Histories

Providing food for family and friends has always been the traditional work of women. Privileged women were not exempt from overseeing family meals, although they could pass on these duties to hired help—usually women. Even now those who work outside the home are expected to cook and fulfill other domestic responsibilities while male family members generally relax once they leave their jobs. As the essays here show, women's age-old relationship to food ranges from being creative and enjoyable, to a dull chore, financially necessary, or much worse, a desperate, sometimes futile, attempt to keep families alive.

Nancy Jenkins's portrayal of Martha Ballard gives us a picture of a woman living in the early years of the American republic who suffered from the modern condition of juggling a career with family responsibilities. Her work as a midwife often kept her away from home for days at a time, but ever mindful of the needs of her husband and adult son, Ballard would arrange for her daughters or hired girls to prepare the men's meals, a job she found burdensome. In "Cooking to Survive," Barbara Haber contrasts the lives of two women who cooked for a living: one a working-class Black woman from Oklahoma and the other an upper-class white woman from New York who had fallen on hard times. Cleora Butler cooked with exuberance for employers, family, and friends, always finding the work creative and gratifying. On the other hand, Alice Foote MacDougall, though she became a successful restaurateur and had much to be proud of, never got over her loss of status caused first by her father's business failures and then by the death of her husband. Darra Goldstein's essay on the siege of Leningrad brings a grim reality to the meaning of providing food. With food supplies shrinking as the siege went on, seeking sustenance became the purpose of women's day-to-day existence. The population ate bread made with sawdust and other fillers—if they were lucky enough to get it—and stripped rooms of wallpaper in order to eat the glue. Most poignant is the daily dilemma women with children faced: whether to sustain them-

selves with some of the food they managed to gather so as to be able to do the physically demanding work of finding more food, or to give it all to their starving children. All of these essays show the seriousness of the connections between women and food, a subject that in the past has often been trivialized as being mainly about the baking of cookies.

Martha Ballard: A Woman's Place on the Eastern Frontier

Nancy Jenkins

> April 1, 1807: "Snows & Blows but we are able to Make a fire and have food to Eat, which is a great Mercy for which I wish to thank ye Great Doner."
>
> *The Diary of Martha Ballard*

Cookbooks can tell us much about the food of past times, but the views they present of historic kitchens, and of women's roles therein, are necessarily limited. Cookbooks are prescriptive, rather than descriptive, describing not so much what people actually ate, what women (for it is to women that most cookbooks are addressed after about 1650) actually cooked, as what the authors hoped they would eat and cook. And historically cookbooks were restricted in their audience to an elite segment of society that was literate and that found in the printed word an accessible and legitimate source of information. In researching what Americans ate, and how they procured it and prepared it, in the early years of the republic, I've found that diaries, journals, and correspondence can enormously enrich more formal culinary literature. At the same time, such personal documents give us great insight into women's lives at a time in our history when from young girlhood the primary obligation of women of almost all social classes was to guarantee the food supply of families and communities.

One particularly rich and relevant source for information about women's lives and food on what historians call the Eastern Frontier, that is, the pioneering settlements of Maine in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, is the diary kept by Martha Ballard, which was the subject of Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's masterful study *A Midwife's Tale*. The book won Ulrich a Pulitzer Prize for history and was later made into a public television documentary. The diary itself has recently been published in its entirety for the first time.[1]

Martha Ballard was just shy of fifty years old in January 1785 when she began, apparently for the first time, to keep a diary. From then till

her last diary entry on May 7, 1812, shortly before she died, not a day seems to have passed without a comment of some kind, even if it was merely a note about the weather or a birth or death in the Maine frontier community that she served as midwife and what we would today call a visiting nurse or paramedic.

