

FOR THE RECORDS

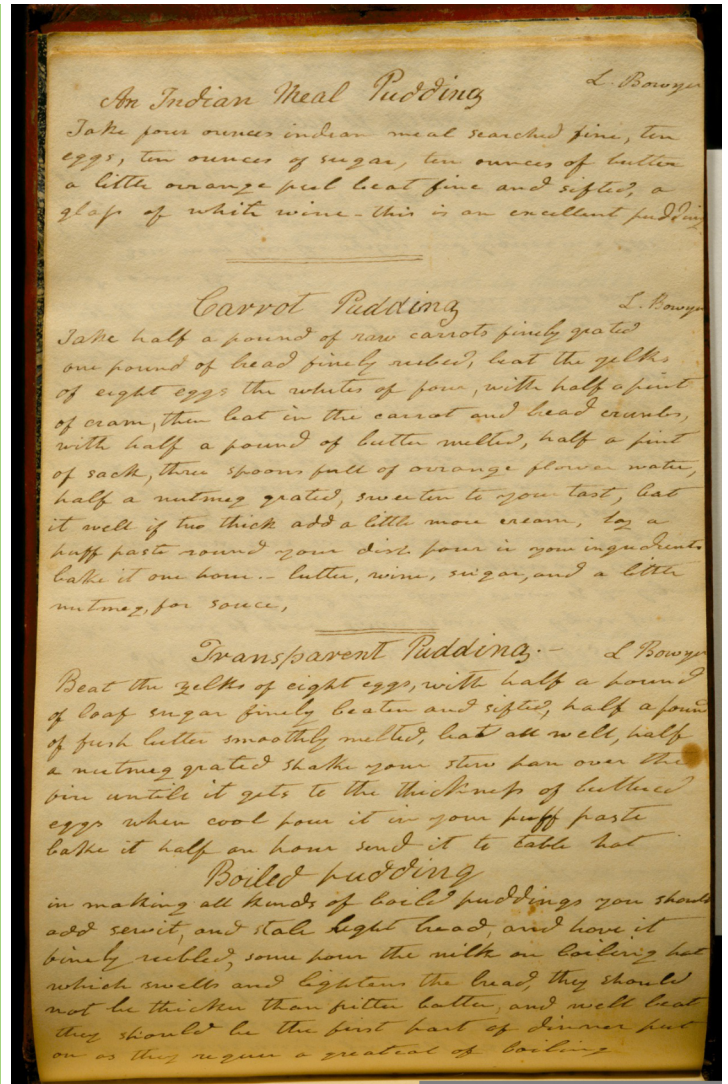
St. Louis eats An historical overview of food and food culture in St. Louis

When researching ancestors, the customary goals concern finding their origins, proving relationships, and documenting the specific events of birth, marriage, and death. Historical records can pinpoint these milestones, but their day-to-day lives are often shrouded in mystery. Issues such as quality of life and the things that brought them enjoyment may seem greatly removed from our present-day circumstances. One thing that ties generations together is food. The author of *The American History Cookbook*, Mark Zanger states, “You cannot go back in time, but you can go back in taste.”

European settlers encounter Native American food ways

When the first Europeans arrived in what is now the United States, they were confronted with unfamiliar climate and terrain, as well as flora and fauna. Native Americans had been growing corn, squash, and beans together for centuries, referring to them as “The Three Sisters.” They formed the base for succotash, a stew sometimes supplemented with meat. This protein might be in the form of fish, or the deer, elk, and buffalo they hunted. Some of the fresh meat would also be sliced thinly, salted, and then rolled up in an animal skin to dry. The preserved meat was referred to as jerky, which is believed to come from the Spanish word “charqui.”

