Crisp is a Korean fried chicken restaurant, with a menu highlighting gochujang and kimchi as accompaniments to the dish born from US imperialism. Split-Rail, in contrast, is

toward the city's distinct cultural pockets, all in one bite. We buttermilk-brined a locally-sourced chicken and created a Southern-style rub. We double-fried the chicken parts in beef tallow, methods borrowed from Korean and Harold's style chicken, and served it with rye

The annotated greasy palimpsest of menus accompanied process photos as our final product, the refuse of our foray into a complex culinary tangle. As students of Chicago's gastronomic landscape and researchers hoping to contribute something of our own, we

learned that a dish can only do so much storytelling work: the rest has to come from asking questions about what is on our plates and why.

WITH 25320



a white-owned upscale-casual restaurant, with a price point that reflects its self-perception as an "updated" comfort food spot. We struggled with claims of authenticity as markers of what makes a "good" fried chicken experience and examined how the owners and operators of these different restaurants approached the conversation about appropriation and gentrification of soul food.

bread (a nod to Polish and Jewish immigrants), white rolls, and a flight of sauces: ramp pesto (a nod to the Miami-Illinois word *shikaakwa*, meaning an allium that grows along the Chicago River), honey butter, gochujang sauce, Chicago mild sauce, and Nashville hot sauce. The completed dish was nestled in a newspaper basket with the menus of all of the restaurants we visited as well as imitations of the menus that we created based on our own iteration of the Chicago fried chicken.

With bellies full of research, we attempted to blend these disparate dishes into one that reached



By Sam Winikow, Noah Goodman, Maya Osman-Krinsky, Molly Donahue, Isabelle Sohn



THE BIG BABY



MAXWELL STREET POLISH



BREADED STEAK SANDWICH



CRISPY CHEESESTEAK



MOTHER-IN-LAW

SOUTH SIDE SANDWICHES

AND HOW TO ORDER THEM

by **J m Behymer**

As an Internationally Recognized Sandwich Expert™, I am often asked, “What is your favorite sandwich?” My standard answer is “The one in front of me,” which often gets a chuckle and ends the line of questioning.

Some folks persist, though. “But how do you decide what sandwich to put in front of you?”

Observation. *What are other people ordering? Does this place serve only one or two things? Does the restaurant have a signature dish in its name?* Sandwich shops and fast food joints on the South Side of Chicago tend to organize themselves into certain phyla, and each major family of restaurant has certain specialties that patrons seek it out for.

Am I on the Southwest Side of Chicago? Can I see a gyros cone in the kitchen or a prominently displayed Kronos poster in the dining room? Do I smell hamburgers?

If you answered yes to these questions, you may be at a Nicky's. Or maybe it's a Mickey's. These loosely—or not-at-all-affiliated—Greek-owned fast food joints dot the Southwest Side and suburbs, and are among the more reliable fast food options in the area. Your best bet here is a **Big Baby**, though it might sometimes be called a Big Mickey. This is a double cheeseburger built in a very specific way, with cheese between two small fast-food-style patties, served with ketchup, mustard, pickle and grilled onions on a sesame-seed bun. Nicky's also tends to have good **Gyros** and decent **Italian Beef** sandwiches if you aren't in the mood for a burger.

Am I near UIC? Can I hear cars roaring by on the highway? Are there yellow signs everywhere I look? Is the smell of cooking onions heavy in the air?

You must be on Union Ave. just south of Roosevelt. This is the only place to get a **Maxwell Street Polish Sausage**—and I do mean the *only* place, as you should ignore the words Maxwell Street Polish anywhere else you see them. A true Maxwell Street Polish is a thick section of kielbasa, its casing griddled to a crisp snap, dressed simply with yellow mustard, grilled onions, and sport peppers. Don't like sausage? Try the bone-in **Pork Chop Sandwich** instead—just find the bone with your fingers and eat your way around it. You can get a hot dog or a burger as well, but if you want anything other than mustard, grilled onions, and sport peppers on your sandwich, you may be out of luck.

Am I in a South Side or South Suburban deli with an Italian name, like Soluri's, Gio's, Frangella, Rubino's etc? Am I at a pizza place located in the Bridgeport neighborhood?

You have stumbled onto an embarrassment of riches, friend. See if they have a **Freddy** on the menu. This is a hot grinder made with an Italian sausage patty, marinara sauce, cheese, and sweet peppers. Eat one whenever you have an opportunity and spread the gospel; these sandwiches are a dying breed.

You may also want to ask about a **Breaded Steak Sandwich**. This sandwich features a very thin piece of breadcrumb-coated beefsteak, fried crisp, rolled up into a French roll and served with red sauce and melted cheese. A few years ago, Ted Berg wrote in the USA Today sports section that the breaded steak sandwich from Ricobene's was the best sandwich in the world, but there are a half-dozen other places in Bridgeport doing it at least as well.

If neither of those appeal, an **Italian Sub** or an **Italian Beef** will probably be a safe bet as well.

Am I on the far South Side at an extremely busy and well-loved locally-owned sandwich shop? Do I smell a mixture of something like barbecue sauce and vinegar? Are the only things on the menu either some kind of hoagy or a steak sandwich?

The South Side's hoagy houses are among the great treasures of Chicago's fast food scene. The **Hoagy** will be a long roll with a combination of deli meat slices served with tomato, onion, pickle, pepperoncini, and “hoagy juice,” a kind of vinaigrette. It's good if you're in the mood for a cold sub, but do check out the **Sweet Steak**. This is a local variant on the cheesesteak, combining griddled shaved steak with a sweet barbecue-style sauce, melted American cheese, sweet peppers, and tomatoes. It is a mess, it is not photogenic at all, but it is one of the best, most unique sandwiches Chicago has to offer.

Is this a sub shop? Are the walls covered with hand-written signs and specials? Is the menu massive? Am I ordering my sandwich through bulletproof glass? Do the sandwiches come with fries and “can pop?”

I'm excited and a little scared for you. The experience you are about to have could be either amazing or terrible. Order a **Jim Shoe**, a sub sandwich containing roast beef, corned beef, and gyros meat; cheese and mustard; lettuce, tomato, and onion; “gyro sauce,” which may be tzatziki or mayonnaise or ranch dressing or some unholy combination of the three; and giardiniera, if you choose to add that greatest of condiments. When all those flavors combine just right, a **Jim Shoe** can be glorious. Be sure to get mild sauce on those fries, too.

Are there red and yellow signs everywhere? Red and yellow paint, red and yellow trim, red and yellow umbrellas over the tables outside, and the Vienna Beef logo plastered on everything in sight?

When in Rome, order a hot dog. If you want ketchup on it, you may need to put it on yourself—there's a strong bias against ketchup on a hot dog in Chicago and change is a slow process—but for the places that identify this strongly with the Vienna Beef brand, it doesn't matter whether they serve the old-school **Depression Dog** (featuring mustard, relish, diced onions, and hot peppers, rolled into wax paper with steaming hot fresh-cut French fries on top) or the classic salad-in-a-bun presentation that everyone thinks of when they hear **Chicago-style Dog**. Both are great.