Mrs. Ballard came to Maine's Kennebec valley in 1777 from Oxford, Massachusetts. Her husband Ephraim, a miller and surveyor, had arrived in Maine two years earlier, part of a broad movement out of the older, more settled parts of Massachusetts that was interrupted only briefly by the Revolution. After his wife and five children joined him, Ephraim settled his family along the banks of Bowman's Brook where it empties into the Kennebec in Hallowell. There he rented land with a gristmill and saw mill, and Martha raised their children (the youngest, Ephraim Jr., was born in Hallowell in 1779), planted her gardens, gathered herbs and simples like balm o' Gilead, buckthorn, and mallow, and composed her diary. In the spring of 1791, the Ballards moved down river a ways, and later they went to live on land that was part of their son Jonathan's farm, but essentially they were residents of this growing river community throughout the twenty-seven years of the diary.[2]

Maine was still a backwater of Massachusetts when the Ballards came to live there, and Hallowell was a frontier village of log houses, although it was beginning to be well settled with a meeting house, wharves, a couple of stores, and by 1777 a population of some one hundred families on both banks of the river. Ephraim Ballard was not alone in seeking out cheap land and abundant resources in the Maine backcountry. As the 1790 census showed, the population of the District of Maine had increased by 40,000 since the end of the war; two hundred new towns were established between the Revolution and 1820, when Maine became a state. Thus, the years covered by Martha's diary were extraordinarily busy and productive, for Martha herself as much as for the growing community that she served. Along with the births and deaths that she assisted, she also paid discreet attention in her diary to local scandals (noting, for instance, the male parentage of illegitimate babies, as the tradition of midwifery obliged her to do), crimes and misdeeds, and arrivals and departures from as far afield as Boston and New York. But events of the greater world beyond the Kennebec intruded only rarely in the pages of her diary, and even then it is necessary to read between the lines to understand that when, for instance, she writes of her husband's surveying team beset by "men they knew not" and robbed of compasses and documents, the reference is to an ongoing struggle between, on the one hand, landed proprietors who controlled vast

stretches of Maine wilderness and, on the other, settlers or squatters attempting to lay claim to territory.[3]

Food historians examining Martha's diary may also find it necessary to read between the lines. There is not a recipe to be found, nor any instructions that give a hint about how she or any other woman prepared the cornmeal and flour that were ground in Ephraim's mill, the fruits and vegetables that came from her garden, the veal calves and swine that were slaughtered on a regular basis. But she notes what she planted, when she harvested, days of brewing and baking, of churning and cheese-making, and, although cooking was apparently a minor interest in her busy life, when guests arrived for tea, coffee, or chocolate, "roast chickins," or a "line [loin] of veal."

This work, like the wool she spun and the cloth she wove, or that was done under her direction, was not incidental to what we would call her "real" job as a midwife. Indeed, although midwifery was an important source of cash and barter income, the "real" work of Martha Ballard and women like her throughout North America, was in providing sustenance for their families twelve months a year at a time when outside sources of provisions were hard to come by, especially in winter when the ground was frozen iron hard and the ice-clogged river was no longer a trade route. As in other frontier communities, Hallowell had to be self-sustaining, and within Hallowell, individual families had to be self-sustaining too. And most of that sustenance was the result of women's work. It is difficult to put an economic value on that work until we remember that without it, families might well have starved.

"The girls Baked & Brewed," Mrs. Ballard says on many occasions, indicating either her own two daughters or, after they had married and moved on, the hired girls who helped out, and from this we understand the intimate yeasty connection between baking bread and brewing beer—but we don't know whether the girls were making corn bread, wheat bread, or—most likely—the mixture that thrifty New England housewives called thirded bread, a third cornmeal, a third rye, and a third wheaten flour.

Once her own daughters, Hannah and Polly (her eldest, Lucy, had married before the diary begins), had set up housekeeping on their own, Martha relied on a series of young women from within the community, nieces and daughters of friends and neighbors, most of whom came to live with the Ballards during their time of service. The immediate reason for this, of course, was the need for an extra pair of hands with household tasks like brewing, baking, or setting up the warp for a piece of homespun cloth. But beyond the obvious, it was also a way of extend-

ing and strengthening bonds within the community, and it was a way to train young women in the multitude of skills they would need as they too grew up, married, and established households of their own. In no sense were these "girls" treated as servants. Juniors in the household, yes, but otherwise in the same position vis-à-vis the senior Ballards as their own daughters had been. Why, then, didn't they stay home and train with their own mothers? The answer, I believe, lies in the development of the concept of adolescence and post-adolescence. At a time in their lives when young women are testing their own independence, the mother-daughter relationship, even when most loving, can be fraught, and this is no modern phenomenon.[4] Quite possibly, sending a girl to live with a trusted neighbor or relative was the equivalent of sending her off to boarding school, a way of defusing the situation for both mother and daughter and helping both to arrive at a comfortable situation that would maintain the closeness of the family bond while permitting the girl to grow into a more independent role.