To endure winter or distant travel, they prepared pemmican, consisting of dried meats, animal fats, and berries. They also knew about other edible plants such as acorns, sunflower seeds, and cattails. If relations were good, the struggle for mutual survival encouraged exchanges in foodstuffs and recipes between colonists, Native Americans, and enslaved people. If



Manuscript page from Julia Clark's recipe book. Source: [Missouri History Museum](https://bit.ly/3wL7uKD) <https://bit.ly/3wL7uKD>

not, starvation was never far off.

As the colonies developed during the 1700s, the colonists became more self-sufficient at maintaining a food supply, either through agriculture or trade with Europe. Immigrants often brought Old World cookbooks or manuscripts with them or

obtained cookbooks from Europe. When cookbooks appeared on American presses, they were often reprints of English cookbooks and sometimes adapted for the use of locally available ingredients.

The first cookbook written by an American about American foods was published in 1796. The author was Amelia Simmons, and though it bears a very long title, it is usually referred to simply as *American Cookery*. Its popularity in New England, New York, and the Midwest endured for 30 or more years, and the Library of Congress named it as one of the 88 “Books That Shaped America.” It bolstered American identity while retaining the familiarity and perceived refinement of British cuisine. Her book introduced innovations such as pearlsh, a leavening agent similar to baking soda, and used American terms in place of British ones, such as molasses for treacle and cookies for biscuits. It was the first cookbook to feature the combination of turkey paired with cranberries.

Colonial French cuisine

Many of the same influences were at work in the Missouri-Illinois region but with a distinctive French influence. The French fur trappers and voyageurs cultivated close relationships with Native Americans, as their livelihoods were dependent upon them. Their nomadic lifestyle encouraged them to adopt many of the Native American ways of eating (pemmican, maize, and rubaboo—a stew made from corn and/or peas with bear grease or other fat and thickened with flour). However, as French settlers began farming, they sought to distinguish themselves socio-economically from their Native American neighbors. Though they raised corn, they preferred not to eat it themselves. It was reserved for animals, laborers or slaves, reflecting a hierarchy based on race and class. Nevertheless, they availed themselves of other native foods like pumpkins and maple sugar.

Food customs in early St. Louis

In early St. Louis, the regular food supply was tenuous and difficult to maintain. Flour was often imported from Ste. Genevieve, which had a flourishing agricultural tradition. This earned St. Louis the nickname *Paincourt* (short of bread). Fernando de Leyba was appointed lieutenant governor of Upper Louisiana in 1778 with instructions to encour-

age farming. He complained that, though the land was very amenable to raising a variety of crops, “the settlers are only interested in trading with the Indians and neglect their farming. All are, or wish to be, merchants...”

Their attitude towards agriculture notwithstanding, the settlers’ diet was likely better and more varied than that of their compatriots in France. French women were renowned for their cooking prowess. One specialty of the area was *bouillon*, a type of broth, as well as fricassees and stews. Henry Marie Brackenridge, a writer and politician, spent time in Ste. Genevieve as a child and lauded their cooking. In his book, *Recollections of Persons and Places in the West*, he wrote,

With the poorest French peasant, cookery is an art well understood. They make great use of vegetables, and prepared in a manner to be wholesome and palatable. Instead of roast and fried, they had soups and fricassees, and gumbos (a dish supposed to be derived from the Africans), and a variety of other dishes.

Not everyone was smitten. William C. Carr, an early American lawyer, complained that,

The breakfast is composed of a single cup of coffee with some bread without butter; the dinner of soup, very seldom of any other kind of meat besides that of which the soup is made together with lettuce of which the French are extremely fond, using with it some kind of oil, commonly Bear’s oil.

Traces of French food origins are reflected today at Soulard Market, where one can buy fresh produce and meats. The market, occupying what was originally part of St. Louis’s common fields, originated in 1779. The property was given to Antoine Soulard, a surveyor general of Upper Louisiana at the time, as payment. His widow, Julia, donated two city blocks for use as a public market in 1841. It has the reputation of being the oldest public market west of the Mississippi.

