The Library as Learning Matrix

The Art of the Box Lunch

University of Pennsylvania Libraries
The essays in this volume—one by a professor and several by his students—are a kind of literary soufflé, folding together ideas about food and society, culture and collecting, libraries and learning. The learning we witness in these evocative pages is learning in the most authentic sense: the process that informs and re-forms an individual’s identity and relationship with the surrounding world.

Tom Devaney brought his Critical Writing class to the Penn Libraries so students could work with primary source materials, specifically a collection on the culinary arts given to Penn by the renowned chef, Fritz Blank. These are ephemeral texts. Unique to Penn, they cannot now, nor may they ever, be found on Google. But in the hands of a dedicated teacher and a knowledgeable librarian, even a pamphlet about Jell-O or a church recipe for tuna casserole can fuel new ideas, sharpen literary sensibilities, change a student’s appraisal of society. In short, the ephemeral can transform young minds.

By publishing this work, I hope we’ll foster a different transformation, one that affects assumptions about libraries, especially the time-honored, but misleading view that libraries are quiet, sheltered book repositories. In the Art of the Box Lunch, Tom offers us food for thought when he says, “The students connected various parts of their own world to Chef Blank’s and to the world he collected and gathered. Ultimately...the Box Lunch Project was not about archival research or even a writing assignment at all. It was, in fact, about education in its most elemental sense.”

This book reminds us that libraries are the place where knowledge, teaching and change intersect. Teaching is the preserve of the faculty, but enrichment of the learning experience is the libraries’ task. To offer students the best possible education, the alliance between Penn’s schools and their libraries must be healthy and sustained.

Carton Rogers
Vice Provost and Director of Libraries
The Library as Learning Matrix

The Art of the Box Lunch
“...they were not finding many references, if any, about the information from their boxes online. How could something so interesting not be on Google?”
It will surprise no one that undergraduates are doing research projects in the library. But that they can have full access to, and work firsthand with archival documents is a whole other terrain. For several weeks during the fall of 2007, students in my “Art of Eating” Critical Writing Seminar worked directly in the Chef Fritz Blank Collection in Penn’s Rare Book and Manuscript Library. We dubbed the essay assignment the “Box Lunch Project.” In fact, several students mentioned they actually did their research during their lunch hours.

Before the fall semester I visited Lynne Farrington, Curator of Printed Books to discuss possible ways to use the collection. On that day our pleasurable twenty minute meeting stretched into an hour. We sketched out a number of possible tasks, but until we went directly to the collection itself, we had yet to hit upon an assignment we both agreed upon. I expected to be overwhelmed by the extensive collection and I was. Yet when Ms. Farrington took me to a row full of filing boxes, a group of over forty gray, serious boxes, I began to smile.

The boxes contain more than 3,000 recipe booklets from church organizations, small to mid-sized companies, food manufacture PR departments, and far-flung community groups. Every sturdy box is labeled with the implacable title, *Victus Populi*. The items in each box are not high-end cookbooks, but are all over the map: stapled together mimeograph copies, eye-catching (often kitschy) promotional pamphlets, one-off recipe booklets.
Diagram of a Table Laid for a Formal Dinner
The boxes intrigued me. Each *Victus Populi* case was an archive in its particular category: Bread, Fruits, Nuts & Olives, Seafood, Cheese, Meats, International Foods, Condiments: Herbs & Spices, Salads & Sandwiches, Health & Diets, Leftovers: Quick & Easy, Chocolate, Ice Cream, and one devoted solely to JELL-O.

And so the assignment took shape. Each student would choose a box to write about. The student essays would chronicle their journey and search of the primary source materials. They would use both large brush strokes (to provide an overview of the box) and develop one or two finer points in greater detail. To finish, they would find and cull all but two recipes from hundreds in each box. In all, the class worked in the collection for several weeks. As the project continued they applied themselves mightily to the task. They also worked with the librarians, myself, and their peers (in class) to draw out the many layers locked inside their boxes.

The Rare Books Department provided a dramatic setting for their exploration. The space itself became part of the experience. In one student essay, *A Word to Housewives: A Recipe for Good Living*, Vishall Pawani conveys the feelings he had on the first day working in the Rare Books Room. Pawani writes:

> The bulky box lay in front of me, an unopened chest. I felt as though I had been the Chosen One bestowed with the key to unlock the hidden treasures of fruits, nuts and olives, and to discover an unknown world.
The essays impressed me. They made a number of intelligent connections between the broad categories of food and society in the second half of the 20th century, when Blank amassed his collection. Among other general concerns the question of audience was also addressed. Since many of the recipes were intended for a broad audience, the students found that they were often written in a clear and straightforward manner. Commenting on this overriding characteristic, again we hear from Pawani.

In contrast to a number of contemporary cookbooks that often use complicated recipes (hard to find ingredients); most recipes I read in my box were created for the masses, which means they are fairly simple. Each calls for ingredients that could be found in a typical kitchen. Even the titles of many of the recipes were as direct and clear-cut as “Lemon Clear Sauce,” or “Lemon Hard Sauce.”
So the lofty-sounding *Victus Populi* collection, translated as Food of the People, actually lived up to its name—that is, these recipes had been written for everyday people.