The economy of frontier communities like Hallowell was a complex mixture. Subsistence farming supplied most family needs; at the same time, small export crops, wood products, for instance, or grain, provided cash money, and an assortment of small-scale skills and crafts, such as midwifery in Martha's case and surveying in her husband's, also brought in extra cash or commodities. An intricate bartering system governed the exchange of goods and services among neighbors. For her assistance at a birth or an illness, Martha was often paid in foodstuffs, sometimes as common as a couple of pumpkins or a barrel of rye flour, but sometimes exotic or difficult to obtain—rice, a packet of India tea, chocolate, a brace of pigeons, or a bottle of brandy or rum. (Once, as a special present for a special service, Martha was given "an oreng.") Like Ephraim Ballard, many farmers dealt in lumber, cutting timber and ripping logs not just for home and building construction but for shipbuilding, soon to become a major industry on the Maine coast, and for export to the Caribbean. Cordwood was shipped to fuel city fireplaces, tanbark was important for the leather industry, and woodash went to make potash or pearlash for various uses, including soap-making and, a more recent discovery, as a leavening for baked goods.

Ephraim and his sons kept the saw and grist mills going, but this was an economy in which women played an equal, if officially subservient, role to men. Martha, and her daughters as they married and established homes of their own, kept poultry for meat, eggs, and feathers (to stuff pillows, mattresses, and quilts), milked and pastured cows, made butter and cheese for the family larder and for sale outside, spun flax and wool and wove fabric, kept vegetable and herb gardens, and converted pro-

duce into pickles and pantry staples for the winter. But the Ballards were not entirely self-sufficient, and both cash and barter went to obtain coffee and tea, molasses, pepper and salt, garden seed, tobacco, sugar, and fish. (Though upriver, Hallowell was still within the tidewater of the Kennebec, and the Ballards had good access to cod, both fresh and salt, smelts in season, and smoked herring.) Purchases of commodities like flour, apples, potatoes, wheat, and corn (whether for seed or for home use) were common, despite the fact that these were all produced by the family or their neighbors. Martha frequently mentions making cheese, but almost as frequently she speaks of buying it at one of the stores at "the Hook," the commercial center of the community.

There is no evidence that Martha Ballard, or anyone in her community, acquired or even knew of the slim 47-page booklet of recipes and household hints that was published in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1796. Amelia Simmons's *American Cookery* was apparently the first American cookbook, although American editions of English cookbooks had been published in the colonies. As such, it was a modest attempt to define, for the first time ever, the content of a new, thoroughly American branch of the domestic arts, and it was apparently greeted with great success, for two editions were published in 1796, a revised edition came out in 1800, and successive editions were published in the years that followed.[5]

Cookbooks, as I noted above, are not always the best evidence for what people eat or how they prepare it. Instead of recording the way people live, cookbooks represent an ideal that the author hopes, for one reason or another, will be achieved. Nonetheless, putting together the information from Martha Ballard's diaries and Amelia Simmons's cookbook, we can see some way into this world of two hundred years ago. In a brand new country, with a brand new and highly developed sense of commonwealth, of national identity, of civic and patriotic pride that at times bordered on outrageous jingoism, it was natural that a national cuisine, a style of cooking unique to this seaboard collection of former colonies, should, like American music and American speech, be an integral, identifying part of the evolving national culture.

What makes the Simmons cookbook unmistakably American is the presence of food products and processes that were also part of Martha Ballard's kitchen and garden, of her food world if you will, products such as corn, pumpkins, squash, potatoes, and cranberries in particular—all products of the New World that were still little known in much of Europe. Cooking techniques using the open hearth and the bake oven were still the same ones that had evolved over centuries in northwest Europe, but they too were beginning to change. The black cast-iron

kitchen range, the stove that warmed country kitchens and dominated the memories of anyone who grew up in rural America before about 1935, was still some years over the horizon, although the first patent would be issued in Philadelphia during Jefferson's administration in 1808.