Southern U.S and African-American traditions in St. Louis

With the advent of the nineteenth century, settlers and speculators began pouring into Missouri from Kentucky, Virginia,

and other states from the Upper South bringing their food traditions with them. Dishes like fried chicken and greens cooked with bacon were often a fusion of European and African cooking, exemplifying an ongoing cultural *pas de deux* <<https://bit.ly/3ryGwVu>>. Fried chicken is believed to have originated with Scottish immigrants, but the spices and flavorings were added by enslaved Africans preparing their food.

Early American cooks preserved their family recipes (or “re-ceipts,” as they were then known) in manuscript cookbooks. One such manuscript is *The Julia Clark Household Memoranda Book*. Published in the 1820s, it serves as an example of Missouri cookery within a particular strata of society. Though it had been assumed to have been written by Julia, it is now believed to have been written by her husband William Clark, of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Her use of spices and more exotic ingredients was the province of a more cosmopolitan and well-heeled background. These items would not have been available to the average Missouri resident, especially outside of a city. The original manuscript is held by the Missouri Historical Society.

Agricultural food traditions in Missouri

For the average Missourian of this era, however, corn was the staple. Though farmers would grow vegetables and fruits and own cattle, chickens, and pigs, corn was supremely important because it fed both humans and animals and could be planted in areas that had not been fully cleared. Native American life also centered on corn, so much so that William Clark, on his expedition with Meriwether Lewis, gave corn mills to the Native Americans they encountered. While corn was the preferred grain, pork was the most commonly eaten meat, outside of wild game. Pigs were easy to raise and the climate was ideal for meat curing. As the seasons progressed, food preparation and availability changed. In winter, preserved meats like salt pork and salt beef were eaten but replaced with chicken in summer. In fall, vegetables were recently harvested and plentiful. Cattle were slaughtered and root vegetables and cabbages were put away for winter. Sweets might be dried fruits or apples because of their long storage time. The yearly cycle cemented traditions and eating habits.

With such a strong agrarian presence surrounding the city en-

viron, a group of farmers met in St. Louis to exchange information in the early 1820s and went on to form the Agricultural Society of St. Louis County. In 1824 they held the first agricultural fair in Missouri. After the Civil War, African American farmers in Kirkwood and Carondelet sponsored a Freedmen’s Fair in 1868 to pay for schools and churches. Eventually, the Missouri legislature passed a law in 1899 calling for an annual state fair. Sedalia was chosen as the location, where it remains at present.

As the century progressed, two important crops emerged: black walnuts and apples. Missouri became and remains the number one producer of black walnuts. The Midwest also dominated the apple market by the early 1900s, surpassing the eastern states, until disease and insects caused the industry to move westward again. One notable grower, Stark Brothers Nursery and Orchard, has been in operation since 1816, when James Hart Stark came to Pike County from Kentucky with apple scions from his father’s orchard.

19th-century immigrants bring new food traditions

When successive waves of immigrants arrived they brought their respective cuisines. Often adaptations would have to be made to accommodate unfamiliar ingredients or the lack of access to their preferred ones. Germans began arriving in large numbers in the middle of the nineteenth century and, by the 1850s, comprised one third of the population of St. Louis. Their influence over the city’s food scene was extensive. Potato pancakes, sausages, and cheesecakes are but a few of their contributions. Known for their pastries and breads, like stollen, pfeffernuesse, and pretzels, they opened many bakeries and pastry shops. One delicacy that remains popular today is the Berliner Pfannkuchen, more familiarly known as the jelly doughnut.