The connections between food and society continued. According to Alice Gao in her essay, *The Knead for Bread*, baking bread can be as much about the creation of desire as it is about the bread itself. Gao writes:

*It is not simply the bread itself, but the satisfaction of filling the home with the distinctive aroma of baked bread, which was being sold. Nearly every page of the booklet Better Homemade Breads and Rolls (1939), contains effusive lines such as: “Nothing tastes as good as fresh homemade bread, newly from the oven, its crust a rich-henna brown, its interior light and even textured, warm enough to melt dots of butter into golden pools.”*

The pleasures of the project no doubt included the search itself. The students were discovering new worlds in the by-gone worlds of the pamphlets. In her travel guide-like essay, *Oh the Places I Went*, on the International Foods box, Emily Huang writes:

*Last I looked at The Scandinavian Cookbook. The book urged me to imagine the ancient Vikings on their ships going towards a new world. I was grateful to be introduced to the world of the “smorgasbord,” which I did not know was an expansive buffet of delightful appetizers in Scandinavian cuisine.*

At the time of the project I began each class-session by going around the room to hear about items of interest the students had lately discovered. One day sophomore Liza Lozovatskaya (who wrote about the Herbs & Spices box) explained she had happened upon an elaborate pamphlet on astrology and food. The booklet recommended the most optimal foods to eat on specific days of the month. The students were all ears. So what does an astrology chart about food have to do with getting students to become more effective writers? Answer: nothing and everything. My job was to get the students to write, and once writing, to get them to write the best they could. But the fact is they wrote more because they were so fully engaged in the assignment itself.
Nothing tastes as good as fresh homemade bread, newly
from the oven, its crust a rich henna-brown, its interior light and
oven-textured, warm enough to melt dots of butter into golden
pools.

But homemade bread can be pretty terrible. Each household
made. The common opinion is that only the experienced or
outsiders can make it right.
500 DELICIOUS DISHES FROM LEFTOVERS

500 delicious dishes from LEFTOVERS
The students were not only learning, but they were enjoying their work and working more, and more creatively because of that. In his spirited essay The Day Jell-O Died, Jeffrey Lu conjures an evocative analogy:

Jell-O itself reminds me of the band The Carpenters: largely devoid of substance, strangely consumable, and sometimes sweet and saccharine.

In his essay on leftovers entitled, Baby Orange Babas: A Tale of Questionable Meals, Adrian Viesca Trevino writes:

Without a doubt, the most impressive item in the box was 500 Delicious Dishes from Leftovers. This yellowed booklet divided recipes according to what leftovers were available. As I turned the pages I looked at some of the titles and laughed out loud: “Lazy-day Lasagna,” “Hurry Tuna Curry,” and “Baby Orange Babas” to name a few.

A turning point happened when I started to hear that students were cooking up the recipes on their own. They were also reporting that they were not finding many references, if any, about the information from their boxes online. How could something so interesting not be on Google?
Were all of my students so enthusiastic about the Box Lunch Project? No, they were not. However, even the one student most resistant to the assignment ultimately wrote a successful essay. In Yiqiang (John) Zhang’s four page irreverent essay on a pamphlet entitled, *A Guide to Game Cookery*, Zhang accomplished at least two major things: he turned his resistance into a narrative about resistance, and wrote a plucky piece—pitched to tweak the teacher (me) and his readers (his peers)—about how to cook and prepare meat you hunt down and kill. The two recipes he chose from his box were: “Stewed Pigeon” and “Fried Squirrels with Mushroom Gravy.” Zhang closes his essay with the following paragraph:

> Imagining Chef Blank, an overweight Jersey native, equipped with a net (hunting squirrels and pigeons), I closed the grayish green lunch box and walked out of the Rare Books Department. In this class, we discussed how there is more to food than just being food. This is true. This assignment brought me to this unknown space and whether it was dreary or not, it was a unique experience. I guess Professor Devaney, who breaks into hysterical laughter and freaks me out once a week, did illustrate “the art of eating” indirectly.

In the daily, weekly, and semester-long grind of school work the Box Lunch essay might be one of those assignments you never forget. The assignment you talk about when you talk about what you did when you were in college, what you found, what you ultimately made your own. The students connected various parts of their own world to both Chef Blank’s and the world he collected and gathered. Ultimately, I realized the Box Lunch Project was not about archival research or even a writing assignment at all. It was, in fact, about education in its most elemental sense.
So what exactly came together with this assignment, with these students, in this situation? Each member of the class was discovering things no one else was finding, or had yet to find. Each began to feel a sense of ownership towards his or her box and subject. No essay exactly addressed the same questions: in fact, each box required its own set of questions. Along the way the students had to think both critically and creatively about food, culture, the writing process, their own expectations, and even the nature of collecting, via Chef Blank’s capacious and curious collection itself. In a word, and famed pedagogical platitude, they felt empowered.

The feeling in class, and the one I had while reading their essays (four of which are published here) both share a singular characteristic: a founder’s sensibility. It is a brightening spirit and ethos indicative of those who are founders in their fields. In their own way, and at their own levels (freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors) I believe the students had a sense of need, purpose, and possibility, which was conveyed in the writing itself.

Overall, the project genuinely illustrated the idea that education is a conversation. One among so many agents—students, teachers, librarians, friends, family. A collaboration that brings a new awareness to a familiar set of ingredients for all involved. But the activity also reminded us that education is even a broader generational conversation: the one that has been going on before we were here, the one such projects initiate us into through our engagement, and the same dialogue we hope will continue when we have passed from the scene.
Diving into the raw and sometimes torn and shopworn materials provided an ongoing sense of excitement. One day after class a student approached me to say how thrilled she was to come across Chef Blank’s hand-written notes and comments in several booklets. Again, Vishall Pawani, in his essay on fruits, nuts, and olives, comments on Chef Blank’s check-marks:

In many cases, I noticed recipes that had been checked-off and marked, such as “French Raisin Pie” and “Raisinberry Relish” in the *Sun-Maid Raisin Cookbook*. … I imagined a young Chef Blank eyeing the recipe for Raisinberry Relish, Rumford’s Fritter Batter and Custard Dipped Cornbeef Sandwich and blending them together to create a new dish possibly called “Chef Blank’s Cornbeef Fritters with Raisinberry Custard Coulis.”

It is exciting to see Chef Blank’s approving check marks next to his favorite recipes. One student beamed as he listened to another hold forth on Chef Blank’s marginalia. The student broke into the conversation to mention his own seemingly arbitrary discovery—a rare prize indeed—a pamphlet dusted with Chef Blank’s own fingerprints. It was a pamphlet that had been put to good use no doubt, and one that was continuing to be put to good use.
FRENCH RAISIN PIE

1 cup sugar
\( \frac{1}{4} \) cup butter or margarine, softened
\( \frac{1}{4} \) cup sweetened condensed milk
1 teaspoon vanilla


Makes one (9-inch) pie.