Every rule has its exceptions though, and one of the most legendary hot dog spots on the South Side doesn't have a Vienna Beef sign in sight. Fat Johnnie's on S. Western uses David Berg brand dogs, and is also one of the premiere spots to order a **Mother-in-Law**. This tamale-in-a-bun comes covered in chili and often dragged through the garden like a Chicago-style dog. At Fat Johnnie's you can gild the lily and order a **Mighty Dog** instead, which has both a tamale *and* a hot dog hidden under all those toppings.

Wait, none of these descriptions match the place I'm at. It's some weird one-off that has a menu unlike anything you've mentioned! I'm confused and scared! What do I do?

In that case, pick the wildest, most unique thing you can find on the menu and order that. Take a chance on something with a name like **the Hossa**, **Crispy Cheesesteak**, **Smoke Bomb**, **Corleone**, **Gunslinger**, or **Wild Bill**. It might be good, it might be bad, but it should at least be memorable. Make sure you send me a photo too—I want to hear all about it!



CHICAGO STYLE HOT DOG



CHICAGO SIGNAGE



SWEET STEAK SANDWICH



THE SMOKE BOMB



THE HOSSA

In addition to being a husband, father, and senior systems engineer (mostly in that order), Jim Behymer is a co-founder and obsessive contributor to Sandwich Tribunal (www.sandwichtribunal.com), an ongoing online encyclopedia of sandwiches with the goal to eat and document every type of sandwich the world has to offer.

DIVING INTO THE TANTALIZING WELL OF THE SEA



From the Chicago Tribune, 1967.

by Margaret Carney

By the time you are my age, and if you are the type of person that Benjamin Franklin would have deplored when he famously said one should “eat to live, not live to eat,” you have enjoyed many fine dining experiences. As a child, my parents would take the train from Iowa City into Chicago several times a year, with me and maybe a sibling. There was always a dining destination interwoven with a trip. Without fail, we stayed at the Palmer House. And I remember dining with my sister Kay on chateaubriand for two at Trader Vic’s which was located in the Palmer House.

Fast forward forty-five years to 2012, and I have established the International Museum of Dinnerware Design in Ann Arbor, Michigan. As its director and curator, I am exploring the topic of restaurant ware, and I stumble upon images of dishes with fantastic abstract designs of fish, fish hooks and lures manufactured by Shenango China for use in the Well of the Sea Restaurant. It takes me back to 1967, when, as an awkward teenager, I dined *sans* siblings with my parents at the Well of the Sea. I must have bragged to dozens of complete strangers over the years how I had eaten at this strange restaurant. Did I tell them about the marvelous seafood cuisine or the plates with abstract fish designs? No, because I do not actually remember what I ate or what the dishes looked like. What I vividly recollect is the ambiance of the restaurant, lit solely with black lights, which, along with the accompanying abstract murals and sculpture gave the impression that one was dining under the sea. The little white flowers and ricrac on my 60s frock that my sister Kay had sewn, glowed in the dark under the ultraviolet lights. An uncredited photograph from 1952 shows a waiter appearing to use a flashlight to illuminate a menu for diners. In retrospect I believe that I was not as impressed by the abstract designs on the murals and dinnerware because in the late 1960s, these designs were not as unusual and provocative as they would have been in 1948 when the restaurant opened.

The Well of the Sea opened to much fanfare. A press release photograph dated 12/28/48 announced the arrival of fresh seafood at the restaurant. Live turtles, lobsters, fish nets, and a large fish are draped over an airline stewardess, a mermaid, and the assistant to the president of the Sherman, in street clothes. The restaurant was no ordinary restaurant. It was designed by artists, interior designers, and architects to evoke the experience of dining under the sea. Rather than a literal interpretation, this was accomplished through the use of abstract murals and dramatically lit sculptures of fish, lures, and bait. Culinary historians may be captivated by the menu—bouillabaisse, rijsttafel of seafood, café diable, and flaming rum punch; Mid-Century Modern art connoisseurs have fixated on the abstract undersea murals designed by Richard Koppe; dinnerware collectors cannot own too many



The cover of an original Well of the Sea menu, dated 1950.

place settings of the sturdy Shenango China restaurant quality dishes with the abstract fish motifs, adapted from Koppe’s murals by Shenango China’s noted designer Paul W. Cook. There is the novel restaurant concept, the architectural/interior design, the murals, the dinnerware, the cuisine. As a result, there are restaurant reviewers, art historians, interior designers, china collectors, and gourmands who remain captivated by the story of the Well of the Sea. At the time there was even a doctor who seemed obsessed with the effects of ultraviolet light on animals and the wait staff alike.

The restaurant closed in 1972, and the hotel closed the next year. The building was torn down in 1980. Perhaps because of the use of ultraviolet

Detail from menu showing fish eating fish.

TEMPTING COLD SUMMER SELECTIONS	
FISHERMAN'S COLD PLATE	2.75
Cold Fresh Chinook Salmon, Garnished with Shrimp, Sardines, Tuna, Sliced Tomato, Limestone Lettuce, Capers and Pimento with Choice of our own Mustard Mayonnaise or Thousand Island Dressing	
NEW ENGLAND SEAFOOD PLATTER	3.50
Cold New Brunswick Lobster (one-half), Garnished, Sardines, Shrimp, Clam, Sliced Tomato, Limestone Lettuce, Hard Boiled Egg, Capers and Pimento with Choice of Our Own Mustard Mayonnaise or Thousand Island Dressing	
COLD SHRIMPS AND LOBSTER ON FRESH PINEAPPLE	3.50
Cold Mexican and Brazilian Shrimp, Cold Select New Brunswick Lobster (one-half) on Chilled, Sliced Pineapple, Garnished with Sliced Tomato, Limestone Lettuce, Capers and Pimento with Thousand Island Dressing	
COLD AVOCADO PEAR FILLED WITH SELECT MARYLAND CRABMEAT OR	2.75
MEXICAN AND BRAZILIAN SHRIMPS With Thousand Island Dressing and Cucumbers Sandwiches, Garnished with Capers and Pimento	
COLD CALIFORNIA HARD SHELL CRAB	3.50
Garnished with Sardines, Shrimp, Clam, Sliced Tomato, Hard Boiled Egg, Capers and Pimento with Choice of Our Own Mustard Mayonnaise or Thousand Island Dressing	

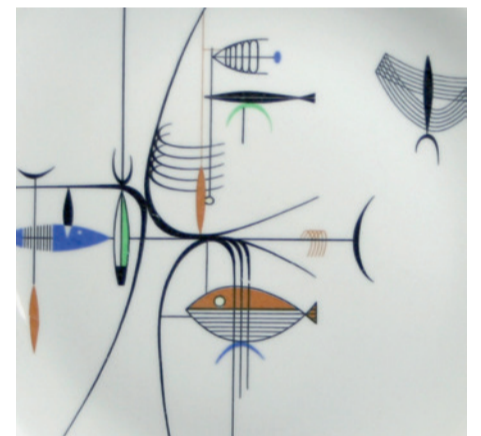
We dined in the Cape Cod Room at the Drake Hotel.