Brewing and beer culture

Germans famously contributed beer and their brewing expertise to the city. Not simply a beverage, it was also an industry and a culture. Anglo-Saxon Protestants in St. Louisans were taken aback by the beer gardens that broke Sabbath restrictions by welcoming families to drink and be entertained on Sundays, as was customary in Germany. Not that these were



The entrance gate for Schnaider's Beer Garden, located at 2000 Chouteau Avenue, between Mississippi Avenue and Armstrong Avenue (MacKay Place). | Source: [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Schnaider's_Beer_Garden.jpg), <<https://bit.ly/36JLs0o>>

the first breweries, Jacques St. Vrain, a former French soldier and Victor Habb, a brewer from Germany, opened the first production brewery in 1810 in Bellefontaine. Other breweries followed, many lasting for only a few years. The many caves that dotted the St. Louis area provided natural refrigeration and breweries took advantage for storage. St. Louis Brewery went so far as to have their beer garden in a cave, along with a bowling alley.

The concentrated German presence in the Midwest inspired one cookbook writer, Henriette Davidis, to pen *Praktisches Kochbuch für die Deutschen in Amerika* (Practical Cookbook for Germans in America). In addition to recipes, she also provided instructions on how to properly host a *Kaffeetrinken* (a coffee and or tea party) by serving cakes and pastries. Germans often reserved cake and other sweets for this late afternoon ritual, rather than dessert after a large dinner.

As Irish as corned beef?

The Irish formed the other major influx of immigrants to St. Louis. Their mark on the local cuisine is somewhat less obvi-

ous. Many Irish dishes had been brought earlier by the Protestant Irish, or Scotch-Irish, as they were known. The subsistence cooking of the Catholic Irish was not appealing to the native-born American. Domestic workers met with their employer's disapproval when serving "potatoes with the bone in," a potato that was parboiled leaving the interior nearly raw. The dish reflected food scarcity with the idea that the firmer interior of the potato would take longer to digest, leaving the consumer feeling satiated longer.

Although identified with corned beef, the Irish rarely ate it themselves. The average Irishman was much more inclined to eat pork when available, and export their beef. In Gaelic Ireland, cattle were historically a source of dairy products and field labor. With the English conquest of Ireland, the Irish began supplying England with beef and preserving it, or corning it, per the English term, with salt crystals the size of corn kernels. The taste would have been quite different from present-day corned beef. Its current association with the Irish and St. Patrick's Day owes its origins to the Irish who settled in large cities in the United States, often near Jewish immigrants. With improved economic circumstances, the Irish were able to eat more meat and often turned to Jewish butchers who prepared a brined brisket. They would throw this in a pot with potatoes and cabbage, and a long-standing tradition was born.

The impact of slavery and the Civil War

Nineteenth-century politics, as well as immigration, shaped diets. Abolitionists avoided sugar, molasses, and rum, because of their associations with slave labor. Maple sugar was promoted as a slavery-free sweetener, and honey production was highly encouraged.

As a northern city during the Civil War, St. Louis would not have suffered as many shortages as southern ones did. Canned foods, developed in the early 1800s, became very popular during the Civil War. Preservation methods were improving, as well as transportation allowing access to seasonal and previously unavailable foods. The Civil War also had an influence on cookbooks. Women's charitable organizations published cookbooks to provide relief for war victims and raise money for soldiers, and the popularity of cook books grew after the war.

Suffrage and women's movements

Women's movements often dovetailed with the production of the cookbooks. Some benefitted the temperance and suffrage movements, while others promoted charitable interests in orphanages, hospitals and schools. In 1875 and again in 1880, a group called the Ladies of St. Louis sold *My Mother's Cookbook*, compiled for the benefit of the Women's Christian Home. Many recipes will be familiar to modern cooks, but others such as snipes or jellied chicken are more unconventional. The book also offered "every species of pie" and that—with practice—a wife would impress their husbands so much that he would say she had outdone his own mother.

Dr. Susanna W. Dodds, one of St. Louis' first female doctors, produced her own cookbook, *Health in the Household: or Hygienic Cookery* (1883), geared toward healthy or hygienic eating. One would expect that from a medical professional, but Dr. Dodds went so far as to recommend vegetarianism. She and her sister went on to open Dodd's Hygeian Home, a health sanitarium focusing on diet and natural treatments, in 1878. The first portion of her book prescribes a restricted diet eliminating white flour, baking soda and powder, milk, sweeteners, meats, and spices. A later chapter entitled, "The Compromise," allows that some readers may find the diet too restrictive and permits more commonly found ingredients. However, she admonishes one to eat those infrequently.