RAISINBERRY RELISH

3 cups (12 ounces) fresh or frozen cranberries
1 tablespoon finely grated orange peel

Cranberry relish, Raisinberry Relish makes 4 cups.

Place cranberries and water in medium saucepan. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and simmer about 10 minutes or until cranberries and orange peel soften. Return to a boil; boil 3 minutes. Remove from heat. Cool. Store in covered container.

Makes about 4\( \frac{1}{2} \) cups.
The following four essays were written for the Box Lunch Project by students enrolled in Critical Writing Seminar English 125 “The Art of Eating” in the fall 2007. They are: “A Box of Cookies,” by Amber Alhaddeff; “Fridge Food,” by Harrison Liu; “Mrs. Schlorer’s (Pronounced Slorer’s) and the Age of Consumerism,” by Kristen Beneduce; And “The Knead for Bread,” by Alice Gao. The majority of the quotes in my introduction essay are from essays written by students in my class whose essays are not published here.

Many thanks to Lynne Farrington, Curator of Printed Books; Valerie Ross, Director of the Critical Writing Program; Daniel Traister, Curator of Research Services; and Jessie Dummer (Rare Books Department Staff).
was a little nervous as the sign-up sheet was being passed around the classroom when we chose our boxes. Surely all of the good, interesting foods would be gone and I would get stuck with, I don’t know, gravy, or something even worse? But by some kind of miracle, when the sign-up sheet finally reached me, the dessert box had not yet been claimed. For me, it doesn’t get better than that.

I felt important in the University of Pennsylvania’s Rare Books Library, as I was surrounded by valuable and beautiful antique books. I had to leave my bag at the door, and pens were forbidden in the room (the less permanent pencils were acceptable). These people meant business. The young woman at the front of the room hand-delivered the box directly to my desk. The box was about a foot tall and a foot-and-a-half long. It was constructed of crisp grey cardboard and appeared to be new since no corners were yet worn or dented.

The box is part of the collection called *Victus Populi*, or “Food of the People,” so named by Chef Fritz Blank because, “since the late 18th century, pamphlets like these have taught American homemakers how and what to cook.” Blank was born in Pennsauken, New Jersey and lived most of his life in Philadelphia. He first experienced the art of cooking as a young child at his grandmother’s side. Food and cooking remain important parts of his life even now after retirement from his Philadelphia restaurant, Deux Cheminées. The University of Pennsylvania was fortunate to inherit his impressive cookery collection in 2006.

Staring at the large box on the desk in front of me, I knew I was delving into something untouched by members of the Penn community, that this was a pivotal moment in the exploration of Chef Blank’s personal recipes and notes. I excitedly flipped open the lid and my journey through Chef Blank’s dessert recipe collection began.
The box was filled with many recipe books for cookies, candies, pies, and pastries from 1927 all the way to 1991. Interestingly, there was not one hard-bound book in the collection; all were paperback, or simple pamphlets. The collection of cookie recipe books was the most dynamic. Who would have thought there were so many varieties of cookies? Drop cookies, bar cookies, no-bake cookies, refrigerator cookies—so many cookies that I had never even heard of! The box was filled with familiar standbys, like the favorite chocolate chip cookie and traditional sugar cookie, but also contained unexpected delights, unusual recipes, books using the unique spelling of “cooky,” and striking differences between older and more modern recipe books.

Toward the beginning of the older books, there were cooking tips and nutrition information. A Betty Crocker cookie recipe book from 1948 contained an entire page dedicated to preparing nuts. Complete with illustrations, it showed how to prepare broken, cut-up, coarsely chopped, finely chopped, blanched, sliced, slivered, and ground nuts. Another book’s informative sections included, “Cooky Baking Tips,” “How to Freeze,” “How to Store,” and “How to Pack for Mailing.”

Illustrations such as the “nut preparation” drawings in the Betty Crocker recipe book were common among the books and pamphlets in Chef Blank’s collection. Instead of huge, vividly colorful photographs which aim to appeal to one’s senses and appetite, many illustrations depicted “helpful techniques.” Drawings of women—(none of the recipe books display images of men)—rolling dough, sifting flour, and making cookie cutouts were neatly juxtaposed with recipes involving the respective baking techniques.
Betty Crocker Picture Cooky Book

128 of the most popular tested recipes from her collection... with 70 "how-to-do" tips, 50 success pointers and 175 illustrations.
A big difference I noticed between Chef Blank’s cookie recipe booklets and more contemporary recipe books is in the area of health consciousness. Today, a big trend is in health foods; we try to make our guilty pleasures a little less harmful by using margarine instead of butter, or low-fat versions of ingredients. But in these wonderful old booklets, healthy alternatives are not even an option. They advocate using shortening, butter made from whole cream, and other sinful ingredients. A book called *The Candy Calendar* makes audacious claims such as “candy does not harm teeth,” “sugar comes next to fat and oil as a complete and quick-acting food for heat and energy,” “[sugar] speedily relieves exhaustion,” and the ingredients in candy have “high nutritive value.” These statements almost certainly would not be printed today!

Browsing through my box, had yet to be surveyed by any Penn librarian or even student, I felt like discovering a new, unexplored frontier. And even better, this frontier was filled with delicious ingredients such as cookie dough, chocolate chips, chopped walnuts, and shredded coconut. What I thought would be a simple collection of chocolate chip, peanut butter, and other standard cookie recipes turned out to be both that and so much more. The interesting contrast between the older and more contemporary books was an unexpected and exciting find. Why no one chose the dessert box is still beyond my comprehension.
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Betty Crocker Picture Cooky Book. NA. U.S.A.: General Mills, Inc., 1948. Dessert #8, Victus Populi (Food of the People), the Chef Fritz Blank Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

It is quite easy to find an appealing recipe when assigned the dessert box. But amongst thousands of cookie recipes which all sound delicious, how can someone choose just one perfect cookie? These Peanut Butter Fudge Bars appear to come awfully close. Never before have I come across a recipe that calls for all of my favorite sweet ingredients: cake, peanut butter, chocolate, and coconut—all in one food! This recipe comes from the book *Bar Cookie Bonanza*, edited by Annette Gohike. It is sure to be a favorite among fellow sweet tooths.