We ate under the multi-storied Christmas tree in the Walnut Room at Marshall Fields, memorable for the long line waiting to get a table under the tree. My sister Kay fainting in the line quickly propelled us to its front. Merry Christmas! That year was 1961. That same year, when Kay and I were safely on the train back to Iowa City, our parents dined at the renowned seafood restaurant Well of the Sea, located in the basement of the Hotel Sherman.

lighting in the dining area, there are few photographs of people dining in the restaurant interior, with most vintage images aimed at capturing the murals and sculpture in situ.

Lucky for us and my poor, underdeveloped teenage visual memory, the restaurant was documented in illustrated art and architecture journals in 1949. There one can see the fantastic abstract murals, albeit in mostly black and white, one by one. Not everything seems to have been finalized by December 1948, in time for the grand opening. The restaurant china with the abstract fish motifs first appeared in use in the restaurant around 1953-1954. Fortunately, the manufacturer used backstamps which can reliably indicate production dates. By the mid-1960s, the original menus, which reproduced one memorable segment of one of Koppe’s five painted undersea murals, were replaced by newly designed menus that glowed under ultraviolet light and could be seen in the darkness that was the Well of the Sea.

The menus actually describe all the tempting cuisine at the restaurant, including such delicious wordsmithing as “Bahama Conch Chowder with Barbados Rum, said to be a favorite soup of Ernest Hemingway, believed by the natives of the Bahama Islands to promote virility and longevity.” All that for only 75 cents in the 1950s! The advertisements of the



The abstract fish, bait, and lure designs on the restaurant china.

time went even further, with a 1967 ad boasting “flagrantly provocative piscatorial viands (fish).”

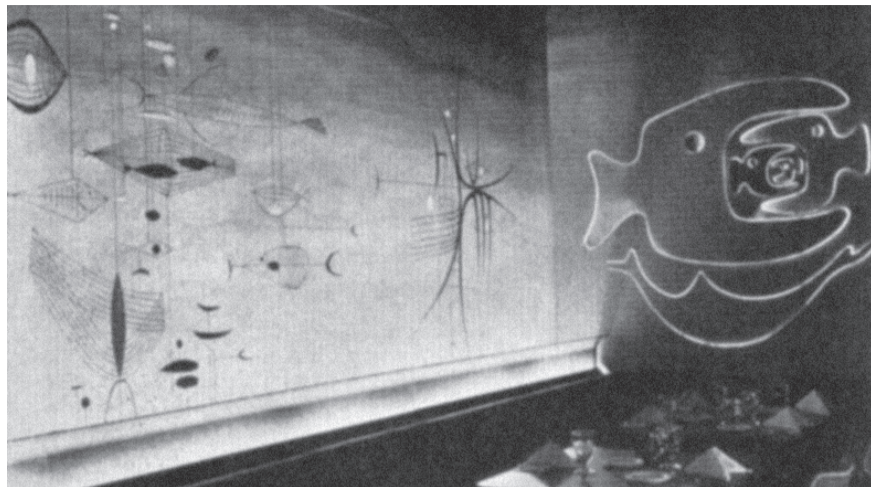
The more one learns about the Well of the Sea, the more one craves the food described on their menus. Unfortunately, there are few recipes that were published. One popular item on the menu, “Crabmeat in Skillet,” was published in the 1950 edition of the combined restaurant guide and recipe book, *The Ford Treasury of Famous Recipes from Famous Eating Places*. A menu describes this item as “Ernest Byfield’s Favorite crabmeat dish, prepared with butter, tarragon wine, vinegar and chives.” It sold for \$3.10 back around 1950. The adult me wishes I could go back in time and revisit the restaurant, take in the abstract murals and sculptural elements, wear an awesome vintage outfit that would be enhanced by the ultraviolet lighting, and order “Old Mr. Flood’s Black Clam Chowder.” Alternatively, who wants to come to my house to try “Crabmeat in Skillet” with me?

Margaret Carney is a ceramic historian with a Ph.D. in Asian art history. She likes to write books about esoteric ceramic topics such as lithophanes, tiles manufactured in Flint, Michigan, and the “father of American studio ceramics.” She established the International Museum of Dinnerware Design in 2012. She is obsessed about everything to do with the Well of the Sea restaurant in Chicago. She also loves marzipan.

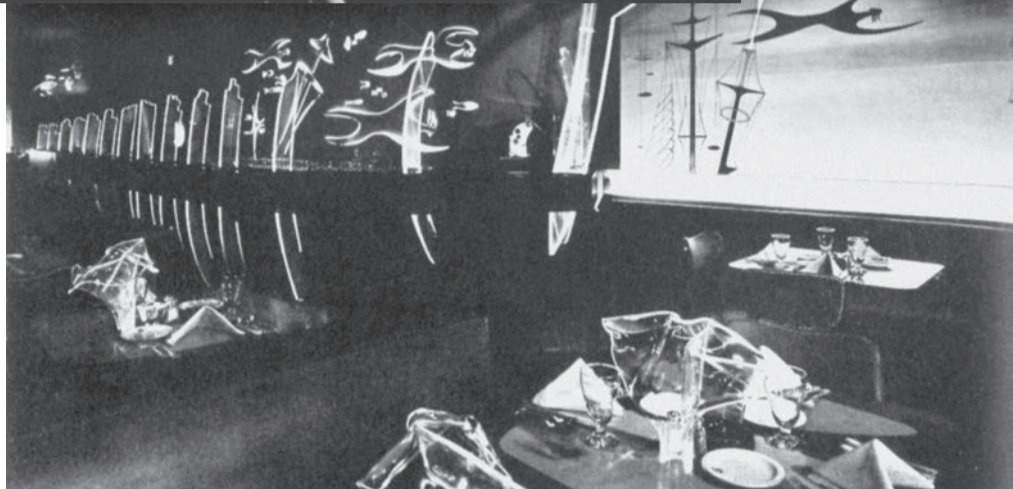


A selection of Well of the Sea dinnerware from the collection of the International Museum of Dinnerware Design.

An interior view of the Well of the Sea, illustrated in *Town Folk* magazine, 1955. Note the fish-eating fish hanging sculpture designed by Richard Koppe.



The experience of the Well of the Sea diner circa 1952.



Vintage image of the bar, capturing the experience of being amongst the hull of a sunken ship, as pictured in *Art in Modern Architecture*, p. 44, 1952.

Seafood Specialties from the Well of the Sea

We receive seafood in small quantities, and many of the dishes listed are available only when please shipments arrive.

To Prepare for the Appetizers

THE "ORIGINAL" College Inn Juice Cocktail 30

TWO-TONE COCKTAIL A Blend of Cham and Tomato Juice served with a Fresh Clam 30

And then, to whet the palate for seafood.