The development of restaurant culture

Throughout American history, the rise of any sort of restaurant and dining culture can be linked directly to two social phenomena, namely financial prosperity and immigration."—*Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America*

In colonial times and into the 1800s, taverns and inns were common and served mainly travelers and drinkers. The 1821 St. Louis City directory lists three large inns, together with a number of smaller taverns and boarding houses. Although the Chinese had begun eating in restaurants as early as 1100 A.D, fine dining as we know it originated in 18th-century France, partly as a way of demonstrating one's status and good taste. Americans were less captivated by such notions and more concerned with practicality and frugality. Inns that included

dinner with lodging, known as "The American Plan," served plentiful, albeit often bland and unsatisfying food. Meats were usually boiled or roasted. Cooks used little seasoning.

Dinner parties at home were rare. A wealthy family might host a large formal dinner, but rarely was it an informal get together of unrelated individuals. Eventually inns and hotels began charging separate fees for food and lodging, allowing those not boarding at the hotels to dine there. One St. Louis hotel that broke the mold was the Planter's House. In April 1842, Charles Dickens, while a guest during his tour of America, was quoted as saying:

It is an excellent house and the proprietors have some bountiful notions of providing the creature comforts. Dining alone with my wife in our room one day I counted fourteen dishes on the table at once.

From then on, fine dining became associated with hotels. Boarding houses were a cheaper option, but food was often of poor quality and repetitious.

Another catalyst for the growth of restaurants was the increase of commuters in the workforce. Luncheon restaurants sprung up, with an emphasis on food that was quick and reasonably priced. Throughout most of the 19th century, restaurants were largely the bastion of men. Some restaurants offered ladies' dining rooms, though these were often mixed gender. It was not until after Prohibition that women attended restaurants alone on a regular basis.

Later immigrants add to the milieu

Immigration and restaurant dining have always been intertwined. Each wave of immigrants brings restaurants that provide a tie with home and introduce locals to their cuisine. The Germans brought beer gardens and restaurants, though their popularity waned after World War I.

Beginning in the late 1800s, the Chinese settled in "Hop Alley," an area bounded by Seventh, Eighth, Walnut and Market Streets. Besides the hand laundries (their primary businesses) were groceries, merchandise stores, and restaurants. The restaurants initially served primarily Chinese immigrant bachelors but eventually gained a following with other St.

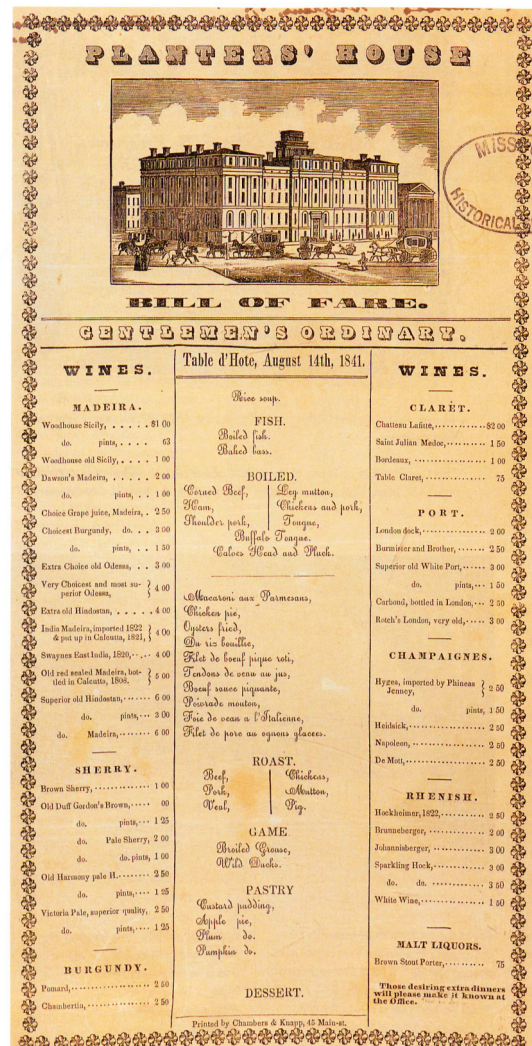
Louisians as well. Chop suey and chow mein, dishes unknown in China, were developed in the United States, because they were quick to prepare and appealed to Americans. Numerous other groups have left indelible imprints on the city’s dining culture—African Americans, Greeks, Indians, and more recently, Thais and Bosnians.