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**PEANUT BUTTER-FUDGE BARS**

1 18-1/2-ounce package yellow cake mix
1 cup creamy peanut butter
1/2 cup butter, melted
2 eggs
1 14-ounce can sweetened condensed milk
2 tablespoons butter, melted
2 teaspoons vanilla
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 12-ounce package semisweet chocolate chips
1 cup flaked coconut
1 cup chopped walnuts

Combine cake mix, peanut butter, 1/2 cup melted butter and eggs. Stir until well blended. Press 2/3 of mixture onto bottom of ungreased, 13-x 9- x 2-in. pan. Reserve remaining mixture for topping. Combine sweetened condensed milk, 2 tablespoons butter, vanilla and salt; blend well. Stir in chocolate chips, coconut and walnuts. Spread over cake mix layer. Crumble reserved dough over top. Bake at 350° for 25 to 35 minutes or until golden brown. Cool in pan on rack. Cut into bars. Makes 4 dozen bars. **Note:** Chocolate cake mix may be used in place of yellow.

—Mrs. Kenneth Horinek, Ludell, Kansas
As an avid runner, this “Athlete’s Bar” recipe caught my eye right away. A sweet treat made especially for athletes? It sounded too good to be true. But after scanning through the list of ingredients, my excitement faded. Raisins? No thanks. Zucchini? I love it sautéed in some garlic and olive oil, but not in a cookie bar. Still, the Athlete’s Bar recipe from the book Bar Cookie Bonanza, seems interesting, to say the least. Adventurous souls may dare to try it.

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**ATHLETES’ BARS**

1/2 cup butter, softened  
1/2 cup vegetable oil  
1 cup brown sugar, firmly packed  
2 eggs  
2 tablespoons water  
1 teaspoon vanilla  
1-3/4 cups flour  
1 teaspoon baking soda  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1-1/2 cups raisins  
3 cups Wheaties cereal  
3 cups grated zucchini  
1 teaspoon cinnamon  
1 tablespoon sugar

Beat butter, oil and brown sugar until fluffy. Add eggs, water and vanilla. Blend in flour, baking soda and salt, mixing well. Blend in raisins, cereal and zucchini. Spread in greased, 13- x 9- x 2-in. baking pan. Combine cinnamon and sugar; sprinkle over top. Bake at 350° for 35 to 40 minutes. Cool before cutting. **Note:** You may frost with German chocolate icing, but do not sprinkle with the sugared cinnamon.

—Edna Stine, Kenney, Illinois
ictus Populi, the only erudite marking on the grey cardboard box set in front of me, seemed uncharacteristic for the otherwise unassuming appearance of the package. Sheltered by the cozy Rare Books Department of Penn’s Van Pelt Library, it beckoned me into a culinary culture of a by-gone time. Beyond the room’s scholarly looking wood-paneled walls, it may have been bleary and dreadfully chilly, but I was settled in comfortably, ready to dive into Chef Fritz Blank’s collection of memorabilia on bread as if I were a child opening a present.

As I shuffled through the contents of the box, expecting to find antiquated newspaper clippings or magazine feature articles, I was initially overwhelmed by the abundance of recipe pamphlets. Pocket-sized, magazine-sized, and everything in-between, these promotional pamphlets all seemed to focus on presenting more variations on bread than the next. I was concerned at first I would not be able to identify a theme that was both unifying and striking. Luckily, however, I was allowed to take pictures (of the contents), so I clicked away in the hope that returning to the pictures, I would find some perspective. Some time after my first visit, I remembered one of the overarching ideas of our class is that food is often more than just food. I think this is especially true of bread, a staple that has now become largely understated. As I spent more time reviewing the extensive contents of the box, it became apparent how the cultural implications of bread emerged from its marketing throughout each of the pamphlets.
In most of the pamphlets, it is not the bread itself that is primarily being sold; instead, it is the ideal of a homemaker fulfilling her family’s most basic needs. An almost textbook-like 1918 booklet, titled *Bread*, issued by the Women’s Institute of Domestic Arts & Sciences explicitly conveys what is found more implicitly in the other materials: “Good bread...contributes largely to the family’s health and enjoyment. So nothing is more important in the accomplishments of a housewife than the mastery of bread making.” Reading this line today, it sounds more satirical rather than an earnest appeal, yet this message unmistakably resonates throughout the materials of the box. Accompanying these messages are images of happy families and even images of children actively participating in the classroom, as if the effect of good bread in the household goes far beyond the home. Bread companies such as Bond Bread also emphasized the “home-like” quality of its bread, and images of an iconic family with two children (jubilant, of course) heading to a picnic pervade its leaflets.
In a similar sense, it is not simply the bread itself, but the satisfaction of filling the home with the distinctive aroma of baked bread that is sold. Nearly every piece contains effusive lines in the introduction, such as: “Almost no task is more soul-satisfying than kneading a batch of bread dough on a wintry morning,” or even better, “Nothing tastes as good as fresh homemade bread, newly from the oven, its crust a rich-henna brown, its interior light and even textured, warm enough to melt dots of butter into golden pools.” The confidence in the transformative power of bread is unwavering. I even began to believe in it myself. When I thought about it later, I realized that I did not give bread enough credit. After all, it is true that there are few things like freshly baked bread; specifically, the charms and virtues of baking bread and the affirmation felt afterwards are likely unrivaled. What I could do without are the over-the-top descriptions that seem to trivialize the genuine gratification we feel when that full-flavored aroma reaches our senses.