These Appetizers

The flavor of seafood is enhanced by the use of lemon. Therefore, separate these large items liberally over every dish.

GOURMET'S DELIGHT FOR TWO A tempting spread of Smoked Shrimp, Oysters, Salmon, Herbing and Smoked Salmon 4.00

SMOKED SALMON With Lemon Wedge and Salsitas 1.60

SMOKED ESCABOTS (Scallops, Boergerpotatoes) 1.90

ALASKA KING CRAB LEGS With Mustard Mayonnaise 1.65

BAKED SHRIMP MEZUNETTE 1.75

BAKED NEW ORLEANS STUFFED SHRIMP With Catfish 1.75

MARINATED HERRING In Sour Cream 1.20

Seafood Cocktails

Served on a bed of ice cubes.

LOUISIANA SHRIMP COCKTAIL Lemon Wedge and Well of the Sea Cocktail Sauce 1.90

MARYLAND CRABMEAT COCKTAIL An Eastern Shore Delight 1.65

GLANT GU'AMLES SHRIMP COCKTAIL Prawns from Mexican waters 1.00

NEW BRUNSWICK LOBSTER COCKTAIL Succulent chunks of Maine Lobster 2.50

CHERRYSTONE CLAMS With our Special Cocktail Sauce 1.25

Seafood Soups

Served in a conchito. Your captain will suggest the featured soups of the day.

CHEF'S OYSTER STEW Made to your order, a portion at a time. Made with Cream 1.50

Made with Half and Half 1.40

Made with Milk 1.30

OLD FIEZARD'S BLACK CLAM CHOWDER (Old M. Fiezd now 90, expects to live to be 115, just by eating seafood) .85

GREEN TURTLE Made with a sixty-year-old Madeira Wine .90

Oysters

Freshly opened, on the half shell.

DIAMOND POINT Blue Point Oysters. The Diamond Point is the finest oyster available. This delicious oyster comes from the beds around the shores of New York and Long Island. 1.90

COTTLES These oysters, larger in size than the Blue Point, come from the famous beds of Cuddepos Bay. They are a sweet, succulent oyster, which should satisfy any gourmet's taste. 1.75

BAKED OR FRIED OYSTERS Baked Borden's Island, Rockefeller Baked Borden's Island, Louisiana. 2.25

Fried New York Coasts, with Mexican Tartar Sauce 2.25



Well of the Sea.



Recipe from Ford Treasury of Famous Recipes from Famous Eating Places, 1955.



Chef David Nikolaos Schneider

MEDITERRANEAN DREAMIN' IN CHICAGO

OR HOW ONE LEARNS TO COOK LIKE A GREEK

by Hazal Corak

Growing up as a committed eater in the Aegean coast of Turkey, one of my favorite street bites was *kokoreç*, lamb intestines fairly cleaned, wrapped around offal, grilled on a horizontal skewer, and seasoned with salt, oregano, and cumin before getting stuck in a half loaf of bread which sucks up all the fat. I may have already lost you with this daring recipe, my precious reader, but I was hardly the only lover of this dish. I always found it astonishing how *kokoreç* was the first and last thing that the Kurdish side of my family had to eat when they came from Diyarbakir to visit us in Izmir (*Smýrni* in Greek). Ultimately, these Kurds were proud meat eaters. Especially those from Diyarbakir liked to impress you by boasting about how they eat lamb liver for breakfast while people from Izmir, my hometown, were rather taking pride in their culinary know-how with the Aegean herbs and greens. How could this hardcore meat sandwich be native to my allegedly herbivorous land and delightfully exotic to my carnivorous cousins from Kurdistan?! Well, I didn't think much. I kept on biting... It took me years—and watching the Athens episode of *Bizarre Foods with Andrew Zimmern*—to realize that my *kokoreç* was endemic to my region because it was Greek; it was called *kokoretsi* in their language and it was not a street food for them but an Easter specialty! Suddenly, thanks to this crazy American, all the pieces started to fit together.

Now, if you are still with me and wondering where you can eat this majestic bowel look no further, my precious reader. Kindly proceed to Chicago's Wicker Park and grab a seat at Taxim Restaurant on Milwaukee Avenue. And if you are reading this because *kokoretsi* sounded intriguingly repellent, that's also fine. Chef David Nikolaos Schneider and his team should have something in the pot for you since their extensive menu covers several regions in Europe and Asia Minor that Greeks once called home.

Chef Schneider is a food anthropologist of sorts. He has been to very many places and their household kitchens with a singular aim: learning to cook like a Greek! In his visits to the Greek mainland, Aegean islands, Cyprus, Turkey, and Syria he collected cooking techniques, recipes, and flavors which are very much alive in these regions' culinary repertoire, but are not featured in mainstream representations of the Greek cuisine since its standardization with a Western influence in the 1930s. Our chef's itinerant spirit is why, my precious reader, you may have your chance to get a taste of Cypriot pork sausage (*Seftalies*) with halloumi, Cretan pastries, and a variety of *Politiki* (Istanbul style) dishes from wood-fire roasted eggplants to artichoke stew, and beer-battered fried mussels with sesame garlic sauce, all in one place. In fact, the restaurant's name, *Taxim*, comes from Istanbul's famous square, located in the cosmopolitan Pera district which was once home to the Greek inhabitants of the city—including Chef Schneider's uncle—and a bustling taverna culture that brought together all sorts of city characters, not unlike today's Wicker Park. But one doesn't always need to go beyond the Ocean to get at the roots of Greek cooking, especially if they are

in Chicago, a city which has attracted many Greek migrants since the 1880s. These migrants, who were running away from the Ottoman atrocities more often than not, brought their culinary wisdom to this side of the Atlantic long before the 20th century standardization of Greek cuisine. Chef Schneider learned how to make the Anatolian style *satz* (*saj*) bread from one of their contemporary descendants on a propane gas tank in a Chicago kitchen. This delicious flatbread is now a main ingredient of Duck Gyro, a specialty of *Taxim*, rubbed with *pastourma* spices and served with yoghurt sauce and a pomegranate reduction.

Chef Schneider does not strike me as an eclectic cook who draws on fusion. Duck Gyro is perhaps the most untraditional dish on the menu. Rather, he is a man of culinary convention with a passionate commitment to explore that convention's hidden paths. When I ask him about his favorite ingredients, he proudly answers: "our home-made yoghurt!" If my *kokoretsi* story sounded appealing to you, here you go... At *Taxim* it is served with Chef Schneider's home-made yoghurt. When I ask him what ingredients he certainly avoids, he is again quick to answer: anything that Greeks have not made use of historically. So, my precious reader, no kale, avocado, or quinoa for you at *Taxim*. No *béchamel* sauce (as in *moussaka*) either, an ingredient that became the staple of the Greek restaurant experience in America since its introduction to Greek cooking in the 1930s by Chef Schneider's Sifnos-born, but Vienna-bred namesake, Nikolaos Tselementes.