Wheat had long been the favorite bread grain of the English; as such, it was grown, or attempted, throughout the colonies. But in the northeast yields were low, especially compared to corn, and pests and diseases were always a problem; already by 1800, wheat cultivation was on the decline, replaced by cornmeal as the staple, even for breads. The Ballards still grew wheat, and bought it, and Martha often baked wheat-flour ("Flower") bread, but that may reflect their status as millers with access to grain. Corn occupies a far more prominent place in the diaries, both as a garden crop and as a pantry staple.

But what did Martha Ballard do with the corn and cornmeal, which was purchased by the bushelful when their own supplies ran low? Can we assume it was an ingredient in the Brown Bread she baked so often? Lydia Child's recipe for Brown Bread, published a few decades later, calls for half Indian and half rye, though some, she says, prefer one-third Indian and two-thirds rye.[6] Did Martha also make Indian pudding with her Indian meal? Amelia Simmons gives us three recipes for this—a rich one with eggs, raisins, butter, and sugar; another with molasses and spice; and finally one that is simply Indian meal steamed in a quart of sweetened milk. As for Johnny cake, that nearly archetypal American cornmeal product, there's not a mention of it in the diaries, although Martha does make herself Hasty Pudding once when she feels unwell, and Hasty Pudding, Mrs. Child reminds us, is best made with Indian meal.[7]

Along with apple and mince, pumpkin pies were favorites in the Ballard household. Not a baking day went by, it seems, without pies being put in the oven. One wonders if they were eaten only as a dessert at the end of the meal or if perhaps they were sometimes a main course for supper, with a piece of cheese on the side—as they still were in old-fashioned homes in my Maine childhood. Miss Simmons's pumpkin recipes are listed under puddings, but she is really talking pies since the "pudding" is baked in a crust—and very familiar pies, too: the combination of pureed pumpkin with cream, eggs, molasses, allspice and ginger would happily grace a Thanksgiving table to this day.

(Incidentally, although Christmas is mentioned but three times in twenty-seven years and always en passant, without any sense of feasting, Thanksgiving is always noted in Martha Ballard's diaries, sometimes very simply: "It is Thanksgiving day." The holiday is invariably marked

by a gathering at the meeting house, and it was often the occasion for a family feast as well. On December 1, 1803: "We roasted a goos, boil[d] Beef, Pork and fowls for Diner." And on November 30, 1809, when Ephraim and Martha apparently dined alone: "My Child[n] Sent us in pies."

Many of the staple, standard vegetables and fruits mentioned in *American Cookery* would have been as familiar to any continental European cook of the day as they are to modern Americans: seven kinds of green peas, six kinds of kidney beans, broad beans (listed as Windsor beans or horse beans) and chickpeas ("calivanse" or garbanzos), asparagus, cauliflower, carrots and parsnips, potatoes, onions, beets, cucumbers, lettuces and cabbages, radishes, artichokes (meaning Jerusalem artichokes, an American native), horseradish, watermelons and muskmelons, grapes, currants, pears and apples. "Garlicks" are mentioned but, Simmons says, though they are much used by the French, they are "better adapted to the uses of medicine than cookery."

At one time or another, Martha grew most of the vegetables described by Simmons. But she also grew peppers (possibly only for medicinal use—she says they are an antidote to colic) and garlic (for cooking or medicine—probably both), and she mentions plums, quinces, gooseberries, damsons, and cherries, whether her own or from the orchards of her neighbors. Rhubarb was another familiar fruit that grew well in this northern climate, though it too may have been more for medicinal than for culinary purposes. And twentieth-first-century gourmets who claim credit for "discovering" new varieties should note that Martha mentions blue potatoes and both purple and sweet corn flourishing in her garden. Because she was a midwife, which meant that she also served as something of a paramedic, particularly for the women of her community, Mrs. Ballard grew a great variety of medicinal herbs, some of which may also have been used in cooking—she planted coriander, anise, mustard, and camomile, and several times speaks of harvesting saffron or providing it as a medicine.[8]