What’s more remarkable is that it is not only the bread, but the convenience and versatility of products like ready-to-go baking mixes that are sold. Most of the pamphlets and cookbook supplements in Blank’s collection were released by yeast or flour companies, and to say the some of the culinary creations were innovative is putting it lightly. Although we often associate Bisquick with pancakes and waffles in our day and age, that would not add up to the 157 recipe ideas professed by Betty Crocker’s Bisquick Cook Book. From taco pies to cheese soufflés to hot-fudge pudding, the vibrant promotions complete with kitschy photography (orange-hued images of unappetizing food) make me wonder if quantity and creativity became the main selling point, overshadowing the essence of bread.
There is a clear distinction between the 1918 pamphlet on the art of making bread and the pamphlets published between 1950-1970. We can distinguish how the emphasis shifted from the simplistic, classic loaf to peripheral concerns such as creative menu names as well as ‘ease’ and ‘quickness.’ The pamphlets reflect their times. In the early decades of the twentieth century, women generally had more time to spend in the kitchen and more singular responsibility in taking care of the household. Naturally, marketers honed in on the homemaker by drawing attention to a more traditional lifestyle. A few decades later, the concept of convenience became more important to women who were starting to leave the domestic sphere; marketers then captured this shift in needs, offering numerous ‘elegant’ solutions that saved both time and effort.

Yes, on the surface, bread is bread, but because it is so representative of our culture and immersed in it, it is highly symbolic as well. The 1918 pamphlet perhaps says it most pointedly: “In truth, to study the history of bread making would amount to studying the accounts of the progress that has been made by the human race.” This multi-dimensionality manifests in Chef Fritz’s collection, and although his whole collection is titled Victus Populi, how strikingly fitting the phrase “Food of the People” is for bread.
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133-Quicker Ways to Homemade…with Bisquick. General Mills, 1959. BREAD (box) #7, Victus Populi (Food of the People), the Chef Fritz Blank Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.
Tying the Knot

Today pretzels come with a variety of coatings, shapes, dips, and flavors that would stun the seventh century monk who originally came upon this creation serendipitously. Pretzels have now lost most of their religious and spiritual implications and are most commonly associated with street vendors and sporting events. The unique shape of the soft pretzel was actually meant to represent a person’s arms crossed in prayer, and it was rewarded to children who excelled under the monk’s tutelage. As a symbol of church life, it was thought to bring prosperity and wholeness. The versatile pretzel later found its way into marriage celebrations and also became the food of the poor during economic downturns.

Today a number of variations are found for this once unadorned treat. From cheese to cinnamon and brown sugar and even pizza toppings, what the soft pretzel has lost of its original essence, it has gained in variety. Here now is a recipe for the humble pretzel the way the monks knew it.

“LITTLE ARMS”

PRETZELS

WATER
YEAST
SUGAR
UNBLEACHED FLOUR
EGG
SALT
1 1/2 cups, warm
1 tablespoon
1/4 cup
4 1/2 cups
1, beaten with 2 teaspoons water
coarse

Stir together WATER, YEAST and SUGAR in a large bowl. Let stand 1 hour. Mix in FLOUR thoroughly. Turn dough out on lightly floured surface and knead 10 minutes.

Grease bowl, return dough to bowl, turning to grease the top. Cover and set in a warm place to rise until double in size, about 1 1/2 hours. Punch down, then pinch off a piece of dough about the size of a golf ball. Roll dough with hands to 15 inches long or pull into a smooth rope. Make a loop by picking up and crossing the ends of the rolled strips. Bring the left end of the strip over to the right and then the right end over to the left. This forms a twist in the center. Bring the ends up and over and press them against the sides of the loop, making the traditional pretzel shape. Place the pretzels on greased cookie sheets two inches apart. In a small bowl, beat EGG with water and brush on each one. Sprinkle with coarse SALT. Let dough rise again, 1/2 to 3/4 hour. Bake in a preheated 475°F oven 10 to 12 minutes until golden. Cool on rack. Makes about 2 dozen.

Note: These pretzels can also be made in stick form.
There are no entries (not too surprisingly) for the phrase “Chicken-Tomato Waffle” on Google. One reminder of the uniqueness of recipes found in various manufacturers’ booklets, this recipe is from an old Bisquick pamphlet. In contrast to the evolving variations on the pretzel, the waffle seems to have settled down a bit from its mid-twentieth century self. Today, we typically enjoy our waffles (whose nooks and crannies are perfect for holding in those heavier sauces and toppings) with fruit and whipped cream, favoring sweet over savory. At any rate, it is apparent that Bisquick felt the need to be inventive with its baking mix product, and coming up with well over a hundred variations cannot be accomplished without a little risk-taking. So here, I present the decadent and quite heavy sounding variation on a breakfast favorite.

**Chicken-Tomato Waffles**

- ¼ cup margarine or butter
- ¼ cup Bisquick® baking mix
- ⅛ teaspoon pepper
- 2 cups milk
- 1 tablespoon parsley flakes
- 1 teaspoon instant bouillon
- 2 cups cut-up cooked chicken or turkey
- Waffles (below)
- 3 large tomatoes, sliced

Heat margarine in a 2-quart saucepan over low heat until melted. Stir in baking mix and pepper. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until mixture is smooth and bubbly; remove from heat. Stir in milk, parsley and bouillon. Heat to boiling, stirring constantly, Boil and stir 1 minute. Stir in chicken; heat through. Prepare Waffles. Place 2 tomato slices on each waffle section. Spoon chicken mixture over tomatoes. Garnish with cooked asparagus or broccoli spears if desired. 6 servings.

