
Menus: Their use and collection in an academic library

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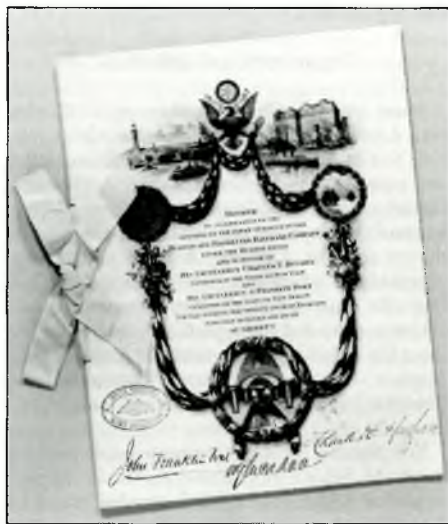
Sampling the wares of Cornell's menu collection.

Would it surprise you to know that Teddy Roosevelt, our 26th president, after whom the teddy bear was named, had eaten bear cub? On September 28, 1909 in a dinner in his honor at Hayden Lake, Idaho, Roosevelt was served bear cub, along with such other "game" dishes as oysters, bass, partridge, and venison. And did you know that during prohibition established restaurants indicated the availability of spirits to their clientele by tucking a small insert labeled "Entre Nous" into the spine cord of the menu? This discreet insert listed the alcoholic beverages to be served.

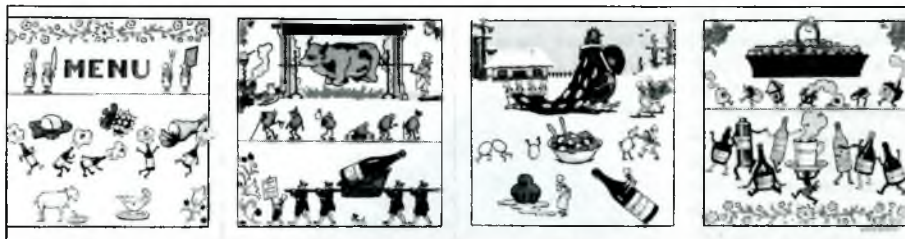
These and a myriad of other facts can be gleaned, not from extensive reading of history books, but from examining a type of historic document long ignored—the menu. In recognition of their importance to his profession, maitre d'hotel Oscar Tschirky, better known as "Oscar of the Waldorf," collected menus throughout his career, eventually amassing over 6,000 of them. Upon his death in 1950, the School of Hotel Administration at Cornell University inherited his collection.

The Library of the Cornell School of Hotel Administration is a unique facility. A special library in an academic setting, it houses the largest collection of cataloged material on the hospitality industry in the United States. As a member of the Research Libraries Group, the library's cataloged collections have long been available to researchers

and scholars through national bibliographic databases. The uncataloged portions of the collection, however, have been inaccessible both physically and bibliographically.



This hand-colored menu features Tiffany etching, gold embossing, and autographs of the governors of New York and New Jersey.



Potatoes dressed as lame beggars illustrate "Peasant or Poor Man's Potatoes" in this 1926 hand-illustrated menu by French artist and book illustrator Marcel Jeanjean. The menu describes the entire meal in pictographs.

The largest groups of uncataloged materials in the SHA Library are the Menu Collections. Of these, the largest single collection is that of Oscar of the Waldorf which was evaluated in 1955 by Parke-Bernet Galleries at \$30,000 and more recently (in 1990) reevaluated at \$160,000. This collection is arranged in order by date, and covers almost 100 years. The oldest menu was produced in 1851 and is printed on silk; it describes a dinner offered by "The Press" to Louis Kossuth, a Hungarian patriot. One hundred eleven dishes were served, including ten "ornamental confections" and five different species of duck. The most recent menu in the collection, printed in 1943, describes the 50th anniversary of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel; Oscar was the featured speaker of the evening. The vast

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majority of these menus come from fine dining restaurants around the world or from special events, such as the 1883 centennial banquet in commemoration of the evacuation of the City of New York by the British.

To provide descriptive access to the menu collections, School of Hotel Administration library staff created, in 1989, a searchable database using PC File+ software. The fields or categories in which data are entered include the name of the host or restaurant, the occasion, location, condition, language, type of cuisine, meal (breakfast, tea, etc.), number of courses, toasts, guest list, program, illustration, binding, condition, printer, and comments. All of these fields can be searched, thereby providing multiple points of access for each menu. (We would also have liked to list each dish served,

but were unable to do so due to time limitations. This information may be added in the future.)

Cornell's menu collections are used to meet a variety of needs in the university curriculum. Students of menu design and menu engineering as well as food and beverage students often use old menus for inspiration. Anthropology students use them to study food habits across time, culture, or geography.

Menus can provide evidence of the manners, mores, and food habits of earlier times, as well as interesting historical sidenotes. A September 30, 1909, menu from the Hudson-Fulton Celebration lists among its speakers "Dr. Frederick A. Cook, Discoverer of the North Pole." Ironically, Robert E. Peary, the "real" discoverer of the North Pole had reached the pole on April 6, 1909. The 1910 24th annual banquet of the Ohio Society of New York lists among those seated at the President's Table, Mr. Orville Wright and Mr. Wilbur Wright. A handwritten cover on a menu from the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco announces "A Luncheon to The California Promotion Committee on the occasion of the resumption of the hotel business in the burned district after earthquake and fire on 18 April, 1906." The luncheon occurred on July 23, 1906, just three months and seven days after the quake, and this menu is ascribed as the first in the new hotel! The relatively simple fare consisted of grapefruit, essence of chicken, celery, salted almonds, olives, fillet of striped bass meuniere, cleo potatoes, boiled squab on toast, lettuce and tomato salad, fancy ice cream, assorted cakes, and coffee.

