

A Christmas Gift

The Home Comfort Cookbook Suggests . . .

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The Menu for Thanksgiving and Christmas

Choice of

Soup, raw oysters, quail on toast, or oyster soup

A choice of

Turkey stuffed with oysters

Sweetbreads and boiled ham,

Roast pig ornamented with parsley and celery tops,

Roast duck with bread sauce

Vegetables

Mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, canned corn, asparagus on toast,
Escalloped potatoes, boiled mushrooms, mashed parsnips, baked macaroni,
French string beans, canned tomatoes, and stewed celery.

Celery, cranberries, pickles, olives, chicken salad, rice croquettes, chow-
chow, lettuce salad, oyster parries, currant jelly.

Desserts

Pumpkin pie, mince pie, lemon jelly, chocolate and sponge cake, fruits, nuts,
raisins, lemon pie, charlotte russe, orange ice cream, plum pudding and wine
sauce, California peaches, raised donuts, English plum pudding, assorted
cakes

Beverage

Coffee, chocolate

THE HOME COMFORT COOKBOOK

Henry Harrison Culver's most remembered legacy is the school that bears his name. However, he built his fortune and developed his instincts long before people dreamed of "business models" or ever heard of market studies. He was a natural salesman and a keen observer of his customers. He and his salesmen from the Wrought Iron Range Company in St. Louis traveled across the country, mostly by mule-drawn wagons carrying Home Comfort cook stoves. He dealt with a population that was 60 per cent rural and another 13 percent who lived in small towns. Mass merchandizing didn't exist and taking the product to the customer was essential. With rare exceptions, most sales were consummated on the back porch or sitting room in small towns or isolated farmhouses throughout the country.

Culver was meticulous in his demand that the location of every sale be recorded and available to the company office. He had an affinity for testimonials, using them in advertising and promotions. However, it was the gift of a frying pan, a steel tea kettle, or an enameled cooking pot that brought instant good will. If the housewife was happy with a Home Comfort stove, she told her friends and referrals were essential in building a clientele.

The pièce de résistance, however, was the presentation of a Home Comfort Cookbook. In the early 1870s, the WIR Company began to publish a guide to good cooking that provided the housewife with a variety of recipes and helpful household hints. Menus for each meal of the day were suggested. Breakfast, for instance, could include oatmeal porridge, bacon, ham, fried pork, hash, 23 kinds of bread, 18 recipes for waffles and cakes, and a dozen ways to prepare eggs.

The noon meal, "dinner," was so critical to the working farmer that the Home Comfort Cookbook made the most of the opportunity to help the housewife be creative. It noted that "A well-arranged dinner is always begun with soup . . . [and] one of the housewife's secrets is that it is very economical." Five pages and 50 recipes later it finished with the soups and moved to 30 fish recipes and 12 different ways to prepare oysters. Meats included beefsteak, veal, mutton, lamb, turkey, and chicken followed. In all, there were 93 recipes for various meat products.

Vegetables presented 57 opportunities and a variety of dishes including turnips, parsnips, and succotash along with 19 different potato recipes. Not surprisingly, desserts and puddings led the way with 92 suggestions. Pies and cakes dominated the dessert list, but unusual dishes like Corn Starch Blanc Mange, Farmer's Pork and Apple Pie, and Boiled Batter Pudding surely made for interesting reading and, hopefully, inspiration to the cook.

Esoteric dishes like pigs' head cheese and pigs' feet souse, pigeon stewed in broth, sweetbread fritters, brains and sauce, and fricasseed rabbit had enough appeal that they were suggested as entrees.

The Wrought Iron Range Cookbook also attempted to educate its readership on the niceties of dining and the need to develop social skills at the table. A housewife was given explicit instructions on how to set a table for a special event and even families of "ordinary means should follow proper decorum." Silver should be polished, glasses for water without a blemish, knives, forks and spoons laid at each plate. Mothers were cautioned to "see that your girls abide by this rule." Helpful hints for the table included the suggestion that "Yellow cream show to advantage through a white glass pitcher and creamy milk through an amber and red pitcher. Cut glass is out of the question for the average mortal, but pretty imitations can be had now."

Table etiquette was stressed. "Don't eat until all are served, say thank you or no thank you, have something interesting to tell the family or guests, and never apologize for your short comings." In a telling comment, the cookbook editors noted that if children were not allowed to "crumb their bread, spill their milk, and make a mess of their food, there would be fewer inquiries through the newspaper columns as to proper conduct at the table."

The man of the house was not spared his lesson. "Everyone knows how hacked meat takes away the appetite and exhausts the man in carving." Hence, every home should have a "knife of good steel for carving only . . ." and that "the meat should come to the table in a large platter . . . and the carver should not be hampered by glasses of water or cups of tea within reach of his elbow."

Instructions on how to hold the carving fork and knife were followed by directions of carving beef – it should “be shaved off in very thin slices. All fowls should have the legs and wings cut off and jointed before the other parts are touched. A good carver always sits . . . [and] anyone with a good knife and much practice may become a good carver.” It then commented that “under some hands it becomes a fine art.”