Waffles. Beat 2 cups Bisquick baking mix, 2 tablespoons vegetable oil, 1 egg and 1¼ cups milk with hand beater until smooth. Pour batter from cup or pitcher onto center of hot waffle iron. Bake until steaming stops. Remove waffle carefully.
EQUIPMENT
FOR SALAD MAKING
The family has left the dinner table. The children are playing with the neighborhood boys and girls, and your husband is sprawled out on the lime-green couch in the next room. The grainy, black and white television buzzes in the background behind the staticy rush of faucet water as you finish up the dishes. You marvel at how lovely it would be to have a Whirlpool dishwasher like so many other housewives in town. “It could practically wash the dishes for you,” you think. “Except for your wooden salad bowls, of course.” These should be wiped with a rag to guard from cracking and allow the wood to be continuously flavored with salad herbs.

Every good housewife knows that a meal is not complete without a healthy but so often dreaded salad of fruits and vegetables. However, a great housewife knows exactly where to turn for the secret ingredients that make even the most obscure salad concoctions a hit. You consult Mrs. Schlorer’s the little magic recipe book tucked into your apron pocket. Mrs. Schlorer, salad extraordinaire, and trusted maker of Schlorer mayonnaise products. She whispers to you in her darling, lady-like way: “A vitamin-rich healthy salad, especially for growing boys and girls, is a sure failure without a gracious spoonful of Mrs. Schlorer’s mayonnaise French dressing to lure your family customers.”

Now, years later, Mrs. Schlorer’s pamphlet is a by-gone artifact of American cooking heritage and the consumer age. Her booklet seems quite at home in Penn’s Rare Book Library, but how it found its way into the “Salads and Sandwiches” recipe collection of Chef Fritz Blank, biologist, soldier, and owner of the renowned Deux Cheminées restaurant, is something of a surprise and a mystery. I pictured Chef Fritz Blank towering over me like the Ghost of Christmas Past, as the librarian slid the unopened “Salad and Sandwich” box, and what I hoped would be a feast of innovative, scrumptious new salad recipes, into my arms. I then imagined Chef Blank dressed in military garb and laboratory goggles of his pre-chef life, standing at attention, chest forward, like soldiers in my grandfather’s old Korean War photos. I pictured his jolly, round head held high, crowned with a towering chef’s hat, the mark of a cook who rules his commercial kitchen with masculine sovereignty rather than dainty know-how.
Given Chef Blank’s culinary stature, I just knew (or I thought I knew) that I would discover several shiny new tricks to add richness and variety to my salads. I was anxious to appropriate Chef Blank’s wealth of knowledge. I cracked open the box and peered over the ledge as if it were a lost treasure of recent gastronomic life. A seeping smell of musk struck my nostrils. I dropped the lid. The box fell open to reveal a menagerie of magazine pamphlets and thin catalogues, their covers faded with age. Slowing down, I gently flipped past each booklet, slid them out, and examined each like precious pieces of art. Then I began to realize how outdated many of the materials were. The inside covers read: “Copyright 1930,” “Copyright 1950,” “Copyright 1955.” No shiny new recipe pamphlets with micro-digital close-ups of finished products, no computer print outs, no post-it notes, and no ad-hoc recipes scribbled on napkins. What I found was simply a time-capsule of everyday condiments and American food brands parading as culinary treasure.

Chef Fritz Blank’s “Salads and Sandwiches” box is a museum of twentieth-century food history artifacts rather than high-end food. The collection is appropriately titled *Victus Populi*, food of the people. The salad section is layered with pamphlet after pamphlet from well-known, all-American food companies: Mrs. Schlorer’s, Hellman’s, Kraft, Ivanhoe, and even Knox-gelatin. Mrs. Schlorer was meant to be a model housewife for her time. Her pamphlet opens with this sentence: “Culinary theory has no place in Mrs. Schlorer’s scheme of things—she was a practical woman…” Mrs. Schlorer’s workaday advice was not intended to inspire creative excellence. It was meant to inspire everyday purchases at the grocery store.
Mrs. Schlorer’s Salad Book was the first item I looked at in Chef Blank’s box and it set the stage for the materials to follow. The messages included the following: A good salad is reliant on mayonnaise, Jello, mustard, spice, ketch-up to mask the salad’s content and aid presentation. These goods make fruits and vegetables look and taste more delicious than they are, promises a publication from Hellman’s mayonnaise. According to Schlorer’s booklet: “Whatever the ingredients may be, the experienced hostess knows that the secret of a perfect salad lies in its thoughtful presentation,” and presentation requires that the salad be “perfectly dressed with Hellman’s.” In a pamphlet published 1928 by Coleman’s Mayonnaise we read:

“Work this little miracle to any one of your familiar dressings add the bright sparkling flavor of Coleman’s Mustard. The whole salad springs to life. French of mayonnaise, boiled, cream of Russian – all your well known dressings take new brilliance from the vivacious flavor of Coleman’s.”

The pamphlets all lead to a similar conclusion: the condiment is the magic of the salad. Chef Blank and the great housewife shared this secret, surreptitiously handed down from the food manufacturers to the consumers. Evidently, the most popular sales tactic was to become a housewife’s confidant, her trusted friend. Many pamphlets include flattering and fun drawings and doodles. One shows a young, dainty woman cheerfully waving her cooking spoons. Other pamphlets offer a glimpse into the intimate lives of the woman behind the ever-popular food products. Ivanhoe Mayonnaise’s pamphlet Letters to Daughter in the City introduces each recipe with a letter from Harriet Meaker Osborne, the woman figure behind Ivanhoe Mayonnaise, to her daughter Margaret, a newlywed housewife in training. Mrs. Osborne divulges the importance and appropriate use of each recipe, passing her coveted ‘secrets’ to the entire housewife community. Mrs. Schlorer, likewise, makes herself an intimate companion. “In the following pages you will find Mrs. Schlorer’s own personal recipes. Mrs. Schlorer took personal pride in her table and her skill as a provider of dainty tempting dishes,” her pamphlet alluringly says. Well, you won’t find Chef Fritz Blank’s personal recipes in this box, but you will discover a surprisingly deep connection with the American housewife and consumer products.

