AMERICA EATS

I. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED BOOK

II. TENTATIVE TABLE OF CONTENTS

III. OUTLINE INDICATING APPROACH TO SUBJECT

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED WORK

LENGTH: 60,000 to 70,000 words

ILLUSTRATIONS: Probably line drawings for head and tail pieces to show cooking facilities, and Currier & Ives prints showing group eating.

PRESS DATE: February 1, 1942.

DESCRIPTION: An account of group eating as an important American social institution; its part in development of American cookery as an authentic art and in the preservation of that art in the face of mass production of food-stuffs and partly cooked foods and introduction of numerous technological devices that lessen labor of preparation but lower quality of the product.

The proposed book will consist of
A general introduction on development of American cookery.
Five sections covering the country by regions. Each section to consist of an essay on the development of cookery within the region and on the numerous social gatherings at which eating is an important part of the program, with emphasis on dishes and methods of cooking characteristics of the locality; detailed description of two to four gatherings characteristic of the region.

POTENTIAL COMPETITORS: None

Style: Light, with emphasis on human interest and on the ever-absorbing divisions of opinion concerning ingredients and cooking methods.

TENTATIVE TABLE OF CONTENTS

AMERICA EATS

Foreward

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION (To be titled later)

Poverty of cookery tradition among settlers; unbelievable abundance of American foodstuffs; the challenge of new foodstuffs and lack of old stir inventive genius of settlers to creation of new dishes that do not need spices and sauces to make them appetizing; frontier conditions that made group eating the most popular colonial diversion and resulted in social recognition of cooks, thus stimulating their creative activities.

Devastating effects on cookery as an art and on public taste by introduction of labor-saving devices and mass-production; the frying-pan almost wrecks America; the art of cooking preserved by social gatherings, especially those of the nostalgic variety - family and pioneer re-unions - and the presence of a continually challenging frontier.

Current threats to the art from restaurateur's use of pseudo French menus, sedentary loss of appetite, disguised advertising in woman's magazines, broadening work-field of women, lack of sound criticism of cookery. Importance of social gatherings that glorify the non-professional cook and keep traditional cookery alive.

THE NORTHEAST EATS

Fish, corn, molasses, fish, shell-fish, berries and apples of major importance - development of baked beans, Indian pudding, gingerbread, as result of triangular rum-molasses-slave trade; chowder, succotash, baked clams, mush. Thanksgiving dinners, harvest suppers, game suppers, corn-shucking suppers, strawberry festivals, shore dinners, corn roasts, Vermont sugaring-offs, Pennsylvania Dutch Sunday dinners and footwashing dinners (with apple butter, dough-nuts, and coffee), Rhode Island May breakfasts; latter-day shore dinners, garden suppers, brunch; pale echoes in bridge luncheons, Rotary and Kiwanis dinners.

Grange Supper
Baked Bean Supper
Clambake

THE SOUTH EATS

Chicken, fish, squirrels, sugarcane, corn; Negro slavery and its importance in developing breads and cakes in infinite variety - beaten biscuits, cracklin cornbread, hoe-cake, corn pudding, sour biscuits, angel cake, Lady Baltimore cake; frontiersmen invent Brunswick stew - game with whatever else happened to be available. Slow development of hotels because of attitude that "nice folks can always stay with us - we don't want the rest." Clan feeling and development of visiting; court-day and church as breeders of social eating; oldest social club in America, Maryland's South River Club (1822), founded solely to provide dinners for friendly gourmets; rise of evangelistic meets and "all-day preaching with dinner on the ground"; Delaware's annual old chapel picnics; Maryland's hunting breakfasts; family re-unions in Virginia and other southern states; North Carolina's chitterling struts, clan dinners, patriarchal birthday dinners; South Carolina's St. Cecelia ball breakfasts (with hop-in-John), Pee Dee fish stews, hill country wakes; Georgia's Brunswick stew barbecues (pork), watermelon cuttings, cane-grinding picnics; Florida's cemetery cleaning picnics, pilau dinners of lodges and other social organizations; Alabama's Christmas eggnog parties, Baptist foot-washing dinners, possum roasts, Household of Ruth dinner, all-day-sing picnics; Mississippi's political barbecues; Creole re-union dinners; Tennessee's clan reunions, New Years' dinners of hog jowls and collards; Louisiana's King's Day parties, fish fries, communion breakfasts; Arkansas' box supper socials, bayou fish fries, candidate's barbecues; Texas' political barbecue's, annual squirrel dinners, possum hunt dinners; Kentucky burgoo feasts, coon hunt suppers, chittlin' feasts at hog-killing time.