A group with one of the most enduring influences was the Italians, who also began arriving in St. Louis in the 19th century. Italian immigrants initially lacked the means to frequent restaurants, and the well-known Italian neighborhood called The Hill did not become a restaurant destination until the mid-20th century. Returning G.I.s with a taste for the food they had experienced in Italy eagerly patronized Italian eating establishments, and Italians living on the Hill were earning enough to enjoy a dinner out. St. Louis also became a center for pasta manufacture and in 1910 was recognized as the spaghetti center of the United States. Ravarino & Freschi, one of the best-known pasta suppliers, was founded in 1901. Though the original owners sold it in 1979, the company continues in operation.

World’s Fair fact and fiction

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, expositions and fairs also became an important means of introducing foods to a national audience. The Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904, or World’s Fair, is notable for such introductions. Many myths abound when it comes to the World’s fair and food. For example, legend has it that the hot dog was invented at the fair. In truth, two Austro-Hungarian men had already sold hot dogs at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago under the moniker, “Vienna sausages.” They later formed the Vienna Sausage company in Chicago to manufacture the product that became the main ingredient of the classic Chicago Dog.

One hot dog origin story concerns Anton Feuchtwanger, a St. Louis German from Frankfurt in Hesse. He had been selling “frankfurters” from a cart long before the fair, offering white gloves to customers, so they could eat them without soiling their hands. He became dismayed when customers did not return the gloves, so his wife (or brother, depending on the story), suggested serving sausages on bread rolls instead. He then went on to serve them at the World’s Fair.



Menu of the Planter House Hotel, 1841 | Source: “The Bygone Era of Dining Out in St. Louis” in *Gateway Heritage*, 23:2 (2000), p. 33.

Another myth involves the ice cream cone. As the story goes, Ernest Hamwi, a Syrian waffle vendor, noticed that the neighboring ice cream concession stand had run out of serving dishes. He formed one of his waffles, a “zalabia”, into a cone shape, scooped in some ice cream and the ice cream cone was born. History shows, however, that although the fair may have popularized the ice cream cone, it was not invented there. Italo Marchiony, an Italian living in New York City, had already been granted a patent for a cone in December of 1903, thereby negating the World’s Fair claim of origin.

Yet another myth states that iced tea was invented at the 1904 World’s Fair. Richard Blechynden, an English tea merchant, wanted to promote his Indian black teas, but the oppressive

summer heat dampened interest in hot beverages. To promote sales, he added ice, and customers welcomed the more refreshing version. Actually, iced tea had been popular in other parts of the country and appeared on restaurant menus and in cookbooks. The fair caused its popularity to surge, however.

