



The Forgotten Chef at Delmonico's: Alessandro Filippini (1849-1917) An Appreciation on the Centenary of his Death

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Abstract:

This Research Note sketches the biography of Swiss immigrant Alessandro (or Alexander) Filippini (1849-1917), a chef at New York City's Delmonico's restaurants for over 25 years, and provides a short analysis of his culinary heritage. Mostly forgotten today, and overshadowed by the reputation of French chef Charles Ranhofer for creating many of the dishes that made Delmonico's famous, Filippini authored the very first Delmonico cookbook (1889) and made significant contributions to the evolution of fine dining in the United States—in restaurants as well as in private homes and on transatlantic passenger ships. This note seeks to elevate his importance in the role that Delmonico's restaurants—founded in the nineteenth century by two Swiss brothers of that name—played in the history of the American restaurant and the development of American cuisine.

Keywords: Delmonico's, Alessandro Filippini, Charles Ranhofer, American restaurant history, cookbooks

Introduction

The history of the American restaurant and the development of American cuisine are inextricably tied to one particular nineteenth century establishment in New York City—"Delmonico's"—whose name to this day evokes a picture of lavish dinners, grand balls, famous patrons and fanciful new dishes. What in 1827 started as a small café and pastry shop on 23 William Street in the lowest part of Manhattan, where the hot chocolate was "unlike anything served elsewhere in New York—rich, thick, and foaming" (Thomas 1967:9), became quickly the most famous and successful culinary empire of its day. It was founded by two brothers who emigrated from the little village of Mairengo near Faido in the Canton of Ticino, the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland. Giovanni (John) Delmonico was a wine merchant, while his younger brother Pietro Antonio (Peter) was originally a chocolate maker with a shop in Berne (Messerli 1922:6). In 1830, they opened their first restaurant on 25 William Street, hired French chefs for the kitchen and sought the help of their nephew Lorenzo Delmonico, who



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

joined them from Switzerland in 1831. The restaurant surprised its clientele by the novel feature of ordering “à la carte” from a menu that listed the dishes in both English and French (Choate and Canora 2008:11, Thomas 1967). The peak of success came with New York’s Gilded Age in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Primarily recognized today as Delmonico’s culinary exponent is Charles Ranhofer (1836-1899), a French chef who worked for Delmonico’s during that period, from 1862 until his retirement in 1896 (with a short three-year break in between). Ranhofer, credited with creating many of the dishes that made Delmonico’s famous, published *The Epicurean*, a massive 1,200-page cookbook, in 1894.

Another cookbook of that period that is regularly mentioned when Delmonico’s culinary achievements are discussed is a work not by a chef, but by someone who (much) later confessed that he “never cooked anything more difficult to prepare than a plate of scrambled eggs” (Schriftgiesser 1943:5): Oscar Tschirky (1866-1950). Also originally Swiss, he worked as a maître d’hôtel at Delmonico’s for three years, after a first stop at the Hoffman House, one of the grandest hotels in New York at that time. In 1891, he then moved on to the new Waldorf hotel before it even opened. There he became “Oscar of the Waldorf,” the embodiment of a professional host. *The Cook Book – By ‘Oscar of the Waldorf’* was first published in 1896. While one would assume that Tschirky was the actual author of that comprehensive collection of recipes, it was in fact a compilation “from the recipes of some of the most famous chefs New York has ever known” (Schriftgiesser 1943:5), including, obviously, those from Delmonico’s kitchens, even if Tschirky does not name any of them.

Often mentioned in connection with Delmonico’s, but getting no more than a passing mention, and thus never lifted to the culinary Olympus, is yet another Swiss, Alessandro (or Alexander) Filippini, who was with Delmonico’s for over 25 years. Filippini was the author of five cookbooks, including the very first cookbook about Delmonico’s, published in 1889 in New York under the title *The Table: How to Buy Food, How to Cook It and How to Serve It*, and at the same time in London as *The Delmonico Cook Book*. A supplement, published in 1890, was incorporated in later editions of the book. Like the other two cookbook authors, but before them, he presented the menus and recipes of America’s most famous eating place to an amateur audience, the private home.

While Filippini appears in the contemporary New York press as a key figure in Delmonico’s kitchens¹ at least to the same extent as Charles Ranhofer, unlike Ranhofer he sank into oblivion quickly after the publication of his last book in 1906. He is largely unresearched, to the extent that even his basic life dates had remained elusive.² However, Filippini’s contribution to the evolution of fine dining in the United States, in both restaurants and private



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

households as well as on transatlantic passenger ships, justifies a closer look into his life and work.