Family Reunion
Political Barbecues
Cemetery Cleaning Picnic

THE MIDDLE WEST EATS

New England in tradition with special passion for oysters; later German and Scandinavian influences from immigrants who left their native land after renaissance of cookery had created characteristic dishes; Ohio's rabbit fries, coon suppers, fish fries; Indiana's harvest suppers and Sunday School picnics; Illinois' sauerkraut suppers, silo-filling dinners, Farm Bureau pot-luck dinners; Michigan's fish fries (rock bass and lake perch); Wisconsin's New Years' Eve German suppers; Minnesota's lutefisk dinners; Iowa's church suppers and catfish fries; Missouri's fried chicken suppers and friendship parties; Kansas' county fair dinners, grange suppers, and school picnics; North Dakota's Scandinavian picnics, Lutheran lutefisk suppers; South Dakota's chuckwagon meals; Nebraska's Sand Hills picnics and pancake day.

Church Supper
Lutefisk Supper
School Picnic

THE FAR WEST EATS

Mixed tradition but dominated by mining, cattle raising, and lumbering traditions; miners' banquets with champagne and other exotic items were earliest social gatherings; round-up barbecues and big game hunts came next - primarily male feasts; meat always most important part of feasts; church and schoolhouse became community centers where picnics and suppers were held- schoolhouse supper-dance a frontier feature. Colorado's mountain trout suppers; Montana's hunters' dinners and Labor Day barbecues; Wyoming's sportsmen's riots, mountain oyster feasts (when lambs are docked); Nevada's old prospector dinners; Washington's pigeon pie suppers and salmon barbecues; Oregon's loggers' dinners; California's pioneer dinners.

Roundup Barbecue
Mormon Ward Reunion
Game Dinner

THE SOUTHWEST EATS

Spanish, Indian, and range influences in arid region - spices and condiments, tomato sauces, cornmeal, sheep and cattle; cooking facilities; sparse diet of Anglo-Americans before irrigation made fruit and vegetables part of year-round fare. Spanish picnics and Mexican backyard barbecues; differences between barbecue sauces; Southern California's part in revolutionizing national diet and mongrel character of Los Angeles' state picnics.

Sheriff's Barbecues
Cowboy Dinner
Pipeline Meal

INDEX

III

OUTLINE INDICATING APPROACH TO SUBJECT

EATING IN GROUPS IS THE MOST POPULAR AMERICAN SOCIAL INSTITUTION. The traditional gatherings--clambakes, barbecues, fish fries, church suppers, family re-unions--preserve the best of America's native cookery. Although some of the same types of gathering are found throughout the country, or throughout certain regions, the individual gatherings, even within a state, vary widely in character, not only in ritual but also in rigid tradition governing methods of preparing the foodstuffs. Maryland's Tipsy Parson cake is soaked in sherry, North Carolina's is moistened with scuppernong wine and served with a syllabub flavored with brandy. One section of the North Atlantic coast puts tomatoes in its clam chowder, another puts cream, and a third scorns both. Georgia includes pork or beef as a base for its Brunswick stew, Virginia insists that only squirrel, rabbit, or chicken should be used.

MOST EARLY AMERICAN SETTLERS HAD LITTLE EXPERIENCE WITH VARIETY AND QUALITY IN FOOD: they migrated at a time when the renaissance in cookery, begun among the wealth in Italy in the 1400's, had reached the gentry of northern Europe but had not yet greatly changed the diet of the poor. And most American settlers came to America because they were poor. Black bread and cabbage, occasionally augmented by broths or soups made of tough meat, dried fish or coarse vegetables, were the standard fare. Even the rich had a lack of quality and variety in their diet and it was the search for spices and sauce ingredients to make the foodstuffs more palatable that stimulated the discovery of America. Sweets, which became more common in Europe after development of sugar plantations in Latin America, were available to the middle and lower classes only on holidays.

THE RICH ABUNDANCE OF NATIVE AMERICAN FOODSTUFFS was the theme of one of the promotional publications put out by the Dutch, early in the 1600's. The country had huge quantities of fish, shell-fish, large and small game, wild fowl, maple syrup, wild honey, berries, nuts, and even some vegetables, such as asparagus; and with the most primitive methods the Indians were obtaining large crops of maize, beans, pumpkins, and squash from the virgin soil.

LACK OF THE LIMITED TRADITIONAL FOODSTUFFS AND ABUNDANCE OF NEW ONES stirred the inventive faculties of the settlers. Introduction of molasses through the slave trade soon made another ingredient available, especially important in New England where it was even tried in combination with seemingly incompatible foods;

a result was baked pork and beans. Other new dishes were crab-cakes, chowder, squash and pumpkin pies, jonny-cake, corn-meal mush, and jamcake. Plantation owners of the South, who soon became wealthy, imported renaissance recipes from Europe and the Negro cooks used them with rich imagination. They were especially interested in cakes and sweets and also invented the endless variety of hot breads and biscuits still found on tables of the region.