Taxim is an Athenian, Cretan, Smyrnaean, Politiki, Cypriot, Cappadocian, and Pontic restaurant all at once, but it is equally Chicagoan. Chef Schneider raves about how he can find greens that are specific to Crete in Chicago thanks to our town's mild summers, high-quality soil, and visionary farmers. This, of course, does not stop him from stuffing his backpack with bitter almonds while flying back from Greece and turning them to tear-inducingly (I told you, they are bitter!) delicious *kourabiedes* (cookies) covered with powdered sugar.

Well, my precious reader, now we hit the last lines of my piece and the Clarion is getting ready to bid you farewell until an unforeseeable future. I dipped my pita bread in a considerable amount of labneh and olive oil, made a ceviche of sorts with Aegean *lavraki* (seabass), and even watched Andrew Zimmern eat Iraqi *pache* in Chicago while writing this. There would only be too much color and food stain on this page if I used actual pen and paper instead of a word document. It has been a mouthwatering journey to get to know and talk food with the unapologetically gluttonous Clarion crew, Chef Schneider, and now you. Hayde, opa, cheers... to many more appetizing Chicagoan adventures!



Easter lamb and kokoretsi roasting.

Hazal Corak is an anthropologist at the University Chicago. She enjoys thinking and writing about metallurgy, poetics, cinema, and environmental justice. She secretly believes that the pink neon sign of the Music Box Theater is actually the heart of Chicago.

ALBERTO AGUILAR'S 50 INGREDIENT MOLE A SAUCE THAT WELCOMES ALL

Eric May in conversation with Alberto Aguilar

EM: Alright, I'm spending an excellent afternoon with Alberto Aguilar, eating up a storm across the greater River Forest region. We've had excellent home style Filipino food from Lola Tining's, a toasted pasta pizza thing from Gaetano's and are now sitting over duck fat fries and beers.

AA: It's Forest Park, not River Forest, people always get it mixed up.

EM: Tell me about the 40 ingredient molé.

AA: It's actually a 50 ingredient molé. The one I did recently with (Nicholas) Jirasek was 40.

I like the origins of molé – that it comes from anything that was at hand. Being resourceful, improvising with what you have. The story of molé has its origin in a convent, in the colonial times, in Mexico, where there was an archbishop coming to visit the nuns and they didn't have anything to eat so they took whatever was in the cupboards and they killed the old turkey that was in the courtyard, and that was the birth of molé. Every part of Mexico has different versions of molé with different ingredients. I researched all the different possible molé dishes throughout Mexico and compiled a list of all the ingredients and I thought it would be interesting to make a molé that was just over the top with an excessive amount of ingredients and mix the different regions.

I started making this molé as part of this dinner project that I did and I think that it kind of acted as a metaphor for bringing together people that didn't belong, because that was part of this dinner series,

bringing strangers into my home. I also made a drawing of that sauce which is actually owned by the National Museum of Mexican Art.

EM: Is it the list of ingredients?

AA: It's the list in order of the size of the word so it's like a pyramid of words. On that list there's some kind of funny ingredients, I think the funniest one is the animal crackers. That was 2011, in my home. But I also did it at other sites, I was invited to do it at other places. One of the things that I started to do was I would go into people's homes and I would make a molé out of whatever they had. So I never wanted them to buy any special products – my claim was that I could make a molé with whatever you had in your cupboards.

EM: What if they had no chiles?

AA: They always have some form of chiles. Even if it's the red pepper flakes from pizza restaurants or Tabasco sauce. Sometimes if I was lucky they'd have a can of chipotle in their cupboard. So I would use whatever was at hand – chocolate Quik, peanut butter. Worcestershire sauce. A1 sauce is another thing, it actually has tamarind in it, so A1 sauce would work in a molé. It's just about getting the emphasis on the right ingredients to make it as molé-like as possible.

A while back I stopped making the molé.

EM: Did you retire it purposefully?

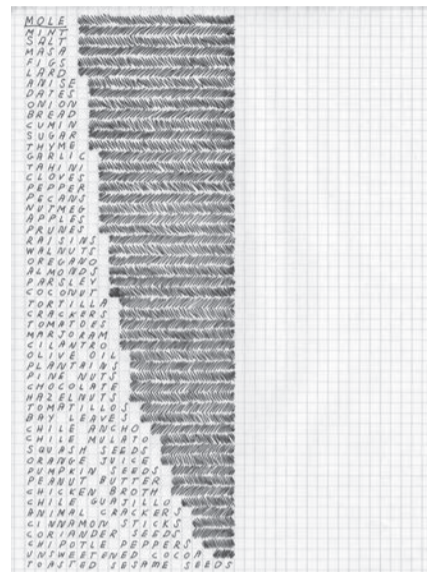
AA: I think time just happened and it fell to the back. But I'm actually going to make

one for a dinner at the Franklin. I'm finally bringing it back. I'm going to smoke chicken legs and tofu, I'm going to make a vegan version also. Did you want to talk about the thing I recently did with Jirasek?

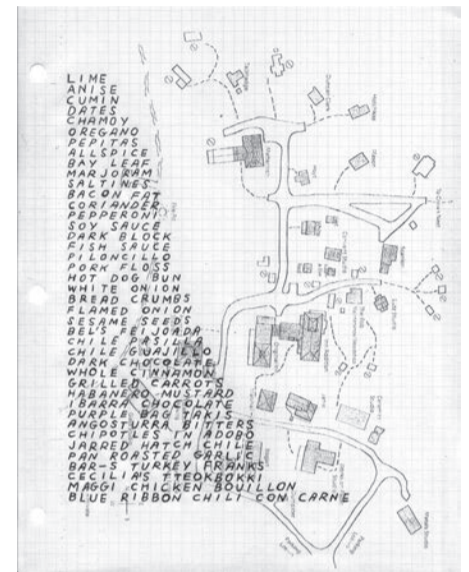
EM: The molé dog. I've always seen the relationship between molé and chili.

AA: You knew that the Coney Island dog was a famous thing in Detroit? Jirasek told us a little bit about those origins. What do you know about that?

EM: They were Greek and Macedonian owned



The original 50 Ingredient Molé



Oxbow Dog

dog seller at the Cub's park – he did that for years, that was a big part of his life. Anyway, when we were out at the bonfire, I was telling Jirasek about my molé

AA: There were several things. But actually he collaborated with several artists who were visiting. He did a Korean dish with Cecilia Kim. She made teokbokkii the previous night and Jirasek mixed that in. And then there was another artist, Bel Falleros, who is from Brazil and they made feijoada. That got mixed into it, also. And Alex and I, for the end of our program, we created a carnival at Ox-Bow in the open meadow. And we thought that we should serve these hotdogs as a performance at this carnival. But that got put off so we actually passed them out during the dance party at the end of our session.

After returning home, I wanted to commemorate that moment and that hotdog that we made, collaboratively, with Jirasek so I thought it would be interesting to ask Southwest Signs to make a sign that I then gave as a gift to Jirasek.