The story of Alessandro Filippini is also a typical example of nineteenth century emigration from Switzerland to the United States. The region the Delmonicos and Filippini originally came from, today the Canton of Ticino, Switzerland, has been of geostrategic, and thus political and economical interest since the Middle Ages because of the Gotthard Pass, one of the most important crossings of the Alps, connecting northern and southern Europe. So naturally the Ticinesi came into frequent contact with travelling merchants from all over the continent, and most certainly got a taste of



Frontispiece of *The Table*, 1889.



foreign culture, customs, and culinary habits much earlier than other Swiss. Maybe it is not a coincidence, then, that the region also fathered the author of the world's first modern cookery book and celebrity cook of fifteenth century Italy, Maestro Martino (or Martino de Rossi). He was born around 1430 in Torre, a village in the valley of Blenio, neighboring the Leventina Valley where the Delmonicos and Filippini originated. But despite its importance, Ticino has been notoriously poor, and this poverty certainly contributed to the high rate of emigration over centuries, first into other European countries, then in the nineteenth century in particular to the United States. The immigrants did not bring any significant pecuniary assets to the New World, but many of them were capable of making fruitful use of their cultural heritage and skills—including gastronomy—on fresh grounds.

My combined interest in the emigration history of Swiss citizens to the United States, the history of New York, and the history of food and specific dishes brought me to researching and writing the following essay. Hopefully it will shed some new light on how Swiss emigrants helped shape the culinary evolution of America.

Alessandro Filippini—a Biographical Sketch

Alessandro Filippini was born on New Year's Eve of 1849 in the little village of Airolo, Switzerland (Filippini 1900), merely 10 miles north of Mairengo, the village where the Delmonicos came from. In his early teens, he went to Lyon, France where he received full training in one of the city's famous culinary schools. He proved to be a gifted student, and the school, instead of having him pay for instruction, employed him as an instructor (*Los Angeles Times*, July 23, 1899:20). Not yet seventeen years old, with practical experiences in Switzerland and Germany, he embarked on the steamer *Ville de Paris* from Le Havre, bound for the United States. Young Alessandro Filippini arrived in New York on June 5, 1866³ where he immediately found employment at Delmonico's 14th Street restaurant (*New-York Tribune*, February 3, 1891:3).

Work in the New World was to start with a life-shaping experience. At Delmonico's for only two months, the young cook learned what it meant to be in the kitchen of the city's most famous restaurant: President Andrew Johnson was visiting New York, and of course it was at Delmonico's that the citizens of the city hosted the dinner in his honor on August 29, 1866. It was "the finest dinner with which I ever had anything to do," Filippini much later told a journalist (*New-York Tribune*, February 16, 1890:15). The bill of fare was composed as follows (Filippini 1889:403)⁴:



DINNER BY THE CITIZENS OF NEW YORK,
TO HIS EXCELLENCY
PRESIDENT JOHNSON,
IN HONOR OF
His Visit to the City, Wednesday, August 29, 1866.

Menu.

POTAGES.

Consommé à la Chatelaine Bisque aux Quenelles
Variés. Timbales de Gibier à la Vénitienne. Variés.

POISSONS.

Saumon à la Livonienne. Paupiettes de Kingfish à la Villeroi.

RELEVÉS

Selle d'Agneau aux Concombres. Filet de Boeuf à la Pocahontas.

ENTRÉES.

Suprêmes de volaille à la Dauphine. Côtelettes à la Maréchale.
Ballotins de Pigeons à la Lucullus. Ris de Veau à la Montgomery.
Filets de Canetons à la Tyrolienne. Boudins à la Richelieu.

SORBET.

A la Dunderberg,

ROTIS.

Bécasses Bardées. Ortolans Farcis.

ENTREMETS.

Petit Pois. Tomates Farcies.
Aubergines. Artichauts à la Barigoul.

SUCRES.

Pêches à la New York. Abricots Siciliens.
Macédoine de Fruits au Curaçoa. Moscovites aux Oranges.
Bavarois aux Fraises. Gelée Californienne.
Crème aux Amandes. Meringue Chantilly.
Beauséjour au Malaga. Mille-feuilles Pompadour.
Gâteau Soleil. Biscuits Glacés aux Pistaches.

Fruits et Dessert.

PIECES MONTÉES.

Monument de Washington. Fontaine des Aigles.
Temple de la Liberté. Trophée Nationale.
Casque Romain. Colonne de l'Union.
Char de la Paix. Rotonde Egyptienne.
Cassolette Sultane. Cornes d'Abondances.



VINS.

POTAGES.

Amontillado 1824.

POISSONS.

Hochheimerberg.

RELEVÉS.

Champagne.

ENTRÉES.

Château Margaux '48.

ROTIS.

Clos de Vougeot.

ENTREMETS SUCRES.

Tokai Impériale.

DESSERT.

Madère Faguart.

An impressive menu, indeed, and it came with an appropriate price tag: “about \$100 a plate” (\$1,500 in today’s money) (*New-York Tribune*, February 16, 1890:15). While it is very unlikely that seventeen-year-old Filippini was actually involved in composing the bill of fare, that dinner shaped his notion of fine dining and a grand banquet. The menu most certainly was Ranhofer’s choice, since he had joined Delmonico’s four years earlier, in 1862. It is interesting to note, however, that in 1866 the signatory dishes of the Gilded Age for which Delmonico’s is famous still today are not yet on the menu, which is still very much in the contemporary French tradition. It does not feature the delicacies that used more local produce such as canvasback duck or terrapin and evolved into the French-American cuisine attributed to Delmonico’s. Also, specific new Delmonico creations such as Lobster Newburg, Delmonico Steak, or Baked Alaska had not yet been invented.

