

Strictly *Food* for *Thought*

September 2014





Commemorative

This year we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Plattsburgh, also known as the Battle of Lake Champlain. The September 11 victory in the year 1814 marked the turning point in the War of 1812. It led to successful peace negotiations between the United States and Great Britain and left a historic imprint on our region. As is our Food for Thought tradition, here we explore and share the celebratory food and drink that those heroic American soldiers partook in shortly after victory...

The Sweet Taste of Victory

Yet to be found is the exact menu for the feast Henry Delord organized at Israel Green's Tavern that September night in the year 1814. Only recently returned from Peru where he fled with his wife, Betsey, and baby daughter, Frances, during the British occupation, Delord barely had time to unearth the family silver before he organized a committee to draft an invitation to newly minted Commodore Thomas Macdonough for "a celebration feast on Friday next."

With the rugs in tatters, gardens trampled, and furniture damaged by restless British soldiers encamped there, Delord arranged to hold the event at Israel Green's Tavern, the popular social center at the corner of Bridge and Green Streets in Plattsburgh. The youthful war hero, 31-year-old Macdonough, brought General Macomb, General Mooers, and officers of the Army and Navy to dine. Fifty-six grateful Plattsburgh citizens also attended the festivities, indulging in a feast of local foods.

Despite the loss of life and recent hardships, the hard-won victory, the return to their homes, the re-opening of Lake Champlain shipping lanes, and pride in the now-assured United States of America, was more than enough reason to convince the city elders of the necessity of celebration. The City of Plattsburgh paid for all 85 dinners, "toasting libations" and cigars.

REENACTORS

Bob Cheeseman-Henry DeLord

Officers:

John Rock -Com. McDonough

Craig Russell -Gen. A. Macomb

Chrystal Russell - Gen. Macomb's wife

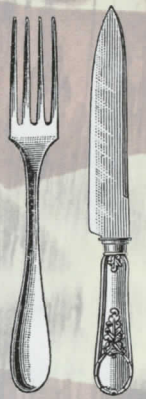
Sailors: Mike Rock, Billy Jo Leopard, Rup Dashnaw

Commissioned Soldier: Joe Stemper



Consumption

BY KAREN BOUVIER
PHOTOS BY KAYSE BRUNELL



Lively salutations and a recorded two gallons of locally made brandy flowed freely, as well as 20 gallons of wine, cider and porter (dark brown bitter beer brewed from partially charred malt). Guests nibbled on a hearty bean soup alongside cheese, cornbread, and pickles. Macdonough proposed a toast to British officer Captain George Downie, who was killed in the battle, and Colonel Woolsey proposed giving extra rum to the sailors (called "tars") in honor of the event. The enormously popular rum, or perhaps even whiskey, may have been used to spike the punch.

As the soup was ladled out, Israel Green carved a haunch of venison while Mrs. Green filled the gravy boats, then brushed the suckling pig with sage-butter sauce. Platters of broiled fish appeared while guests passed side dishes of succotash, stewed pears, potted partridge, roasted onions, and mashed parsnips. General Macomb's musicians ate quickly and took the arrival of salvers (trays) of refreshing glasses of syllabubs (dessert consisting of cream mixed with citrus juice and wine) as the moment to tune

their instruments. They knew the frothy chilled lemon cream tickled the nose and cleansed the palate, and the sweetened wine at the bottom signaled the transition from dining to dancing.

Moving the plank tables aside, guests paired off for "The Duke of Kent's Waltz." Macomb's band soon had a line of dancers making swirling stars with "all hands right" and "casting down" to the caller's instructions while desserts arrived.

Groaning under the weight of flummeries (sweet puddings), brandy-soaked cakes, creams, trifles, wine rolls, pies, and tarts, the dessert table beckoned. Flushed dancers flocked to the refilled punch bowl, offering satisfied murmurs as confections were consumed. More dancing ensued, and more visits to the table.

Once the ladies were escorted home, Henry Delord passed out cigars to the remaining men, poured glasses of sherry and talked about future plans for the success of the United States. □



The Menu at Commodore Macdonough's Banquet

Fall season in the North Country, then as now, offered much for the table. The menu probably included seasonal fruits (apples, plums and pears) vegetables (corn, squash, cucumbers, potatoes, onions, carrots, parsnips, and beets), wild game (woodcock, partridge, turkey and hare), fish (sturgeon, salmon, trout, and perch), pork and chicken, as well as sweetbreads, pickles, jellies, puddings, and cakes. Tomatoes, being considered poisonous, were not served. The citizens must have been plucking, roasting, stewing, baking, pickling, and brewing for days.

A Fairy Tale Setting for a President's Picnic

A few years later, in 1817, Delord, by then a judge, had another chance to honor his adopted country and organize a more intimate repast, when the steamboat Phoenix brought President James Monroe to Plattsburgh. As the president and his entourage strode down the dock, then up the hill to Israel Green's Tavern, the President was greeted with great fanfare, including schoolgirls strewing flower petals in his path. After spending time with the citizens, Monroe took his leave and boarded a private stagecoach. He was on his way to Malone, but he stopped at the DeLord Mansion in Plattsburgh first – home of staunch patriots Henry and Betsey.