The Home Comfort Cookbook, however, was designed to do far more than help the lady of the house. It was clearly designed to sell stoves. Its first 16 pages presented a short history of the company, noting its capitalization was \$1,000,000 in 1890 – and a second factory had just been opened in Toronto . By January of 1895, 299,327 Wrought Iron Ranges had been sold during the previous 12 years and new models were being added to the product line annually. Stability and staying power was clearly on Henry Harrison Culver’s mind.

Four pages were devoted to awards for design and quality made by judges at expositions across the country. Gold medals and a variety of other awards including the highest award at the World’s Columbian Exposition in 1893 in Chicago were prominently featured.

When the Union Station in St. Louis opened in the early 1890s, it was equipped with a 24-foot-long Home Comfort range and an assortment of company products from broilers, cook and carving tables, a seven-foot-long oven, vegetable steamers, egg boilers, a confectioner’s stove, and a 1,000 pounds of copper sauce pans and sauce pots. Mr. Culver made sure these statistics were included in his cookbooks.

The last 50 pages of the cookbook were devoted to a variety of what were referred to as Home Comfort “Formulary.” It described how to build a home fire extinguisher, provided the formula for government approved whitewash, told how to calculate the weight of a block of ice (weight equals the number of cubic inches divided by 30), gave instructions how to make lard and paper hangers’ paste, and the method for curing Virginia hams.

Not to be outdone by almanacs of the time, the Home Comfort Cookbook contained “Ropp’s Perpetual Calendar,” a table to calculate interest, another to find the capacity of a bin or crib and determine how much corn it contained. Weights and measures tables, rules for measuring hay, how to determine the capacity of a cistern (one 3 feet in diameter by 20

feet deep equaled 1,060 gallons), and how many bricks were needed for a chimney only scratched the surface of the available information to the farmer, home builder, mason, or carpenter.

A section titled “Home Remedies,” provided a variety of medical advice. Among its suggestions was a bizarre recommendation for a purgative composed of four ounces of jalap (a Mexican plant), eight ounces of senna, and an ounce of cloves, all carefully pulverized and sifted through a cloth. A heaping teaspoon stirred in water and sweetened with a little brandy (or nutmeg for children) could make it “palatable and agreeable.”

A teaspoon of powdered elm bark, rhubarb, and charcoal, with a tablespoon of salt, an egg yolk, mixed together and reduced to a powder and taken with a little water three to six times a day, was considered valuable for dysentery, flux, or diarrhea. “It seldom fails to cure.”

There were “cures” for pimples, sore eyes, ingrown or inverted toe nails, toothaches, stiff joints, and whooping cough. If what ailed was mumps, cholera, worms, colic or freckles, there was a remedy. “Indian Pile Ointment,” the 19th century answer to Preparation H, directed that equal parts of Cavendish tobacco and old shoe leather be burned in a crucible until charred, then mixed in a cup of hog’s lard and mashed until black or a dark lead color. Then apply once or twice a day for piles. “A never ending cure” was the closing phrase. The writer had a good sense of humor.

If bitten by a dog suspected of carrying rabies, “burn out the wound thoroughly with a red-hot iron. Do this as soon as possible, for no time is to be lost.” There were suggestions to get rid of carpet moths and bed bugs, and a “chest cold should be treated as quickly as possible by laying a flannel cloth dipped in boiling water on the chest and sprinkling it with turpentine.

The 1895 edition of the cookbook devoted six pages to a listing of hotels and restaurants that used Wrought Iron Ranges. They were in 38 states, four Indian territories, two provinces in Canada , two steamship companies, and the Royal Arms Hotel in Carlow , Ireland . In keeping with Henry Harrison Culver’s promotional devices, the names of hundreds of individual owners of Home Comfort Stoves across the U.S. and Canada covered an additional 29 pages. These numbers and the endorsements showed the growth and the stability of the company.

A story in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* in 1890 reported 1,500 men were employed at the company and its production of 100 stoves daily. The annual payroll, according to *Leslie's*, was a million dollars. Clearly the sales force was doing its job in bringing comfort to homes and kitchens across the United States and Canada . When the Culver Military Academy was formed in 1894, it had the full faith and credit of a viable company standing behind it and, yes, future cookbooks contained a promotional page for the school.

In 1938, the nationally known dietician and author of the best-selling *Joy of Cooking*, Irma Rombauer, was engaged to revise the Home Comfort Cookbook. Rombauer, a celebrated St. Louis hostess, brought it into the 20th century. Gone were the esoteric “helpful” hints for medical and home care, product testimonials, and advice on social etiquette. Rombauer’s changes reflected contemporary recipes, instructions for home canning, suggestions for daily menus, and the importance of vitamins in diets. The *raison d’être*, however, for its publication remained the promotion of the Wrought Iron Range and many pages in the 1938 catalog were devoted to that objective.

Time, however, was catching up with the Wrought Iron Range Company. Electricity spelled the end of wood and coal cook stoves and during World War II company facilities were converted to the production of 500-pound bomb casings for the Air Corps. America was becoming urbanized and in 1959 Henry Harrison Culver’s company closed forever.