Menus are frequently embellished with artwork which is of considerable interest to art historians and those interested in the history of printing and publishing. A 1926 hand-illustrated menu by French artist and book illustrator Marcel Jeanjean describes the entire meal, course by course, in pictographs. Potatoes dressed as lame beggars illustrate "Peasant's or Poor Man's Potatoes": A fat hen with a muff and royal train illustrates "Oeufs a la Reine." The 1924 second annual White House

News Photographers Association dinner menu is enclosed in an envelope created from a photograph of a camera bag. Inside the envelope is a photograph of a camera; by lifting the film flap on the back of the camera one reveals the menu. The menu for the 1916 Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States annual dinner opens to reveal a hand watercolored pop-up skyline of New York City.

The data entry project afforded us the opportunity to take basic conservation measures to protect the collection. Each menu is now in an acid-free folder. All are stored in acid-free boxes in an archival facility in the School of Hotel Administration.

Two large collections of menus remain unprocessed. Although menus were actively collected by the SHA Library from 1930 to 1955, the collecting was largely unfocused; every type of restaurant, from diners to railroad dining

cars to nightclubs, is represented. These menus are stored in boxes with no particular arrangement or access points. As of 1989, we have once more begun to collect. We are now focusing primarily on fine dining restaurants nationwide. These newer menus are stored in file cabinets and arranged by name of establishment. School of Hotel Administration library staff plan to create a database similar to the one used for the "Oscar" collection, but with additional fields for menu items. Data entry will begin with the newer menus, but we will work back as time permits.

The development of menu collections is a relatively easy and very enjoyable task. Decisions are made first regarding type of establishment or event and geographic coverage, then letters of request are sent to appropriate restaurants; most are more than happy to send one copy of their menu to an academic institution. In addition, faculty, friends,



This realistic-looking camera bag and camera was the menu for a 1924 meeting of the White House News Photographers Association. The flap on the back of the camera opens to reveal the menu.



The menu from the Equitable Life Insurance Society's National Convention featured a hand-colored, pop-up skyline of New York City.

and family are encouraged to ask for a menu whenever they dine in an appropriate establishment (that is, one that meets our criteria). An added bonus for those whose family and purse limit their dining experiences to fast-food establishments is that menus afford vicarious pleasure. It is awe inspiring to peruse a menu that consists of fresh caviar canapes, oysters, clear green turtle (soup), cream of chicken a la reine, rissoles a la pompadour, filet of kingfish with oyster crabs, cucumbers, ribs of lamb a la bourgeoise, pommes brabant, stuffed eggplant, casserolettes of sweetbreads and mushrooms, sorbet, roast guinea chicken with

bread sauce, green salad, camembert cheese, marron parfait fantaisie, gateaux varies, and coffee!

Menus provide a rich source of original information about the hospitality industry, about printing and publishing, and about society in general. Although more than 400 American academic institutions support hospitality programs, an online search of the *American Library Directory* lists only six libraries that support menu collections. The Cornell School of Hotel Administration Library is attempting to capture, preserve, and provide access to this wonderful historical resource. ■■

Beaubien plans update of librarian profile as she assumes ACRL presidency

Anne Beaubien, head of cooperative access services at the University of Michigan, is the new president of ACRL. As ACRL president, Beaubien is the chief elected officer of the largest of 11 divisions of the ALA. ACRL serves as a resource for academic research and special libraries and represents those interests to the higher education community. Beaubien served as vice-president/president-elect during the past year, is serving her second term on the ACRL Board of Directors, and has chaired a number of ACRL committees.



Anne Beaubien

Beaubien has targeted recruitment as her theme for her 1991-92 presidential year. "I am concerned about the growing shortage of librarians and I think a lot of people don't even consider librarianship as a career because they don't really know what we do," she said. "I think the work we do as librarians is neat. It's fun, I keep learning new things, and I've never been bored. It is important for us to attract quality people to our profession so that we can start creating the leadership of tomorrow."

Many individuals begin selecting their careers based on their scores on vocational interest inventories. Unfortunately the profile of librarians on many of these inventories is quite outdated so Beaubien began investigating how she could get it

updated. Beaubien's inquiries led to a receptive response from Consulting Psychologist Press, Inc., publisher of one of the most highly respected interest inventories, the Strong Interest Inventory. The profile of librarians on the Strong Interest Inventory has not been updated since 1977. Together with Mary Jane Scherdin, a researcher from the University of Wisconsin, Beaubien plans to test a sample of 400 information specialists to develop a current profile. These results will be used to update the profile of librarians on the Strong Interest Inventory.

Beaubien brings a variety of experience to her position as ACRL president. As head of cooperative access services at the University of Michigan, she directs two services she created—MITS, a fee-based library service for businesses, and 747-FAST, a campus delivery service of library materials to faculty—and Interlibrary Loan. Previously she was a librarian in the Graduate Library Reference Department at the University of Michigan where she created a bibliographic instruction program for faculty and graduate students.

Beaubien is the recipient of the Woman of the Year Award from the Ann Arbor Business and Professional Women's Club as well as the Distinguished Alumnus Award from the School of Information Studies at the University of Michigan. A frequent contributor to professional journals in the areas of information services, database searching and teaching in academic libraries, she is the author of *Learning the Library* (Bowker, 1982).

Beaubien holds an MLS from the University of Michigan and a B.A. from Michigan State University. ■■