Alberto Aguilar is an interdisciplinary artist based in Chicago. In 2009 he started a Personal Dinner Invitation, where he invited strangers into his home using a popular social media site. At these dinners he began making and serving a 50 ingredient Mole which he has now made countless times. He teaches at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His work is currently on display at The Franklin Gallery in the Garfield Park neighborhood of Chicago.



Molé Hot Dog

hotdog parlors, so the meat sauce has a touch of cinnamon. Some molés have cinnamon, right, canela.

AA: It all happened really naturally. Alex Bradley Cohen and I were teaching a class at Ox-Bow this past summer. And we met Jirasek and I guess we both talked to him separately. Alex was telling him that he was a hot-

dog project and he had the idea to combine both of our interests to create a molé hotdog, like a chili dog, like a Coney Island chili dog. With molé instead of the chili. He gave me the list of his ingredients and I made a drawing of it on top of the Oxbow map.

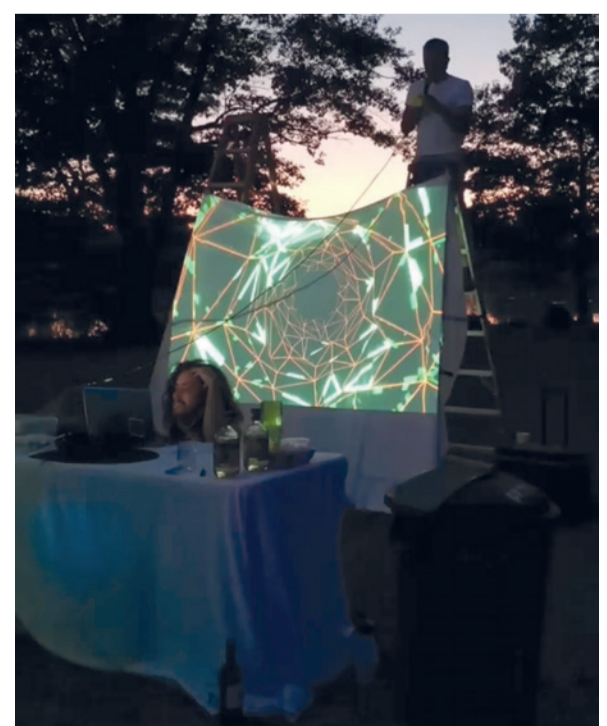
EM: I saw that on Instagram. Did it have some Filipino ingredients?



Alberto serving food at this recent molé event



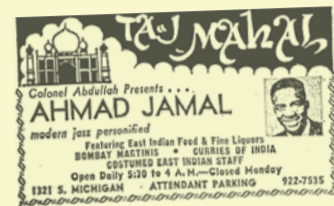
Molé Dog



The Feeling Shapey Carnival at Ox-Bow

A HISTORY OF INDIANS AND THEIR FOOD IN CHICAGO

By Colleen Taylor Sen



Chandra Gooneratne

We don't know exactly when the first Indians came to Chicago. (South Asians is a more appropriate term, since South Asia covers present-day India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka but since before 1947 these countries were part of British India, I've used the term "Indian" in this article.) The 1870 Census lists eight people from India in Chicago, but they could have been Europeans since India was part of the British Empire and residents could enter the U.S. with a British passport. Their number rose very gradually to reach 176 in 1930. After this Indians were included in the Asian category until the 1970 Census.

These early residents were mostly students, mainly at the University of Chicago. A 1920 article in the *Chicago Tribune* notes that the Indian students here, many from Madras, had formed a cricket team. For a time in the 1920s the University of Chicago had what must have been the university's first and only polo team, headed by a dashing young man from Ceylon named Chandra Gooneratne.

While Mr. Gooneratne likely came from an affluent background because of his polo-playing ability, most of the students were on scholarship and on tight rations. In a 1908 article in the *Calcutta Review*, an Indian journalist who spent time in Chicago writes that one student's daily diet consisted of graham bread, fruits, nuts, breakfast foods, and eggs. Another subsisted on a few slices of bread, a banana or two, a small handful of peanuts or dried fruit, and eggs in the evening. A third lived exclusively on bread and beans and added different sauces to the beans.

The same journalist also described the difficulties Indians faced in entering restaurants and finding lodgings because of the color barrier. Starting in the 19th century, communities of Indians who had jumped ship or worked as wandering peddlers settled in New Orleans and New York. Some joined the Great Migration of African Americans that began during World War I and came north to find work in factories and steel mills. Boarding houses and restaurants in the African American communities of Cleveland, Detroit, Buffalo, Baltimore, and other Northern cities served them, and they must have sprung up on Chicago's South Side as well -- a topic that deserves further study. In 1917, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that several Indians who worked in a steel mill in Gary, Indiana, were arrested by Chicago and Federal police in connection with a plot in Chicago "to inflame Indians with revolt against British rule."

A 1924 Federal law effectively banned immigration from Asia, excluding The Philippines. John Drury's 1931 *Dining in Chicago* notes the presence of Filipino restaurants but no Indian ones. In 1946 U.S. immigration laws were relaxed somewhat to allow one hundred Indians a year to enter and to permit those who were here to be naturalized.

In 1963 Chicago's first Indian restaurant opened, House of India, first at 2048 N. Lincoln and later at 1746 N. Wells. The owner Colonel Abdullah was a great showman who claimed to have been an officer in the Indian army and to hold a PhD degree in psychology from Oxford University. However, one of the waiters, a University of Chicago student, told me then that he was an African American

from Tallahassee who served in the American army in Calcutta during World War II. House of India's menu and décor were aimed at a Western audience. Its menu featured various curries and condiments that typified the food of the British Raj. A menu celebrating Indian Independence Day in 1968 described by the *Tribune* featured rice pulao, lamb korma with pineapple, a vegetarian curry, a sirloin of beef curry, a hot spiced dish which the reporter noted was called pork vindaloo, and pappadums "prepared only for special parties." The waiters were Indian students dressed in turbans and achkans (jackets that became popularly known as Nehru jackets). The restaurant became a museum cum gift shop and then closed in 1973. Also in the 1960s, Colonel Abdullah opened another restaurant cum jazz club called the Taj Mahal at 1321 S. Michigan featuring Bombay martinis and "curries of India" served by a "costumed East Indian staff." It was open from 5.30 pm to 4 am and one of the performers was Ahmad Jamal who once owned an earlier incarnation of the club.

In 1965 a major reform of U.S. immigration laws replaced the old quota system that favored 'white' countries by one that gave preference to professionals and relatives of citizens and by 1970, there were just over 3000 people of Indian origin in Chicago.

Chicago's first Indian grocery store was opened by Sarjit Singh Sikand in 1967 at 2911 N. Broadway. Until then the only source of South Asian spices and lentils was Conte da Savoia on Roosevelt Road. Sikand began by selling imported items, especially lentils, to the owner. When business exceeded his expectations, he opened Indian Gifts and Food at Belmont and Sheffield. In 1973 he opened a restaurant at the same location, which initially served kabobs and other tandoori items and later some South Indian dishes. Most of his customers were Americans, many of whom were tasting Indian food for the first time.