From the restaurant at 14th Street, Filippini went on to their Broad Street restaurant (until 1883), then to their Pine Street restaurant, and when that closed in 1889, he moved to the new Delmonico’s restaurant at 341 Broadway. A journalist recounted Filippini’s achievements with



Delmonico's — in full praise—as follows:

Alessandro Filippini has been a power of strength in the Delmonico establishment for twenty-five years. He has been at one and at all times the manager, the buyer and the inventor of toothsome dishes. Every morning for twenty-five years he arose in time to visit the markets by 3 o'clock, where he purchased the daily supplies for all of the Delmonico restaurants, uptown and downtown. No man ever knew better than he the value of food products, and none could buy so well for his employer. Every day he visited the various restaurants, studied their needs, made suggestions and improvements in the service, and kept everything running with perfect smoothness. Not an hour of the day was he ever idle, and his black hair has become silver-streaked in his long service. (New-York Tribune, February 3, 1891:3)

Another contemporary report, by Deshler Welch, a New York journalist, connoisseur, and author of *The Bachelor and the Chafing-Dish* (1896), describes Filippini's standing within the Delmonico empire and with its notable patrons:

In no other one place in this country or Europe could the assemblage have so obtained in its notabilia. I have seen at one time statesmen of several countries, world-wide-known actors, diplomats, literary men, critics and the best known representatives of music, art and money—for I regard the accumulation of the latter as a high and mighty art. That was during the latter Eighties, when that really great cook Alexander Filippini had charge of the kitchen, where he marshaled his forces and drilled them with Napoleonic accomplishment in the batterie de cuisine. I met Filippini several times then, while I was under the guidance of "Charley" Delmonico in exploring the wonderful studies of preparation. He was a personal friend of many eminent people who visited Delmonico's: John Hay, Gordon Bennett, Chauncey Depew, Cleveland, the Belmonts, Vanderbilts, Whitneys, Oelrichs, and hundreds of others known as good raconteurs and bon-vivants. (Welch 1915)

Not only was Filippini friends with the celebrities who frequented Delmonico's, but he is reported to have been in culinary interaction with them as well. Welch recounts the story of Li Hung Chang, the famous and controversial Chinese general, politician, and diplomat, who visited New York in 1896. While in town, the "Viceroy" expressly desired to see



Delmonico's, and he is supposed to have left with Filippini a particular recipe for cooking eggs which the chef then gladly added to his repertoire:

Fried Eggs, Li Hung Chang

Prepare and trim six fresh toasts, three inches square, lightly butter and place on a dish. Broil six exceedingly thin slices lean bacon for a minute on each side, remove and cut each slice in two, and arrange over the six toasts. Heat thoroughly a well-buttered, small frying pan, crack in two fresh eggs, sprinkle over a teaspoon very finely grated, cooked ham, season with a saltspoon salt and half saltspoon pepper, cook for two minutes on the range, then set in the oven for one minute. Remove and carefully glide over one toast, then prepare five more portions in a similar manner. When all prepared sprinkle over half teaspoon curry powder evenly divided. Place an ounce butter in a frying pan, shuffle the pan until the butter attains a nice brown colour, then pour in a teaspoon vinegar, toss a little, then pour over the eggs and serve. (Filippini 1906:770)

However, in all probability this story is too good to be true. While the Chinese merchants of New York hosted a dinner for Li Hung Chang at Delmonico's on September 1, 1896, the guest of honor was notably absent that night "because of a painful injury to his finger" (*New York Times*, September 2, 1896:5). There are no reports of Li Hung Chang actually visiting Delmonico's on another occasion, and in 1896 Filippini was no longer in Delmonico's service anyway.

In 1885, just after the death of the great Charles Delmonico (who was succeeded by Charles C. Delmonico), Filippini began collecting and writing down the recipes used in the Delmonico kitchens. After five years of work he published it in book form as *The Table, or The Delmonico Cook Book*. Not only did Filippini give a bill of fare for the three meals of each day of the year, with the corresponding recipes, but also extensive advice about the seasonality of all kinds of foods and about how to set a table and serve the food.

In the introductory chapter, "The Pleasures of the Table," Filippini pointed out that the evolution of the culinary art in New York in the second half of the nineteenth century by establishments such as Delmonico's was possible largely because New York offered the required environment in terms of quality of foods and patrons who were open to be educated:

. . . there is no place in the civilized world where the market for the



supply of food is so well provided as in New York, both as to variety and excellence, and even as to luxuries. Educated as thousands of persons have been, in the art of dining, by the famous Delmonico and his able lieutenants, New York, perhaps, contains a larger number of so-called high-livers than any other city.

These “gourmands” (if you please), and their number is legion, have, with the aid of the excellent resources of the American market and the encouragement given to the culinary art of the period, brought the modern American table to virtual perfection. This is saying a great deal, inasmuch as the famed restaurants of London, Paris, and Vienna have ever claimed a reputation and an ascendancy over others that seemed to form a part of history itself.