THE OPEN FIREPLACE AND THE BRICK OVEN were the only cooking facilities until about 1830 and they governed the development of American dishes, nearly all of which required slow cooking with moderate heat. Introduction of the cooking stove caused a serious decline in the American standards of cookery. Since the stove enabled more rapid cooking, cooks used large quantities of fat, chiefly lard, to keep the foods from burning. The principles of French frying were not yet understood and, as a result, foods came to the table soaked and swimming in fat. As Europe had not yet widely adopted the cooking stove, visitors from abroad were shocked by the foods placed before them. They reported that all Americans were short-lived dyspeptics. This impression was partly the result of their experiences in hotels, at railroad eating stations, and on boats, for the new facilities for rapid transportation and the rapid growth of cities had created problems of rapid mass feeding. Most of the public dining places were serviced by kitchens with stoves and their cooks used the frying pan whenever possible to satisfy the demand for food on short orders.

Gradually cooks learned to use the new facility and, since the period of creative activity in cookery was not yet over, learned to adapt old recipes or replace them with others suitable to the stove. Later technical improvements caused similar periods of adjustment, but in general American cookery, like the other arts, went through a period of dullness lasting well into the 20th century. Under stimulation of rapidly increasing wealth, restaurateurs and others attempted to make the American table more interesting by importing French menus. Results were bad on the whole because the principles of French cooking were not understood and French facilities and certain French ingredients were lacking.

THE NEW KNOWLEDGE OF NUTRITION started a culinary revolution not long after the first World War. It aroused an intelligent interest in cooking principles and later on appreciation of the soundness of the dishes developed by the ingenious early settlers.

FRONTIERSMEN OF THE 1830's ADOPTED THE FRYING-PAN as their chief cooking utensil because it was lighter than the pot

their predecessors had carried. While many of the frontiersmen, and later the miners, made no attempt to improve on the grease-soaked foods prevalent at the time, others learned to use fat with discretion and also invented certain dishes, such as flapjacks, suitable to the frying-pan. Just as the early frontiersman with only the pot concocted Brunswick stew, a one-dish meal, so the later pioneer invented ham-and-eggs, with potatoes on the side, to cook his meal in a single pan.

SOCIAL GATHERINGS THAT CENTERED ROUND A MEAL were early products of the settlement period when houses were scattered and newcomers were eager for news and company. With food abundant, even the poorest household expected friends to stop in for dinner when coming to town to attend market, court, or church. Community enterprises were numerous and, with farms scattered and transportation poor, the householders benefitting by the gathering always expected to provide a dinner after their barn had been raised or quilt completed. Cemetery and church cleanings always brought people together for a noon meal. Hog-killings and stock-roundups, also communal enterprises, were responsible for development of the popular barbecue. Out of community enterprises came the communal meals of various kinds to which each household contributed a share.

COOKERY EARLY BECAME A MATTER OF RIVALRY, each household trying to outdo the other in the variety and novelty of foods provided under wilderness conditions. Many dishes now traditional were invented as a result of such rivalry. It later aided women in conquering the cook-stove and spurred them to the invention of dishes that could be cooked successfully with the new device.

THE CUSTOM OF GATHERING IN GROUPS TO EAT became fixed and was continued when the conditions giving rise to the gatherings were gone. By that time the kind of food suitable for such meals was also so firmly fixed that women reverted to traditional cooking methods when preparing their contributions even though they were beginning to feed their families on canned foods and factory bread at home. Even today baked beans are cooked for 24 hours before the annual baked bean church supper, and only fish fresh from the water are used at the August fish fry.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF NATIONAL GROUPS to the American table will be given attention, though these are relatively few. Pennsylvania Dutch cookery is quite as much American as it is German, and Mexican cookery, while retaining the Spanish spicing once necessary to disguise toughness and the beginning of decay, is essentially American in its use of tomatoes, corn, and other ingredients. In the Middle West, which was settled fairly late and received large numbers of Northern Europeans with fully developed cookery traditions, some dishes of European origin have been locally adopted.

THE TRADITIONAL ELEMENT IN THE COOKING AND INGREDIENTS OF THE DISHES for the group meals will be emphasized in the various sections of the book and stress will be placed on the role of the cook, since preparation of fine food remains a creative activity that cannot be duplicated by factory methods.

THE TRADITIONAL GROUP MEALS ALSO PRESERVE LONG-ESTABLISHED COMMUNITY ATTITUDES. In spite of the new equality in drinking, men at a hog-killing still go behind the barn to drink their corn liquor and women who now take a Tom Collins at home do not think of sharing this masculine prorogative. Women who contribute to the family income by working in a cotton-mill do not expect men to share in the preparation of the group meal or in the washing of the dishes, even if they do so at home. These and other mores will receive attention in the descriptions.

MANY TRADITIONAL FOODS AND GROUP MEALS CALL FOR TRADITIONAL DRINKS that women do share. Beer is always served with crabs in some places; Maryland, Virginia, and other states have their own recipes for the egg-nog that accompanies the New Year's Day collation. Missouri claims invention of that appetizer, the gin rickey, Virginia of the mint julep, early New York of the old-fashioned cocktail, and early Rhode Island hot buttered rum. These will receive attention.

AMERICA EATS WILL DEAL PRIMARILY WITH THE PRESENT. Historical material will be introduced only to clarify the origins of current gatherings and the dishes they celebrate.