Baking was a regular activity in the Ballard household, often accompanied by brewing, since similar yeasts were used for both bread and beer. Mrs. Ballard's oven was probably built, like most New England ovens, into the brick wall of the fireplace. If the fireplace was located on an outside house wall, the oven could be accessible from both inside and outside the house in order to make baking day more comfortable during the hot summer months. Even the humblest European-American home had a hearth of some sort—it would not have been considered a home otherwise—but not every home had a bake oven. Many of Martha's neighbor's—Mrs. Forbes, Mrs. Savage, Mrs. Wil-

liams, and Mrs. Vose—baked in her oven from time to time, exchanging the use of the oven for other goods and services, and Martha earned cash money one summer when she baked for a neighbor, Captain James Purrinton. (That was in 1803, several years before he shocked the little frontier community one night by murdering all his family saving son James, who "fled in his shirt only," as Martha recorded it.)

Cakes of compressed yeast did not become available until the late nineteenth century. Cooks might rely on a type of sourdough, keeping back part of the dough from each baking to start the next batch, but in households where beer was produced, barm, the frothy residue kicked up when brewing, was also used to raise bread. There were other nostrums made with hops or potatoes or both that would entice the wild yeasts drifting on the air. (One such combination required that potatoes be boiled and strained and their water reboiled and used to steep dried hop flowers. Then the potatoes were mashed and the strained hop liquor poured over. The mixture was thickened with a little flour, salt, and sugar or molasses, then set aside to host wild yeasts and start the process all over again.)

By the time Amelia Simmons's cookbook was published, another form of leavening was coming into general use, one that, as Mary Tolford Wilson has pointed out, was to "revolutionize European cookery as well."[9] Pearlash, a refined form of potash, was added to doughs and batters to lighten them and produce a faster rise—an early indication of the persistent American motif of fast food, food that was quick and easy for busy women to assemble and put on the family table. *American Cookery*, the first cookbook to mention pearlash, recommends it to leaven cookies and gingerbread. A form of potassium carbonate obtained by leaching wood ashes, pearlash or potash was a valuable commodity produced throughout colonial America and exported for use in glass-making, among other industrial purposes. It was also a critical ingredient in soap-making and for bleaching finished cloth, two uses that were familiar to Mrs. Ballard. She made soap periodically as a matter of course, soap being vital in all aspects of home and personal maintenance. And as a weaver, she was adept at whitening her fabric by soaking it in a potash solution. It would be false to conclude from this that, knowing the uses of potash, she "must have" used it in baking too, but the mention of pearlash in Simmons's cookbook means it is not without possibility in Martha Ballard's kitchen as well.

Mrs. Ballard was almost single-handedly responsible for her vegetable gardens, a responsibility that seems only to have increased as she grew older. It was Martha who cleared the ground in spring, Martha who pulled the winter banking away from the warm east side of the

house to prepare the soil for the first little seeds to go in, Martha who planted potatoes, sowed seed, transplanted cabbage "stumps" (plants that had been wintered over in the cellar and set out in early spring to provide fresh greens and seed for the succeeding year's crop), Martha who saved seed and even sold seed to other gardeners. And of course Martha was responsible for the harvest and for putting it by, pickling it, salting it, drying it, to provide for the long months of winter. Ever the frugal housewife, she speaks in one entry of making vinegar from pumpkin parings.

Day by day, in the month of May 1809, here is what Martha did in her garden: set turnips and cabbage stumps; planted cucumbers and three kinds of squash; again, planted squash and cucumbers; prepared a bed and planted more squash seeds; again, planted squash, also cucumbers, muskmelons, and watermelons; planted "long" squash; dug holes and planted three quince trees; planted two more quince trees and an apple tree; planted potatoes; set out lettuce plants and strawberries (the squash and cucumbers planted on May 15 were already up a week later, she noted); sowed "string peas"; planted "crambury," brown, and hundred-to-one beans; set out—that is, transplanted—squash plants; again, set out squash plants and cucumbers. Mr. Ballard helped with the digging and set the poles for Martha's hop plants, whose flowers were a source of yeast for brewing and baking, but Martha did everything else. While doing so in that month of May she also tended a sick neighbor, delivered four babies (including one of her own granddaughters), brewed ale, baked bread, boiled soap, ironed, and did the normal run of housework. That year she was seventy-four years old.