But as times change, so we change with them. Westward the course of Empire sways, and the great glory of the past has departed from those centres where the culinary art at one time defied all rivals. The sceptre of supremacy has passed into the hands of the great metropolis of the New World. (Filippini 1889:1-2)

A quarter of a century later, he had to revise his opinion. As he told a reporter of *The Christian Register* (1906:772), he found “the very best and freshest foundations in the way of meats and vegetables” in France and Switzerland:

In Switzerland, particularly, the vegetable markets are exquisite, every article daintily cleansed and tied with the national colors. These markets put to shame the vegetable stands of New York, heavy with the sweepings of near-by halls and the street, while the vegetables themselves are kept by night in unventilated cellars. This destroys the savor of fruit and vegetables.

And the people in the New World deserved to be enabled to bring that supreme culinary art of Delmonico’s to their own homes: “Variety is the spice of life,” Filippini writes, “but nowhere is it more important, aye, actually necessary, than in the getting up of a palatable meal. This pertains not only to the dining-room of a hotel of the least pretensions or to the so-called ‘grand’ restaurant, but particularly to the family table.” (Filippini 1889:1).

Filippini held that, of course, the quality of the dish depended on the quality of the ingredients, and so he devoted a good portion of his introductory



notes also on where and when to buy what kind of food. To Filippini, “one of the leading questions” that directly affected the American cuisine at the time was the transportation of meat to the East Coast. When reading his statements today, they appear surprisingly modern, and it is hard to believe that they were actually made almost 130 years ago.

The quality of meat does not depend upon the place where the animal is slaughtered, but it does depend upon the state of the animal’s health when it is slaughtered. Let the cattle-cars be improved so that cattle can be transported without being knocked about and bruised, and let them be properly fed and watered while in transit; after making the long journey from the far West, let them be well rested and cooled off before slaughtering.

The Western dressed-beef men will also have to be on their mettle in order to meet the exigencies of the times. Let them keep their wild prairie cattle and their scalawags out of their better markets, handles their beef carefully, keep it subjected to a uniform temperature of about 38° Fahrenheit, discard all artificial preservative means, and all opponents to their interest will be bereft of argument. (Filippini 1889:3)

Filippini then goes on to give detailed and precise instructions on how a table is properly set, and how the food, once prepared, is served. “To set a table seems, perhaps, very easy,” Filippini writes, “but to set it properly and tastily, is not such an easy matter.” He points out that paying attention to setting the table and service was more important for a successful dinner than preparing “costly viands,” and also gives advice as to the temperatures of the dining room (“should never exceed sixty degrees”), the food (“dinner be served very hot”), and the different wines (“champagne . . . very cold, almost at the freezing point”) (Filippini 1889:19-21).

In the second part of the book, Filippini compiled a bill of fare for the three meals of every day of the year. The menus look impressive, in quantity and in quality. For an arbitrary weekday in May, for example, Filippini, suggests the following arrangement of food (Filippini 1889:69):

Breakfast.

Eggs à la Hyde.

Fried Cod’s Tongues.



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

Pork Chops, Apple sauce.
Hashed Potatoes, sautées.
Iced Timbale of Rice

Luncheon.

Broiled Soft-shelled Crabs à la Diable.
Tripe à la Mode de Caën.
Potatoes Soufflées.
Salad Suédoise.
Crème en Mousse au Curaçoa.

Dinner.

Oak Island Oysters.
Consommé Vermicelli.
Radishes. Olives.
Kingfish, Egg sauce.
Stewed Kidneys, with cèpes.
Tomatoes à la Bock.
Sweetbreads à la Pompadour.
Spinach, with Eggs.
Broiled Snipe, with Bacon.
Lettuce Salad.
Strawberry Shortcake.
Coffee.

On a Sunday, it would (appropriately) get even more sophisticated, and the bill of fare includes dishes that the reader was familiar with from visits to Delmonico's (or hearsay), such as Terrapin à la Newburg for lunch or Roast Canvas-back Duck for dinner. Most importantly, the reader for the first time could learn how these famous Delmonico delicacies were to be prepared, for in the third part of the book, Filippini made the hitherto secret recipes of all suggested dishes public, with the blessing of his employer.

When reading the bills of fare and the recipes, one might wonder how the host and the guests could actually cope with such a setting. First, while Filippini designed his book "for the use of private families" (Filippini 1889:vi), it is implicitly assumed that the family had kitchen staff and appropriate equipment. As the reviewer of the *New-York Tribune* noted on February 16, 1890, "most of these menus are too elaborate for any but families of wealth with many servants." Further, the bill of fare was rather a suggestion of choices than a strict order. Filippini recommends that menus be placed at each cover⁵ and explains that "it is not a breach of etiquette to



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

refuse a course you do not desire; by knowing what is coming, you can with propriety refuse a course, and take the next one” (Filippini 1889:20). Nevertheless, the book was well received, sold very well, and was quickly re-issued in a number of revised and enlarged editions. At the time, it was “one of the most popular culinary books in [the] English language” (Fellows 1904:188).