The next restaurant was Brothers, a modest storefront on Belmont Avenue that opened in the late 1960s. The owners were Brahm Dixit and his wife, who was the cook. The restaurant served home style North Indian dishes. Soon a public relations man named Mohan Chablani hired the Dixits and in 1969 opened his own restaurant, Bengal Lancers. It was a small fine dining restaurant in an old mansion in the 2200 block of N. Clark, above a French restaurant called L'Auberge. The restaurant was decorated with hunting scenes from the British Raj, and the menu featured such items as Colonel Skinner's curry chicken and Pimm's Cup. To a possible charge that his restaurant was not 'authentic,' Chablani claimed in an April 9, 1979 article in the *Chicago Tribune*, "An authentic Indian restaurant would have... two cows, people would sit on the floor eating with their hands, and I would have to find 16 flies." It too didn't last long. A third restaurant, also called Taj Mahal was opened at 10 E. Walton Place in 1972 by Behram Irani, a journalism student turned restaurateur.

The same year saw the opening of Gaylords at 678 N. Clark, then a rather seedy area. It was the first North American branch of a well-known Indian chain. (The present-day restaurant at 100 E. Walton has no connection with the chain). India did not have

a deep-rooted restaurant culture until after gaining Independence in 1947, and the first restaurants were opened by refugees from the state of Punjab when it was divided between India and Pakistan. Their menus featured the hearty dishes of this region, such as sag paneer (spinach with cheese), rice pulao, dal makhani (a rich thick creamy lentil stew), stuffed paratha (flat bread), kebabs, and tandoori chicken. These dishes became staples of other restaurants in Chicago. By 1977 there were at least ten Indian restaurants in Chicago, including the upscale Khyber India at 30 E. Walton and Bukhara at 2 E. Ontario, both now closed.

In the 1970s Devon Avenue on the far North Side became a point of entry for Indian immigrants, replacing what had been a largely Jewish area. In 1974 Mafat and Tulsi Patel opened their first store at 2034 Devon near Damen, followed by a larger flagship store at 2610 W. Devon which recently underwent a major renovation. Today Patel Brothers are the largest Indian grocery chain in the U.S. with 57 stores in 19 states and their own line of ethnic products. Other stores followed, including butcher shops serving halal meat for Muslims, sweet shops, Bengali fish shops and grocery stores. By 1990 there were more than 150 Indian owned stores between California and Western Avenues.

Devon Avenue became a shopping mecca for the entire Midwest. Shoppers needed places to eat, and the first Indian restaurant on the street was Standard India opened by the Kamboj family in 1983. It later moved to Belmont Avenue but closed in 2014 following the death of the owner. Many more restaurants opened serving both vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes. The various elements of the city's South Asian communities are reflected in its honorary street names: sections are named after Sheikh Mujib, after the founder of Bangladesh Mohammed Ali Jinnah Way, after the founder of Pakistan, and Gandhi Marg after the great Indian Independence leader.

However, in recent years business has dropped off as more South Asians have moved outside the city and Indian grocery stores can now be found in these surrounding suburbs.

A category of restaurants popularly called dhabas can be found throughout Chicago -- small establishments are popular among taxi drivers from the Subcontinent and Africa as well as students. The menus, featuring kebabs and other meat dishes, are posted on whiteboards. Many of the owners and clientele are Muslim and some dhabas have prayer areas or small mosques. Meanwhile, restaurants serving what is called "progressive Indian cuisine", such as Rooh, 735 W. Randolph, are introducing Chicago diners to new dimensions of South Asian food.

Colleen Taylor Sen is a Chicago-based author and culinary historian focusing on the food of the Indian Subcontinent. One of her seven books, *Feasts and Fasts: A History of Food in India* was selected as one of the best food books of the year by *Vogue* and *The Smithsonian Magazine* and called one of the essential books on Indian food by Madhur Jaffrey. She is currently working on *The Companion of Indian Food*.



FREDA'S POWERFULLY DELICIOUS LEGACY



By Donna Battle Pierce

When her *A Date With A Dish* cookbook was first published, Freda DeKnight proudly referred to the carefully curated recipes as “By Us and For Us.” This strong declaration began in 1948 during the Jim Crow era, more than four decades before FUBU co-founders, Carl Brown and Daymond John, applied the “For Us By Us” acronym to their FUBU sportswear line.

DeKnight was born during my grandmother’s time. Now, two generations later, as I’ve earned the status of one of my family’s elders, the 426-page classic book has also earned a special place of honor in my small condo kitchen, reminding me of the importance nuance plays when it comes to DeKnight’s cultural perception, testing and tasting of the traditional passed-down cultural recipes such as my family’s favorite

I only rave about the 1948 edition because it is the only edition with DeKnight’s copyright and the only edition which includes the very personal chapter identifying and quoting a national collection of Black cooks with storytelling and memories that other cultural cooks, culinary historians, students and myself find inspirational and deeply meaningful.

In 1962 and 1973 when *Ebony* published a revised version of DeKnight’s book with *The Ebony Cookbook* by Freda DeKnight added to the cover and Johnson Publishing Company listed as the copyright holder, they “removed much of the personal narratives that makes the first book such a pleasure to read,” Doris Witt wrote in her *From Fiction to Foodways: Working at the Intersections of African American Literary and Culinary Studies*, included in the collection of essays published by the University of Illinois Press and edited by Anne L. Bower.

“In a fashion parallel to what Susan Leonardi has demonstrated happened to *The Joy of Cooking* over the years... My heart remains with de Knight,” Witt added, comparing the *A Date With A Dish* series of editions with the seven editions of *Joy of Cooking*.

And yes, based on Witt’s “de Knight” surname style plus Freda’s use of a separate De Knight in her 1948 copyrighted book; Freda DeKnight appearing with *Ebony*’s subsequent book copyrights and magazine columns and Freda De Knight appearing under her photo on a Carnation brochure describing her as a home economist, a cook and a writer and what the sports writers would call a triple threat, the question arises:

How should we capitalize and space her surname?

For my part, following much personal deliberation based on the fact—no secret among friends and colleagues—that the first printing only, not the other two, finishes first as my all-time favorite cookbook. Still, I chose not to follow the first edition’s author style in my writing, instead choosing to capitalize and space DeKnight’s last name the way I discovered her handwritten signature in a first edition copy following this note: “May each ‘Dish’ be a ‘Date’ you’ll be proud of.” This is also the capitalization and spacing used by husband and pianist,

banana bread and a gumbo recipe made with tomatoes that only comes in second place to Granny’s version.

“Freda DeKnight was one of the first who brought international attention to African-American food. ... She was a trailblazer,” author and educator Jessica Harris stated several years ago after she offered advice about overcoming research progress with my DeKnight bio plan. “It takes a trailblazer to know one,” I answered back quickly before asking her opinion about an historic topic that puzzled me from her *High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey from Africa to America*. The author of a dozen books which focus on our cultural foodways answered back just as quickly, repeating encouraging words about my own project.