Ulrich, Martha's biographer, calls attention to "the intricate horticulture that belonged to women, the intense labor of cultivation and preservation that allowed one season to stretch almost to another."[10] In this day and age, when we have lost, suppressed, and abandoned so many of the skills of our past, we would do well to remember the importance of gardening, especially in women's lives and in reckoning women's sense of their own worth and worthiness as providers rather than mere consumers. Not only do we not cook much anymore, we no longer know much of anything about growing our own food. Put to the test, most of us would fail. Yet the good food that we know was so prevalent in America until perhaps the middle of the previous century was the product of more than just skilled hands in the kitchen. It was the outcome of skill, patience, care, and attention paid in the garden too.

Martha's skill and diligence in the garden and the kitchen meant that the Ballards were never without food on the table, as the epigraph to

this essay indicates. Sometimes it was plain food, but there is only one indication in the diary that it was ever without abundance. That was late in April 1785, when the river had remained frozen far later in the season than normal: "A Great Cry for provision. no Vesils arived yet. ye ice run this Day," she writes, reflecting the community's dependence on river traffic to maintain supplies.

We don't often know the details of what Martha Ballard put on her table; there are no recipes in the diary, not even the kind of notes about seasoning or cooking time that can help a skilled cook reconstruct a recipe, despite the many notations about cooking and sharing food and the extra mouths at the table, guests who came for a meal or to spend a few days. Was Martha a good cook? Did friends and family look forward to her table, to a chicken pie like the one, rich with butter and gravy, described by Amelia Simmons, followed by a custard of eggs and cream, warm from the oven and fragrant with nutmeg and cinnamon? Alas, we'll never know because not once does she provide us with anything like a reference to cooking procedures, a suggestion of flavoring, let alone a recipe. Yet it's impossible to read Martha Ballard's diaries without coming away with a sense of the importance of food in women's lives—its importance in establishing and strengthening bonds within the community and at the same time in giving recognized worth and dignity to the lives of women, not just in frontier communities but throughout the young republic.

Notes

1. *The Diary of Martha Ballard, 1785–1812*, ed. Robert R. McCausland and Cynthia MacAlman McCausland (Rockport, ME: Picton Press, 1992); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale* (New York, 1990).

2. In 1797, north Hallowell, where all the Ballard homes were located, broke away to become Augusta, now the state capital.

3. Diary, November 15, 1795, discussed in Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, 209.

4. James Henretta and Gregory Nobles, *Evolution and Revolution: American Society, 1600–1820* (Lexington, MA, 1987) (quoted in Harvey J. Graff, *Conflicting Paths: Growing Up in America* [Cambridge, 1995]), speak of the early nineteenth century as precisely a time of "the appearance of a recognizable experience of adolescence" along with the development of age-related peer groups and peer culture. The reasons, too complex to go into here, are discussed in Graff, 26 et seq.

5. Amelia Simmons, *American Cookery*, facsimile of the first 1796 edition published as *The First American Cookbook* (Oxford University Press, 1958; rpt. New York: Dover, 1984), with a very useful introductory essay by Mary Tolford Wilson.

6. Lydia Maria Child, *The American Frugal Housewife*, 12th ed. (1832); facsimile (Cambridge: Applewood Books, n.d.), 76–77.

7. Simmons, *American Cookery*, 26; Child, *American Frugal Housewife*, 65. Indian

pudding was so called *not* because it was an Indian recipe, but because the main ingredient was Indian meal, or cornmeal.

8. I should call attention to another Maine herbalist, nearly a century later, Almira Todd of Dunnet's Landing, so beautifully described by Sarah Orne Jewett in her story "The Country of the Pointed Firs," published in 1896.

9. Wilson, in Simmons, *American Cookery*, xiii.

10. Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, 324.