I now pictured Mrs. Schlorer standing beside Chef Blank as I shut the box and returned it to the Rare Book’s librarian. Then I imagined the little magic recipe book poking out of Mrs. Schlorer’s pocket. Chef Blank removed his towering white crown and placed it on her head.
Works Cited:

SALADS AND SANDWICHES (box) #32. Victus Populi (Food of the People), the Chef Fritz Blank Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA. The Hellmann Salad Book.

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SALADS AND SANDWICHES (box) #32. Victus Populi (Food of the People), the Chef Fritz Blank Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA. Salad Book with special section on Molded Salads. Johnstown, NY: Knox Gelatine Inc., 1959

SALADS AND SANDWICHES (box) #32. Victus Populi (Food of the People), the Chef Fritz Blank Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA. Salad Leaves or Letters to Daughter in the City. Auburn, NY: Ivanhoe Foods, Inc., N.D.

SALADS AND SANDWICHES (box) #32. Victus Populi (Food of the People), the Chef Fritz Blank Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA. 300 Sensational Salads. Berry, Lucinda Hollace. 1982
This aptly titled dish hails from *The Knox Gelatin Salad Book* (1959), when gelatine salads were all the rage. In our modern day, however, the title of this dish must be taken literally, and I beseech you to heed the following warning - It is “A-Lotta Bologna” to preserve your salad in a Jell-O mold, and it is even more outrageous to think this would make a winning meal for a hungry husband.

I present the following excerpt and recipe so that we may marvel at how our eating habits are so vulnerable to food trends and mass marketing. I hope that we may learn from, and not repeat, history.

Unflavored Gelatine differs from flavored gelatine dessert powders in 3 important ways. It is 85% pure protein (flavored gelatines are only 1/8 protein; 7/8 sugar). It contains no sugar. It contains no flavoring. THEREFORE…great variety is possible. Almost any food can be used- meat fish, cheese, eggs, fruit. You can enjoy the full natural flavors of foods. Unflavored Gelatine is low in calories; fits into reducing diets. Salads made with it will not be rubbery or “tough.”

If this does not convince you, perhaps you might consider Knox’s “Spinach and Egg Loaf Gelatin” or “Salmon Grape Mold” recipes from *Knox Salad Cookery* (1973)?

Today, gelatine salad may be a trend of the past, but Jell-O has certainly not disappeared. It is not at all uncommon to find Jell-O fruit cocktail and other jiggly desserts. Jell-O trends have simply mutated and are lurking in new forms. J-E-L-L-O. It’s still alive.

**Sunday Supper for Hungry Men**

**IT'S-A-LOTT'A BOLOGNA SALAD** (serves 8-10)

- 2 envelopes Knox Unflavored Gelatine
- 2½ cups water, divided
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup vinegar
- ½ cup diced celery
- ½ cup diced sweet pickle
- 2 cups grated American cheese
- 2 cups diced bologna

Sprinkle gelatine on 1 cup of the cold water in saucepan to soften. Place over low heat, stirring constantly until gelatine is dissolved. Remove from heat. Add remaining 1½ cups water, salt and vinegar. Chill until the mixture is the consistency of unbeaten egg white. Fold in remaining ingredients. Turn into a 6-cup mold; chill until firm. Unmold on watercress and serve with mayonnaise thinned with sour cream. Surround mold with thick slices of tomato, topped by a green pepper ring and a spoonful of minced onion.
The most recent publication in Chef Fritz Blank’s salad recipe collection, 300 Sensational Salads by Lucinda Hollace Berry, is more than two decades old. Information about the author is scarce, but it is clear that Ms. Berry had a passion for summery fruits including Georgia peaches and Florida oranges. The following is a representative specimen of her recipes which seamlessly combine fruit and seafood, an unexpectedly delightful combination.

PEACH BOATS WITH SHRIMP SALAD

2 4 1/2 oz. cans of tiny shrimp
1/2 cup finely chopped celery
2 tablespoons finely chopped green pepper
4 tablespoons mayonnaise
1 teaspoon lime juice
Dash of each — onion salt, monosodium glutamate and worcestershire sauce
4 large Fresh Peaches — halved
Lettuce leaves or Endive

Drain shrimp and clean if necessary. Add celery and green pepper. Mix mayonnaise, lime juice and seasonings — add to shrimp, celery, and green pepper mixture. Mix well. Chill for at least an hour. Place peach halves on crisp lettuce leaves and spoon shrimp over the peaches. Serves approximately 4.
As I slowly cracked open the box containing Chef Fritz Blank’s collection of articles on ice cream I envisioned what I would find inside. I was, after all, about to delve into Chef Blank’s personal collection of dairy delights. As the owner and executive chef of the renowned Deux Cheminées, Blank was no lightweight in the culinary world. I glanced over the title of the folder, it was innocuous enough: “Victus Populi – Frozen Desserts, General Ice Cream, Junket and Rennet.” Would I find tomes of ancient wisdom regarding the proper production of ice cream? Perhaps a recipe served to a king back before the invention of the refrigerator? Surely I would find at least one secret family recipe that, up until now, was locked inside a three-layered vault laced with laser tripwires and watched over by a belligerent guard named “Oog.” What I actually found that day was much different than what I had expected.
Color. As I eagerly pulled out the first file folder I noticed a barrage of reds, greens, blues, and whites that assaulted my eyes. Pamphlet after pamphlet of brightly-printed paper spilled out of the folder, each vibrantly illustrated with different varieties of ice cream and custard. I had pulled out a folder labeled “Refrigerated, Junket and Rennet” (“Frozen, Ice Cream” and “Frozen, General” still awaited tantalizingly). The word “Junket” immediately piqued my interest. Perhaps here was an exotic dish worthy of being whipped up by a master chef such as Blank! As if to assist elucidating the finer points behind “Junket,” the name of the first pamphlet was *How to Make Rennet-Custards and Ice Cream*. I flipped through the pages, too impatient to read the recipes and text, eyes hungry for a glimpse of the mysterious Junket. To my disappointment everything looked pretty much like…well, ice creams and custards. To decipher this conundrum I leafed back to the front of the pamphlet to read what I had skipped over previously. In the end, it turned out Junket was a company and rennet its flagship product. What I had found was not a pamphlet of age-old ice cream recipes, but instead a promotional pamphlet extolling the virtues of rennet tablets (in full Technicolor glory, no less). I was rather let down, though interested to learn that rennet itself is a stomach enzyme that curdles milk, which greatly simplifying the transformation of milk to ice cream and custards.
This singular discovery was emblematic of others I would make as I examined the box’s contents. Each folder was brimming with pamphlets promoting products from companies old and new. Out spilled leaflets from Jell-O, Breyers, Reidelights, and Dolly Madison, among others. Most of the recipes were along similar lines: milk, sugar, flavoring (usually fruit) and the company’s signature product (whether it be Jell-O ice cream powder or Junket tablets). In fact, if there was one word to describe the entire box it would be this: ordinary. It was neither exciting nor particularly boring; it was ordinary.