Rene DeKnight (1913 – 2004) who became an arranger/conductor for the 5th Dimension following Freda DeKnight’s 1963 death from cancer.

When I began pitching stories about DeKnight’s incredible cultural culinary contributions in 2012, most national publications replied with “not enough readership interest,” which I understood translated to “not enough white readership interest.” After moving from national to regional pitches, the first acceptance came from the vibrant Ann Arbor Culinary Historians for their Spring 2013 issue of *Re-past*.

Four years later, New York editor and writer Dan Piepenbring, writing in the February 27, 2017 *Daily Paris Review*, linked to my recently posted NPR article before chastising the “culture for failing to canonize DeKnight for her amazing contributions.” Piepenbring wrote:

Freda DeKnight, a prominent black editor, writer, and cook whose midcentury fame has now completely evaporated. Donna Battle Pierce explains, “Born in 1909, DeKnight spent much of her fifty-four years collecting, protecting and celebrating African-American culture and traditions in the years after World War II up to the civil rights movement. Yet her name has been all but forgotten—she doesn’t even have that most basic of 21st century acknowledgements, a Wikipedia page ... As the first food editor for Ebony magazine, DeKnight wrote a photo-driven monthly column that offered her home economist’s tips, as well as regional recipes from the “Negro community” of home cooks, professional chefs, caterers, restaurateurs and celebrities ... DeKnight presented a more nuanced and often glamorous image of African-American cooking and culture—not just to African-American readers, but to the broader world.”

Both of my elegant grandmothers, Leana Peters Battle and Juanita Davis Williams (Gran and Granny), who were frequently described as “Gulf Coast club-women” during the mid-20th century, did not favor cookbooks. Gran employed a daily cook in her Mobile, Alabama, Cedar Avenue home. But both grandmothers knew DeKnight and considered her well-written recipe collection with cultural representative dishes and respectful stories about family cooks from the “Talented Tenth” very worthwhile, referring to the references made by W.E.B. DuBois

about leadership coming from the educated and talented ten percent of our race in America.

My grandmothers described me as being very polite when they introduced me in person to DeKnight following a late-1950s Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs meeting. This compliment didn’t refresh my memory...but no problem. I met Freda DeKnight through reading *Ebony*, the first edition of *A Date With a Dish* and newspaper stories, where in photos Mom and I clipped, the beautiful food editor and fashion contributor who staged the first *Ebony* Fashion Fair, is pictured with presidents, including Nixon and Kennedy.

And then, when I studied the details about DeKnight’s Midwestern youth spent in Kansas, South Dakota, Iowa and Minnesota, her age didn’t matter; I identified completely with how my mother used to refer to me: “a child of integration.” One reference identifies DeKnight’s birth year as 1909, the same year my Mobile, Alabama grandmother was born. But her date of birth varies among listings, which I understand completely. I also grew up during the Jim Crow era, and I recall my mother’s stern reminder that as I grew into a talented Black woman overcoming obstacles, “your age as a means of denying one more step up, is no one’s business.”

And as a “daughter of integration” DeKnight included this observation, encouraging giving credit when sharing cultural culinary features instead of letting

white employers borrow or steal. This sentence appeared in the preface of all three editions:

“It is a fallacy, long disproved, that Negro cooks, chefs, caterers and homemakers can adapt themselves only to the standard Southern dishes....”

Like other Americans living in various sections of the country, they have naturally shown a desire to become versatile in the preparation of any dish.”

Sherrie A. Inness (1965-2014) a white Wellesley graduate who received a BA, MA and Ph.D from the University of California, San Diego before her death from Huntington’s disease in 2014, offered this respectful observation about the unfair and cruel racial practices DeKnight quietly challenged with her gracefully precise “By Us For Us” stance against negative racial stereotypes:

Transcending these stereotypes was quite the lofty goal in 1948; Ebony had existed only three years, and while it gave African-Americans a place to take pride in their culture, the country was still enconced in both the institutionalized racism of Jim Crow laws in the South and tacit discrimination all over the country.

1948 saw President Truman submit a civil rights plan to Congress, but public schools would not be desegregated until seven years later. Yet DeKnight’s efforts helped people across the country.... In addition by writing cookbooks specifically addressed to other Blacks and aimed at preserving African and African-American food traditions, authors show that Black women cook because they want to nurture Blacks not whites...

As a Baby Boomer, my life changed after my 1970s college instructor, poet Mari Evans, began rigorously introducing me to the Black history facts that had been left out of my white textbooks in classrooms I integrated before challenging me to learn about amazing people, deeds and literature from my own culture.

It was an awakening and a beginning. And so were the rutabagas Evans brought from home to eat for lunch in her classroom, describing them as “yellow turnips,” for which two recipes—steamed and mashed—appear in all three editions of the book.

Freda’s legacy reminds us to keep dishing cultural traditions: By Us For Us.

CHICAGO FOODCULTURA CLARION 4 Chicago, November 2021

Editor in Chief: **Stephan Palmié**
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Ramon Torrente and **Pau Torrente**

BIOS

Peter Engler worked at the University of Chicago carrying out basic research in mammalian genetics. A South Side resident for over forty years, he took an interest in the often-overlooked cuisine of the area. He has written and lectured on topics such as soul food, barbecue, and bean pie, as well local oddities such as the jim shoe, big baby, and mother in law.

Eric May is a Chicagoland-based parent, chef, and recovering artist. Eric is the founder and director of Roots & Culture, a nonprofit visual arts center in Chicago’s Noble Square neighborhood.

Miralda is a multidisciplinary artist who has lived and worked in Paris, New York, Miami, and Barcelona, his hometown, since the 1960s. His work has evolved around food culture, obsessive objects, ceremonials, public art, and community events. In the year 2000, he created the Food Pavilion for the World Expo held in Hannover, Germany, and subsequently the FoodCultura Museum, in connection with the Sabores y Lenguas/Tastes & Tongues and Power Food project.

Stephan Palmié is a native Bavarian with a Huguenot (French Calvinist) name and a German accent that he can’t seem to shake, but likes to think of as close to what the German-born founder of American Anthropology, Franz Boas, might have sounded like. He is the Norman and Edna Frechling Professor of Anthropology at the University of Chicago, works on Afro-Cuban ritual traditions, is the author and editor of a bunch of books, and likes to think with food, preferably stews.

Evan Williams is a poet and essayist from the cornfields of the Midwest, studying at the University of Chicago. His writing focuses on, among other things, environmental literature, forms of autobiography, and food. He’s delighted and honored to have shared in the Clarion’s journey.

All of the lettering in the Chicago FoodCultura Clarion Issue 4 has been hand-painted by Chuck Willmarth of Southwest Signs.

This issue of the Clarion was made possible by a generous Lichtstern subvention from the University of Chicago’s Anthropology Department. Our thanks go to its present chair Joe Masco and Sue Gal, the chair of the Lichtstern Committee in 2020-21.