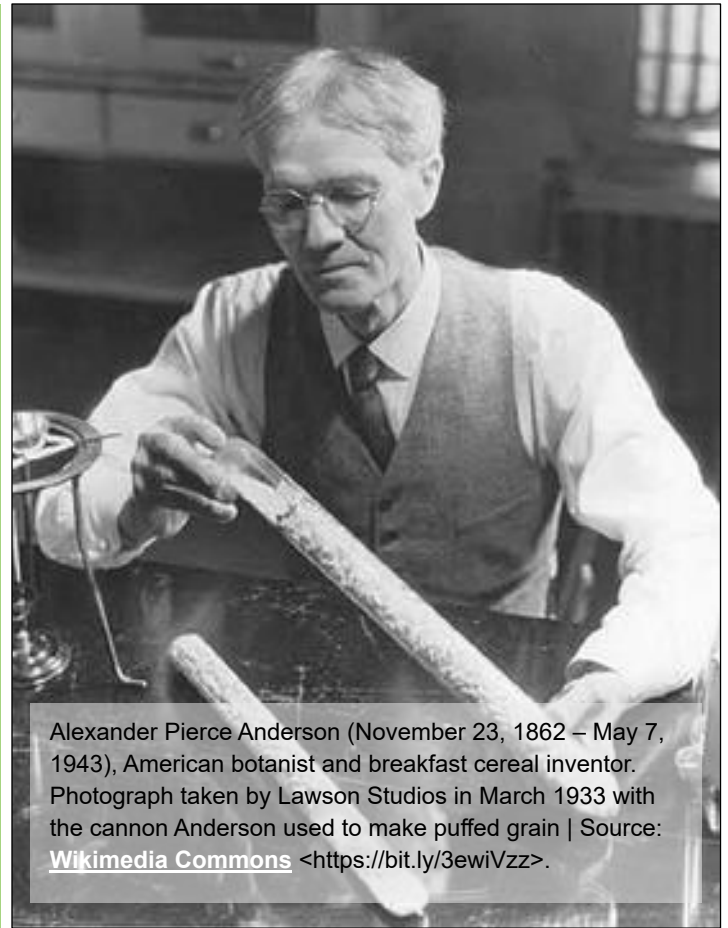
World's Fair originals

Some foods were actually introduced at the World's Fair, however. One was Quaker Oats Puffed Rice, invented by Alexander P. Anderson. Anderson had signed an agreement with Quaker Oats to produce puffed cereals the year before and came to St. Louis to demonstrate his "rice shot from guns." The rice was placed in one of eight bronze cannons, heated to 550° under pressure. Upon reaching the correct conditions, the cannons opened and the rice shot out into a waiting cage. The puffed rice was then bagged and sold to spectators for five cents. Anderson even developed a recipe for a treat made with puffed rice, molasses and caramelized sugar specifically for the fair.

Another fair original was cotton candy. Two candy makers from Tennessee invented a portable machine to make their confection, which they named "Fairy Floss." Prior to the World's Fair it was rarely sold, because it had to be cooked slowly over a stove. Cotton candy proved to be highly popular and thus began its long association with fairs.

An influential cookbook, Sarah Tyson Rorer's *World's Fair Souvenir Cook Book* also sold well at the exposition. Rorer was known as an author and owner of the Philadelphia Cooking School. Her fame preceded her, and she capitalized on it by opening a large restaurant in the Eastern Pavilion on Art Hill. Her philosophy of food preparation was an amalgamation of nineteenth and twentieth century techniques and dishes. She moved away from fussier Victorian tastes to encourage simplicity with an emphasis on hygiene, something that was in the forefront of American minds with the industrialization of food production.

World's Fair myths most likely have at their core several factors coalescing around food and its commercialization. Products could be manufactured in greater quantities than before. Refrigeration and transportation allowed for shipments across the country, and marketing promoted consumption of hitherto



Alexander Pierce Anderson (November 23, 1862 – May 7, 1943), American botanist and breakfast cereal inventor. Photograph taken by Lawson Studios in March 1933 with the cannon Anderson used to make puffed grain | Source: [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexander_Pierce_Anderson.jpg) <<https://bit.ly/3ewiVzz>>.

exotic or novel foods. The World's Fair was well placed to launch the demand for these novel commodities.