In 1890, Charles Delmonico decided to close the restaurant at 341 Broadway, after only five years. The restaurant was not “as profitable as it was hoped it would be,” according to an article in the December 9, 1890 *New-York Daily Tribune*. He had established it especially for the accommodation of the dry goods and wholesale merchants who had their business in the neighborhood—against the advice of his best friends who thought it unwise to go farther uptown than Chambers Street. Filippini regarded this as an opportunity and quit Delmonico’s service, sounding the bell for the decline of the famous restaurant dynasty (see D’Aversa 2014:70-75). Confident enough, he opened a restaurant of his own—Filippini’s—just a block away, at 337 Broadway. Today we know little about Filippini’s own establishment. A contemporary report in the *New-York Tribune*, published March 14, 1891, the day of the opening, allows us at least to imagine Filippini’s concept:

The new restaurant is fitted up in handsome style with all the modern improvements and conveniences. The building has been altered completely. The large, roomy kitchen is in the cellar. In order to preclude the possibility of any odors penetrating to other parts of the restaurant, Mr. Filippini has placed a brick shaft and pipe in the building, which runs from the kitchen floor to a height of twelve feet above the housetop. A huge fan, run by machinery, will drive any possible odors through this outlet. The sub-cellar will be used for a storage room and bakery, as Mr. Filippini will have the bread for the restaurant baked upon the premises. On the ground floor are the bar, the luncheon counter and the café. . . . A handsome stairway and an elevator lead to the restaurant proper, for men and women, on the first floor. In addition to the general room, it contains three private rooms connected by folding doors. When occasion demands, the three rooms may be thrown into one hall seating between sixty and seventy persons.



Large plate-glass windows admit the light from the Broadway side. The natural, cheerful tone of the room is enhanced by the use of light colored paper and carpet. The entire house is lighted with gas and electricity. The chandeliers are artistic and ornamental.

Filippini told the press that he “intended to keep only the best food, wines and other beverages” (ibid). One wonders what was on the menu at Filippini’s, whether his offerings were similar to those at Delmonico’s, or what individual handwriting Filippini added. However, only one menu seems to have survived, from a private luncheon on New Year’s Eve 1891⁶ that may not be representative for the restaurant as such. Nevertheless, it shows a careful selection of classic dishes in the Franco-American tradition of the time:

MENU

HUÎTRES

Consommé en tasse

Céleri Radis

Filet de sole en vin blanc, gratiné
Pommes de terre, duchesse

Côtelettes d’agneau, sauce Périgueux
Petit pois à l’anglaise
Champignons frais grillés sur toast

Cailles roties sur canapé
Salade de céleri, mayonnaise

Charlotte panachée

Fruits Café

DEC. 31, 1891 FILIPPINI’S

The *New York Tribune* on March 14, 1891 anticipated that—in view of the opening of Filippini’s—“the restaurant, which will be run on the same plan as Delmonico’s, is destined to have many patrons.” Alas, it did not, and contrary to Filippini’s ambitions to replicate his prior employer’s overall



success, the restaurant failed to attain the same fame and standing as the old Delmonico's.

On May 16, 1893, the *New-York Tribune* reported that Filippini had to close Filippini's Restaurant and make an assignment of his property for the benefit of creditors. One wonders why Filippini decided to open his own place next door to the unfortunate Delmonico's Broadway restaurant, but it seems that he had been very optimistic and had invested the respectable sum of \$25,000 (\$650,000 in today's currency), partially with money borrowed from the influential and wealthy friends he made during his time at Delmonico's. According to contemporary sources, the initial investment was far from enough to cover refurbishment and operating costs. In two years, he had amassed liabilities in the amount of \$95,793 (\$2.5 million in today's currency), whereas the actual value of the assets amounted only to \$8,623 (\$223,000) (*New York Herald*, June 1, 1893:15).

During the short life of his restaurant, the chef and owner however found time to put out three more cookbooks: *One Hundred Ways of Cooking Eggs* (1892), *One Hundred Ways of Cooking Fish* (1892) and *One Hundred Desserts* (1893), later published in a combined edition as *300 Culinary Receipts* (1893). We don't know whether he filled spare time due to slow business, or if he published these books as marketing tools for his own restaurant. In any case, the three works are far less innovative than *The Table*, and he recycled quite a number of recipes from his first book therein.

A new project to manage a Hotel Somerset in Bernardsville, New Jersey, in summer 1893 seems to have been very short-lived and never materialized (*New-York Tribune*, April 20, 1893:8), and Filippini may actually have been out of work for some years until around 1898 when he entered into the services of the International Navigation Company, which was later renamed International Mercantile Marine. His new employer was the large conglomerate, backed financially by the banker J. P. Morgan, that at one point owned and operated 188 ships, including the American Line, the Red Star Line, the White Star Line and half of Holland America (Wikipedia contributors).