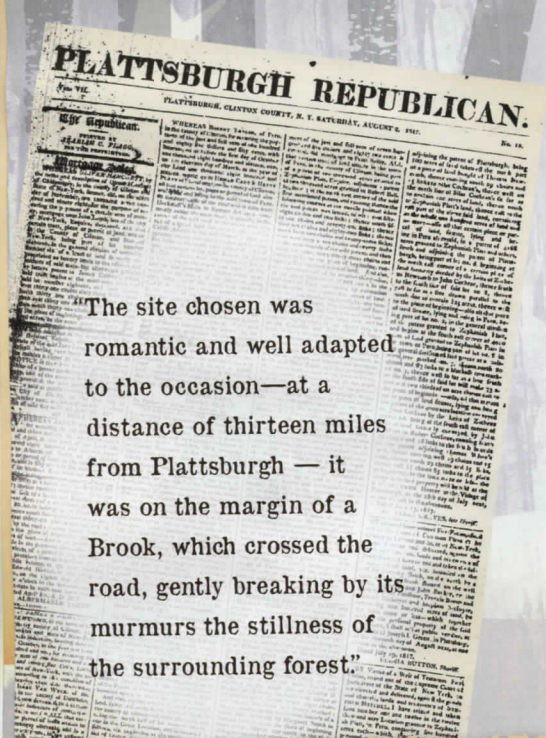
No record exists of what was served at the tea the Delords offered their president, but there may have been plum cake, preserved fruit, pickled cucumber, and gingerbread. Being July, strawberries and cherries were in season, and with trading normalized, flour was readily available and all kinds of baked goods could be made. Draining tea sweetened with honey from a delicate, handleless cup, President Monroe finished the delicious repast, took his leave and resumed his journey. As the stagecoach clattered away, Judge DeLord probably knew what awaited the unsuspecting president, and approved of it greatly.

President Monroe had been on the Old Chatueagay Road (present-day Rt. 374) for a couple of hours, and was thirteen miles outside of Plattsburgh when he was surprised by "a well-timed cold dinner," prepared outdoors by a committee of citizens by the babbling Kelly Brook. According to the *Plattsburgh Republican*, on August 2, 1817:

"The site chosen was romantic and well adapted to the occasion – at a distance of thirteen miles from Plattsburgh – it was on the margin of a Brook, which crossed the road, gently breaking by its murmurs the stillness of the surrounding forest."

Here it was contrived that our illustrious visitor, after having long traveled over a road hard and rugged, with little to enliven the tedious monotony of the scene, should fall unexpectedly into view of the spot – here he was met by a Committee and conducted thro' a triumphal arch of green boughs, to a shaded seat, where the repast, as if raised by enchantment, was spread for his reception. In such a moment, so congenial to convivial gaiety, form, and ceremony have no place; age loses its caution; philosophy itself is taken off its guard, and the flow of soul alone triumphs; the heart is thrown open in generous confidence; its impulses communicate in sweet sympathy from breast to breast; and the unrestrained intercourse of social feelings manifests itself in sentiments and expressions of mutual esteem and respect."

It must have been quite a picnic. From his shaded seat, the president may have been served calf's feet jelly, collops (slices) of cold meat, pickled beets, and meat pie. Since he had a long journey ahead, presumably the meal was quick, and alcohol limited to ginger wine or cider. One can only imagine how surprised Monroe was to be feted on the road, and impressed by the ingenuity and creativity of the citizens who wanted to surprise and honor him and show off their delicious local victuals.



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Kent Delord House



Take a further look back at early American culinary history...

AMERICAN COOKERY

Amelia Simmons published the first cookbook in America in 1796. It was called *American Cookery*, or the art of dressing viands, fish, poultry, vegetables, and the best modes of making pastes, puffs, pies, tarts, puddings, custards, and preserves, and all kinds of cakes from the imperial plum to plain cake. Published 20 years after the Revolutionary War, this cookbook started a second revolution: the use of American ingredients with English cooking methods. Easily available cornmeal replaced oats, and pearl ash (precursor to baking powder) was introduced—reducing mixing time, and effort, to make baked goods rise.

Succotash

A cooked dish of kernels of corn and shell beans, especially lima beans, succotash comes from the Narraganset word *misquatash* which literally means “broken pieces.” This recipe takes the traditional September dish, and adds tomatoes, onions, and stock to elevate it to dinner party status. Serve as a side dish, or spoon into fresh, hollowed-out cherry tomatoes to create surprising and tasty appetizers.

2 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil

1 1/2 cups chopped onion

Coarse kosher salt

1 large garlic clove, minced

3 cups chopped red tomatoes (about 1 1/2 pounds)

2 1/4 cups corn kernels cut from 4 ears of corn (preferably 2 ears of white corn and 2 ears of yellow corn)

2 cups fresh lima beans (from about 2 pounds pods), soaked overnight (You can substitute kidney beans or baby butter beans.)