However, as I looked through more pamphlets I began to lose my initial sense of disappointment. I began to realize this was truly *Vicus Populi* (food of the people) and the fact that it was simple did not preclude it from being delicious. I began to regain my initial sense of excitement—but now for an entirely different reason. Dishes are not created out of thin air; even the most intricate dish is based upon the fundamentals of other, simpler dishes. Even a dish as complicated and spectacular as a Baked Alaska (a baked ice cream cake from what I could gather) was made through a combination of simpler ingredients such as ice cream, sponge cake, meringue, and a hot oven (Berolzheimer). Thus this box represents the elements from which even someone as acclaimed as Chef Blank could draw upon in order to create his own recipes. As I thumbed from colorful page to page I occasionally spotted miniscule handwritten notes, footnotes, and annotations, undoubtedly inscribed by Chef Blank himself. I became more and more eager to catch a glimpse of the process behind creating new recipes as I delved deeper into the box. At last I closed “Frozen Desserts” satisfied. It may not have contained what I originally expected, but I had explored something completely unanticipated: the rich culinary tradition of the masses culled and cultivated by a master chef.
Work Cited

How to Make Rennet Custards and Ice Cream. Little Falls, NY: Chr. Hansen’s Laboratory Inc., 1938. ICE CREAM (box) #5, Victus Populi (Food of the People), the Chef Fritz Blank Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

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A solid and traditional ice cream flavor with easily obtainable ingredients. Other fruits can be substituted for the bananas for different flavors. This recipe came from a cookbook chock full of varieties of ice cream, ranging from English ice cream, French ice cream, Philadelphia ice cream, and even Delmonico ice cream (which the following recipe is classified under). Recipes for water ice and sorbets round out this cookbook, making it truly *Dainty Dishes for All the Year Round*.

Ice cream should be frozen by surrounding the ice cream with a mixture of 3 parts ice to 1 part salt, stirring both occasionally. The ice and salt should be replenished as needed in the same ratio as before. Once the ice cream has sufficiently thickened it can be placed into the freezer.

**Delmonico Ice Creams.**

**Banana Ice Cream**

1 pint of cream, 1 pint of milk, 1/2 pound of sugar, Yolks of six eggs, 4 bananas.

Scald the milk. Beat yolks and sugar together until light; add to the milk and cook until it thickens, stirring constantly. Add the cream, and when cool the bananas, which should be mashed through a colander. Freeze and pack as directed.
A rather unconventional recipe to say the least. I like to think of it as the ice cream version of s’mores, perfect for supplying children with their drug of choice: sugar. Not for the faint of heart.

From: Berolzheimer, Ruth.
250 Luscious Refrigerator Desserts

**COLA MARSH ICE**

24 marshmallows  
2 cups cola beverage  
⅛ teaspoon salt  
2 tablespoons lemon juice

Place marshmallows and 2 tablespoons cola beverage in saucepan. Heat slowly, folding over and over until marshmallows are about half melted. Remove from heat and continue folding until mixture is smooth and fluffy. Cool slightly, then add remaining cola beverage, salt and lemon juice. Blend thoroughly. Pour into freezing tray of refrigerator and freeze until firm, stirring 2 or 3 times while freezing. Serves 4 or 5.
Chef Fritz Blank was born and raised in southern New Jersey and, prior to becoming a chef, earned degrees and worked in a range of related fields, including dairy husbandry, medical technology, and clinical microbiology, all of which helped shape his culinary sensibilities. In 1979, at the urging of friends and colleagues, he opened Deux Cheminées and soon became known as one of America’s foremost French chefs. While running the restaurant, Chef Fritz also amassed a renowned culinary collection, which graced the walls of Deux Cheminées. After the restaurant closed in June 2007, Chef Fritz retired to Thailand, where he currently lives.

During the fall of 2002, a major exhibition in the Kamin Gallery of Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center of works from his collection, titled A Chef & His Library, examined the many influences on Chef Fritz and revealed his eclectic and egalitarian collecting style. This exhibition can be viewed online in a web version at:

www.library.upenn.edu/exhibits/rbm/chef

In 2005 Chef Fritz gave the Penn Libraries his Victus Populi and community cookbook collections. He recently donated the main part of his collection to the Libraries, consisting of thousands of books, manuscripts, periodicals, menus, posters, prints, and related ephemera, as well as his own personal papers. He is planning to return to the University of Pennsylvania in Fall 2009 for a series of lectures and other programs.
Penn Libraries have long been the grateful recipients of gifts of books, manuscripts, and entire library collections, all of which serve as valuable resources for scholarly inquiry.

We continue to enhance the breadth and depth of our collections, which advance the research and teaching missions of the University, and serve to attract outstanding new faculty and students.

The Orrery Society honors the generosity of individuals, such as Chef Fritz Blank, who, through gifts of materials or monetary donations, support and promote the development of the Libraries’ collections.

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