And what a job he got. The contemporary press described it with headlines like *A Unique Vocation* (*Los Angeles Times*, July 23, 1899:20) or *Queer Job—And no other Man in the World has One Like It* (*Cincinnati Enquirer*, August 7, 1899:4): He became the "travelling inspector of the American liners," called in to "systematize steamship cooking on a new basis," and spent "practically no time on land, frequently reaching port in time to sail back again on another liner upon the same day" (*The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 30, 1899:5). He reportedly got on board a ship without previous arrangement, not being expected, and watched the preparation and serving of meals, showed the cooks and bakers essential details, and also made sure



that the table stewards were in good training.

Apart from his inspectorial duties, he also oversaw the composition of the menus served on board—evidently his core competence. An article in the *The Philadelphia Inquirer* of July 30, 1899 described it as follows:

Then Mr. Filippini also studies the classes of people traveling at various seasons, and prepares menus for each day to suit the tastes of people from all parts of the globe. For instance, he does not forget to have roast of beef for Englishmen occasionally, sauces and stews for Frenchmen, Hungarian goulasch for Austrians, wiener wursts for the Germans, and macaroni and all dressings for Italians, as extras, suiting the tastes of all nationalities, without having the bills of fare predominate in dishes not acceptable to others.

In 1899, he traveled through the largest cities of Europe (*Los-Angeles Times*, July 23, 1899:20), and three years later took a long leave of absence. Armed with a letter of introduction to United States consuls in all parts of the world, obtained from Secretary Hay at the suggestion of Chauncey Depew (then US Senator for New York, frequent patron at Delmonico's, and a personal friend of Filippini), Filippini went on a trip around the world, starting in Honolulu in January 1902 and ending in Paris in September that year (Filippini 1906:v-xv, Welch 1915). In between, he traveled through Japan, China and Hong Kong, the Philippines, Singapore, India, Egypt, Greece, Turkey, Romania, Hungary, Austria, Germany, Belgium, and his old country, Switzerland. By visiting innumerable hotels, restaurants and private homes, he gathered over 3,300 recipes that he arranged to form suggestions (as in *The Table*) for "complete ménums of the three meals for every day in the year" and published them as *The International Cook Book* (1906). Filippini's last culinary bow at the end of his career was again a success. It saw several reprints, and a number of newspapers published select exotic recipes from the book for their readers. As in 1889, he seems to have hit the gastronomic Zeitgeist. A quarter of a century after *The Table*, dining habits had changed drastically, with families having less time and allocating fewer resources to preparing food at home. Filippini's final work reflects that social change: The menus are simpler, the preparation of the dishes less complex, and the ingredients more commonly available than in the 1890s. And to serve the public's appetite for more meat on the bone than just plain recipes, he spiced his compilation with anecdotes from his travels, such as his adventures in China:

In the zealous search for knowledge of the kitchen in China, the writer had several very narrow escapes from the violence of suspicious Boxers. Not having been warned as to how dangerous it is for a traveller to enter



Canton unaccompanied by a native guide, I boldly made my way through the old city early one morning. Beginning with rude nudges from passers-by, the indignities increased until I was followed by an increasing horde, and then through the narrow passages I hurried, occasionally warding off an assailant. My curiosity had evidently led them to take me for a war-tax collector, and when I eluded them finally and got to the European quarters much surprise was expressed that I had ventured there alone and had been able to get away. (Filippini 1906:vi)

Very little is known about Filippini's private life. For the better part of his life in New York City, he lived with two sisters and a brother, who also emigrated from Switzerland. The busy life at Delmonico's and then the long periods on board ships seem to have prevented him from marrying. But quite late in life he met Julia Martinoli, a Swiss widow 17 years younger, who became his companion, and in 1898 their daughter, Alice Filippini, was born. Alessandro Filippini died on December 8, 1917 in New York City, at age 67.⁷ Neither a report nor an obituary was published in any of the newspapers. New York had already forgotten about him.

Filippini's Culinary Legacy

What remains of Alessandro Filippini today? Filippini was not the first chef to write a cookbook for the general public with bills of fare for each day of the month (see Déliée 1884, for example),⁸ but he made a remarkable contribution to the democratization of haute cuisine and fine dining by bringing, for the first time, the secrets of the most famous restaurant in America, generally reserved for the higher society who could afford to dine at Delmonico's, to the modest homes of the American majority.

But does Filippini also deserve credit as the inventor of the dishes, in particular the novel Delmonico dishes, he assembled in his works? Today, it is difficult to tell who the actual creator of these culinary novelties was—Filippini, Ranhofer or another chef at Delmonico's (Tschirky, not having been a cook, is not a contender). Many of the dishes in *The Table* were later included also in the works of Ranhofer and Tschirky, without any acknowledgment to Filippini. Filippini himself attributes one recipe specifically to Ranhofer ("Chicken, Sauté à la Ranhofer") and a number to members of the Delmonico family (such as "Filets of Shad à la Chas. C. Delmonico," "Striped Bass Boiled à la Lorenzo C. Delmonico," "Chocolate Macarons à la Aimée Delmonico," "Beignets à la Josephine Delmonico," "St. Honoré à la Rose Delmonico," or the famous "Canapé Lorenzo"). Interestingly enough, Filippini publishes the recipes for dishes for which



Delmonico's still today is most famous, namely "Delmonico Potatoes" and "Delmonico's Steak," only later in his *International Cookbook*, even though they had been around already when *The Table* came out. The attribution to the Delmonicos may have been rather an honorary tip of the hat to a particular individual, or a recipe that a member of the family particularly liked or inspired, than an indication of inventorship. The Delmonicos were not chefs themselves. Filippini also seems to have been quite close to the Delmonico family, in particular the older generation. Coming into the New World from villages just a few miles apart obviously forms a natural bond, evident in the dedication of *The Table* to the Delmonico family "as a mark of reverence to those departed, and of respect and esteem of those living."