Other St. Louis originals

While the origins of some food products featured at the 1904 World's Fair can be disputed, the St. Louis origins of others are not. Goopy butter cake and toasted ravioli, both accidental creations, are identified nationally with St. Louis. Commercial products, such as Provel cheese, 7 Up, and Anheuser-Busch beer, all have their roots in St. Louis.

What we find on our tables continues to change. New contributions arrive from a multitude of sources. Foods that we find commonplace would likely have perplexed our ancestors, just as some of their choices do us. As Missouri celebrates its bicentennial on August 10, 2021, communing with our ancestors may be as simple as preparing a family recipe that have been passed down through the generations, sharing a meal, or raising a glass of Missouri wine.

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The Food Timeline

Everyone eats, but did you ever wonder about the origins of the food you consume or perhaps, what a Viking may have had for dinner? In 1999, a reference librarian, Lynne Olver, set out on a mission to create a user-friendly site for researching culinary history and [The Food Timeline](https://foodtimeline.org/index.html) <<https://foodtimeline.org/index.html>> was born. Working on her own, she compiled her information from a personal collection of magazines, pamphlets, and cookbooks, both new and centuries-old. The timeline begins appropriately enough with water and the last entry in 2013 features cronuts and test tube burgers.

In addition to individual foods, one can browse various culinary topics relating to a particular time period or region. "Ancient Foods of Mesopotamia" yields excerpts from various sources describing the

diet of the area and even provides a recipe for *sasqu*, a porridge made with dates.

Sadly, Olver passed away in 2015, and for several years, her family searched for a suitable steward of the collection. In 2020, the collection found a home at the Virginia Tech University Libraries. The institution is maintaining the physical book collection and plan to further develop the site.



The breadth of Olver's research is astonishing, but she cautions in her introduction that "Food history presents a fascinating buffet of popular lore and contradictory facts. Some experts say it's impossible to express this topic in exact timeline format. They are correct. Most foods are not invented; they evolve."

Of note

Remote access to NewspaperARCHIVE database again available

St. Louis County Library is pleased to restore access of the [NewspaperARCHIVE database](https://bit.ly/3kTU50B) <<https://bit.ly/3kTU50B>> to all library branches and remotely to patrons with a valid St. Louis County Library card living in the St. Louis metropolitan area. A steep subscription price increase forced the library to restrict access to the Headquarters location at the beginning of 2020. Funding to expand access was provided by a grant by the Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act as administered by the Missouri State Library, a division of the Office of the Secretary of State.

St. Louis Genealogical Society meeting

Saturday, Aug. 14, 10:00 a.m.

General membership meeting

Adam Lemp and the Western Brewery

The speaker will discuss new and important aspects of the Lemp family business and provide information about the resources and services available in the Recorder of Deeds Archives. Chris Naffziger, Archives Researcher, St. Louis Recorder of Deeds Office, speaker

The program will be presented via Zoom webinar. [Registration is required](https://bit.ly/3rqv5zi) <<https://bit.ly/3rqv5zi>>.

PastPorts is published by History & Genealogy at St. Louis County Library, located on Tier 5 of Library Headquarters.

[Current and past issues can be downloaded from the web](http://www.slcl.org/pastports) <<http://www.slcl.org/pastports>>.

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Book-a-Genealogist

Researchers encountering brick-walls or who would like assistance in developing a plan to achieve specific research goals can schedule a phone consultation with an H&G staff member. Requests can be made using the online [Book-a-Genealogist form](https://bit.ly/3fQbB0r) <<https://bit.ly/3fQbB0r>>.

Database access

Many library databases can be used at home by St. Louis County Library card holders living in the metropolitan area. The Ancestry Library Edition database, normally restricted to in-library use, can be accessed remotely on a temporary basis. [View the list of genealogical databases on the library's website](https://bit.ly/37GRBtF) <<https://bit.ly/37GRBtF>>.

For more information, please contact the History & Genealogy Department at 314-994-3300 or genealogy@slcl.org.