1/3 cup of chicken or vegetable stock

3 Tbsp. thinly sliced fresh basil

PREPARATION

Heat oil in heavy large skillet over medium heat. Add onion and sprinkle with coarse salt.

Sauté onion until soft and translucent, about 5 minutes. Add garlic; stir until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add corn, lima beans and stock.

Reduce heat to medium-low. Cover and simmer until corn and beans are tender, about 20 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Add the tomatoes. Simmer for 10 more minutes, stirring occasionally.

Take off the heat, season to taste with salt and pepper.

Stir in basil and serve.

Makes 6 servings.

Can be made one day ahead.

Re-warm before serving.



Syllabubs

A popular dessert consisting of cream mixed with citrus juice and wine, syllabubs are fun to drink, and a great palate cleanser. Frothy with cream, wine, and citrus, syllabubs, served on glass pyramids or salvers, became the centerpiece of the dessert table

Preparation

2 cups whipping cream

1 cup golden sherry

1 lemon, juiced. Save peel for garnish

1 cup sugar

Red or white wine, sweetened with honey, as desired

In a large mixing bowl, mix lemon, sherry, sugar, and cream.

Whip with a whisk until soft-to-firm peaks form.

Spoon the whipped mixture into a sieve, screen, or strainer over a bowl, and allow to set for two hours in a cool place.

Fill your glasses 3/4 full with the sweetened wine.

Gently spoon the mounds of strained cream on the glasses to top them off.

Garnish with mint leaves, lemon slices or candied fruit.

Once placed in serving glasses, the acids firm the cream, the cream rises and the clear liquids sink.

Broiled Sturgeon

This simple recipe showcases the classic Lake Champlain fish. You can also use any firm-fleshed fish such as salmon, mahi-mahi or swordfish.

Preparation

1 lb. wild or farm-raised sturgeon steaks, cut to one inch thick

3 Tbsp. white wine vinegar

1 cup olive oil

2 sprigs each parsley, thyme, and rosemary

Salt and pepper

Sprinkle salt and pepper on the fish and set aside.

Combine the olive oil and white wine vinegar, pour over the fish.

Marinate the steaks in the refrigerator for 30-60 minutes, turning once.

Drain the sturgeon steaks and pat them dry with a clean towel.

Broil or grill the fish 4-5 minutes on high heat on each side.

Makes 4 servings



Samuel de Champlain's Dinner Theatre

As the winter of 1606 approached in Port Royal, years before he named our beautiful lake, Samuel de Champlain (1574-1635) navigator, explorer, colonizer, cartographer, diplomat, and, as it turns out, bon vivant, established the *Ordre de Bon Temps* (Order of Good Cheer) as a means to pass the winter pleasantly, and eat well.

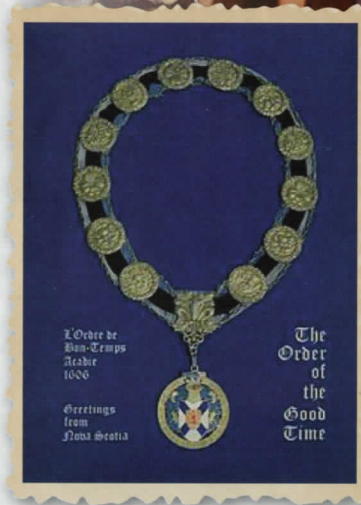
"This order," Champlain wrote, "consisted of a medal on a chain which we used to place with certain small ceremonies around the neck of one of our company, commissioning him to go hunting that day. The next day it was conferred on another to do his best and to bring back the finest game." Like most of Champlain's ideas, it was designed with a deep understanding of those involved. Naturally competitive, and with time hanging heavy, men would start hunting days before their turn to bring back "savory meat of flesh or fish."

The wintering group of fifty French explorers and twenty Native Americans made surprisingly satisfying dishes out of moose, caribou, beaver, otter, rabbits, raccoons, bear, partridges, geese, larks, and ducks. According to one participant, author, poet, and lawyer Marc Lescarbot (1570-1641), "this was so well carried out that, though the epicures of Paris often tell us we have no Rue aux Ours [a street with restaurants] over here, we have made as good cheer as we could have in this same Rue aux Ours, and at less cost."

At dinner time, the chief steward, wearing a napkin on his shoulder, the Order of Good Cheer medal ("worth 4 crowns") around his neck, and carrying the "wand of office," marched proudly in carrying a platter of some fresh delicacy he caught and cooked. In addition, most likely everyone at the settlement took part in the staging of "Le Théâtre de Neptune en la Nouvelle-France," written by Lescarbot and performed at the first celebration, making it the first theatrical performance in North America—the first dinner theatre, if you will.

In the spring, Champlain wrote that "everyone found the Order beneficial to his health, and more profitable than all the varieties of medicines we might have used."

By the way, the most popular dishes were "delicate" beaver tail, moose pie, and broiled sturgeon. □



1606