Ranhofer's book contains far fewer references to specific Delmonico recipes. We find a recipe for "Delmonico Sirloin Steak,"⁹ chicken, pheasant, and roebuck "à la Lorenzo," "Oysters in case à la Lorenzo," and also the "Canapés Lorenzo." Prominently absent is the recipe for Baked Alaska, the famous Delmonico dessert reportedly invented by him to celebrate the acquisition of Alaska in 1867. Tschirky's only explicit reference to Delmonico recipes is, apart from Lobster Newburg, the recipe for—again—"Canapés Lorenzo."

When comparing the recipes of that dish given by Filippini, Ranhofer and Tschirky, it does not come as a surprise that they are quite similar. However, the comparison is to some extent indicative of the recipe's origin. While the textual and preparatory differences suggest that Ranhofer and Filippini wrote them down independently, probably from memory or personal notes, Tschirky's text is obviously copied, directly from Filippini's book, with only minor alterations.

Filippini (1889)

Canapé Lorenzo.

Cut out from an American bread six slices, the width of the bread, one-quarter of an inch in thickness; neatly pare off the crust, fry them in a sautoire with half an ounce of butter, so as to have them of a light brown color. Boil eighteen hard-shelled crabs in salted water for twelve minutes, remove them, and let cool until they can be handled with bare hands; then remove the upper shell, and with the

Ranhofer (1894)

Canapés Lorenzo (Canapés à la Lorenzo).

Fry colorless two ounces of onions cut in one-eighth of an inch squares, and when done add a tablespoonful of flour; let this cook for a few minutes without browning, then moisten with a pint of fresh cream; season with salt, cayenne pepper and nutmeg, and reduce it to the consistency of a well thickened sauce; now throw in one pound of crab meat sautéd in butter over a brisk fire in a pan, letting it

Tschirky (1896)

Canapes Lorenzo.

Cut six slices of bread the width of an American loaf and one-quarter of an inch in thickness, neatly pare off the crust and fry in a sautoire, together with half an ounce of fresh butter, so as to make them a light brown color; then boil eighteen hard-shell crabs in salted water for about twelve minutes, after which remove and allow them to become cool, when the upper shell should be removed, and with



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

aid of a pointed knife pick out all the meat; crack both claws, pick the meat out also; place the meat on a plate, season with a tablespoonful of salt and a saltspoonful of red pepper. Place one ounce of butter in a saucepan with half a medium-sized, sound, peeled, and very finely chopped-up onion. Cook on a moderate fire for two minutes, being very careful not to let get brown. Add two tablespoonfuls of flour, stirring constantly for two minutes; then add one gill of broth, stir well again for five minutes while slowly cooking. Add now the crab-meat, and cook for fifteen minutes more, lightly stirring with a wooden spoon once in awhile. Transfer it into a vessel, and let cool for fifteen minutes. Place a tablespoonful of good butter in a sautoire on a hot stove, mix in well together one tablespoonful of flour, and cook very slowly for three minutes. Add two ounces of grated Parmesan cheese, and the same quantity of grated Swiss cheese; stir all well together. Then place in a vessel and let cool. Place a layer of crab forcemeat on each toast a quarter of an inch thick. Divide the prepared cheese, etc., into six equal parts, giving them a ball-shaped form two inches in diameter[.] Arrange them over the layer of the crab forcemeat right in the centre. Place them on a silver dish, and bake in a brisk oven for five minutes. Then take out from the oven, and send to the table in the same dish.

boil up once and then set it away to cool. Cut slices of bread a quarter of an inch thick; from it cut round pieces four inches in diameter, using a cutter for this purpose; divide them straight through the center to make two even-sized pieces of each, toast them on one side only; cover this side with two ounces of the crab preparation for each half round, and lay the following preparation on top: with the hands work in a tin basin half a pound of butter, add to it grated parmesan cheese, cayenne and white pepper, and knead these together, adding grated parmesan so as to form a thick paste; cover the entire canapé with a layer of this butter and cheese, and set them on a buttered baking-sheet in the hot oven so they attain a fine color, then serve them as quickly as they are removed from the oven. They may be made round shaped two and a half inches in diameter if preferred.

the aid of a pointed knife pick out all of the meat, cracking the claws and removing all the meat from there also; place it all on a plate, season with a teaspoonful of salt and half a saltspoonful of red pepper; then place one ounce of butter in a saucepan, with a peeled and very finely chopped onion, and cook them together for about two minutes over a moderate fire; add two tablespoonfuls of flour, stir again for two minutes, and add one gill of broth, and stir while slowly cooking for five minutes, now add the crab meat, and cook for quarter of an hour, stirring once in a while with a wooden spoon, then remove into another vessel and let it cool for fifteen minutes. Put in a sautoire a tablespoonful of good butter over a stove, and mix in with one tablespoonful of flour, and cook for three minutes gently; add a couple of ounces of grated Parmesan cheese and an equal quantity of Swiss cheese, stirring well together; place it in a vessel to cool. Put a layer of crab meat on each slice of toast a quarter of an inch thick, and divide the prepared cheese in six equal portions, forming them into ball shapes about two inches in diameter, and arrange them over the layer of crab meat in the center, place them on a dish and bake in a brisk oven for about five minutes, then take them out and serve them in the same dish in which they have been cooked.



Hence we may conclude that in many instances, there may be no sole inventor of a particular recipe. The creation of the signature Delmonico dishes is more likely the joint work of the chefs responsible for the Delmonico kitchens, including both Filippini and Ranhofer. Filippini, however, deserves the credit for being the first of the chefs to have made them available to the public, and his collection of Delmonico dishes is by far the most comprehensive. It remains a mystery, and subject to speculation, though, why neither Ranhofer nor Tschirky acknowledged Filippini's prior work, and how Filippini could so effectively be put out of the public's perception of Delmonico's history after the 1890s.¹⁰

His later work for the International Navigation Company at the end of the nineteenth century, mostly unrelated to his time at Delmonico's, then set the standard for mass catering on cruise ships that became the generally accepted fare for most of the first half of the twentieth century.

Filippini realized that eating standards were becoming more universal "like the mail system and the standards of money," and that he had to modify many of the original recipes "for the American taste" as many dishes he found on his travels were "too rich as prepared in the native homes" (Filippini 1906:v-vii). Because he tried to accommodate the tastes of the different cultures and adapted the recipes from different corners of the world to the Western palate, it may thus be fair to name him a father of "international cuisine"—which in a misconceived and widespread form became the dreaded standard tourist fare of the twentieth century.

"The work you have now completed," writes Charles C. Delmonico in his reply to Filippini's dedication of *The Table* to him, "I have no doubt, will prove instructive and invaluable." Right he was, and Filippini's work merits more attention by today's culinary historians as the first comprehensive collection of Delmonico's culinary heritage, as a reformer of passenger ship catering, and as a promoter of "international cuisine." The table for that has now been set.

Notes

1. See, for example, New York Times, September 14, 1883:8; Bangor Daily Whig & Courier, January 17, 1884; New-York Tribune, March 15, 1888:2; The American Hebrew, October 31, 1890:252. See also Welch (1916).
2. Various sources also contain erroneous biographical information, stating



wrongly that Filippini started working at Delmonico's in 1848 as the predecessor of Ranhofer and took up writing cookbooks after his retirement, for example Smith (2013:264), Choate and Canora (2008:18).

3. Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, 1820-1897. New York Public Library, Microfilm Publication M237, Roll 266, Line 12, List Number 587.

4. Editors concur with the author's choice to correct apparent typos in this menu, restoring "Beauséjour" (from "Reauséjour") and "Paupiettes" (from "Panpiettes") as represented in Ranhofer (1920:1082).

5. As used by Filippini, "cover" means the placement of the cutlery, plates, glasses, and napkins for each guest.

6. New York Public Library, Buttolph Collection, 1891-134. Dejeuner for Mr. John Shaw to Mrs. Thos. Brady and Daughter / In Remembrance of a very Pleasant evening / April 1890.

7. New York City Death Certificate No. 34832 (1917).

8. This work is, however, much more general in nature, addressing at the same time "private families, clubs, restaurants, hotels, etc.," and much simpler than Filippini's, suggesting a more limited choice of dishes per meal, and dishes that are less complex and novel. Also, it lacks any kind of ancillary information on such matters as setting a table, serving food, or seasonality of food.

9. The term "Delmonico Steak" designates the cut rather than the preparation, which—in both Filippini's and Ranhofer's recipes—seems fairly standard for a steak.

10. Intriguingly, both Ranhofer and Tschirky claim that their respective works fill a gap by bringing the recipes of haute cuisine to the household table for the first time—as if Filippini's work had not existed: In the preface to *The Epicurean*, Ranhofer writes, "In publishing this work I have endeavored to fill a much needed want—viz: the best and most effectual manner of preparing healthy and nutritious food. . . . This edition contains innumerable recipes which I have simplified and explained in a comprehensive manner so as to meet the wants of all" (Ranhofer 1894:vii).



Digest

a journal of foodways & culture

Similarly, Tschirky states that he had devoted particular attention to the requirements of the “entertainment furnished at the hearthside,” as “the giver of a small reception . . . has been, it might be said, rather neglected in such works as have come before the notice of the undersigned, relative to cookery” (Tschirky 1892:Preface).

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Digest

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