Cooking to Survive: The Careers of Alice Foote MacDougall and Cleora Butler

Barbara Haber

What could these two women possibly have in common—Alice Foote MacDougall, a high-born New Yorker who opened a chain of popular Manhattan restaurants in the 1920s and '30s, and Cleora Butler, a Black cook from Oklahoma who mostly worked for others during the same period and for another fifty years? As different as they were in class and race and regional origin, they were yet representative of a number of American women who called upon their skills in cooking and selling food to support themselves and their families, and who won some measure of success and fame for their efforts. Both wrote autobiographical works that tell their stories—Alice Foote MacDougall, *The Autobiography of a Business Woman* (1928), and Cleora Butler, *Cleora's Kitchens: The Memoir of a Cook & Eight Decades of Great American Food* (1985). The lives of such women are only now being claimed by scholars and other serious writers, but for a while their stories were the stuff of popular culture—and especially of romantic novels and movies that created distorted and often demeaning images of women who made careers in food.

Perhaps the best-known fictionalization of such women's lives was one that appeared during the Depression and was actually inspired by the life and career of Alice Foote MacDougall. This was Fanny Hurst's *Imitation of Life* (1933), about the struggles of two widowed mothers, one a white business neophyte who opens an Atlantic City diner, the other an African American cook she befriends and whose recipes she uses to start an international chain of home-style waffle shops. The book was twice made into a movie, first in 1934 with Claudette Colbert as the white entrepreneur whose restaurants make her a multimillionaire and Louise Beavers as her undemanding Black partner who is content to draw a modest salary and supply an Aunt-Jemima image for the company. The same characters and plot reappeared in a 1959 remake

of the movie, except that the successful waffle-shop magnate was transformed into a famous actress played by Lana Turner. (Evidently the food business was not considered glamorous enough for a star like Turner, whose coifed hair and elegant wardrobe would never have held up in a restaurant kitchen.)

Both Hurst's book and the Hollywood weepers it spawned include a subplot that contrasts the privileged life experienced by the daughter of the wealthy white heroine and the misery felt by the African American woman's light-skinned daughter who tries in vain to pass for white. Nor does money bring much happiness to the main characters in either the novel or movie versions of *Imitation of Life*. If anything, their stories send out a depressing message about women's lives that permeated popular American fiction and films in the first half of the twentieth century. Simply stated, the message was that women who pursue careers outside of the home can rarely if ever find love and fulfillment, and that those who do must first expect to suffer loneliness and despair. Hurst's successful businesswoman never remarries—a man she finally falls in love with winds up engaged to her daughter—and the African American mother and daughter in the novel experience more than their share of sorrow and regret. With these two characters, the author evidently wanted to condemn racism and discrimination in America, showing how hard it was for Black women to overcome their color and become more than faithful mammies, maids, and cooks. Yet so offensive did the poet Langston Hughes find the book's portrayal of African Americans that he wrote a dramatic parody of the novel entitled "Limitations of Life."[1]

Such criticism notwithstanding, popular culture of the period steadily perpetuated images of unhappy career women who can't hold on to their men and long-suffering but cheerful Black servant women who "know their place" and never aspire to more. These were stereotypes that would stop showing up in movies and television only in the aftermath of the civil rights and women's rights movements in the 1960s and 1970s. By that time, Louise Beavers had made a lifelong profession of playing comical African American domestics in well over a hundred movies. (One of her last but best-known enactments of the racial caricature came in the early 1950s, when she played the title character, a family cook, in the TV sitcom *Beulah*.) Joan Crawford had similarly become typecast as a dissatisfied female careerist in a number of movies, most notably in *Mildred Pierce* (1945), where she played another rich but unhappy restaurant-chain owner, this one burdened with a ne'er-do-well, spendthrift boyfriend and a hopelessly spoiled daughter.

These racial and sexual stereotypes were almost certainly a reaction

to the threat that strong, independent, and successful women posed at the time to the sensitivities of men, if not also to women who were committed to marriage and domesticity. For the fact is that well before the Depression and certainly during hard times in the thirties and early forties, numbers of enterprising American women were striking out on their own to support themselves and their children when they could no longer count on men to be sole breadwinners. And some of these women, Black and white, were achieving success and some measure of personal fulfillment in their work, a few even becoming rich or famous or both by trading on their cooking skills or competing in the male-dominated fields of food distribution and restaurant ownership.

This was the case with Alice Foote MacDougall. By the time she became the model for Fanny Hurst's successful restaurant franchiser, MacDougall was already a minor national celebrity whose story was widely publicized during the 1920s.[2] In *The Autobiography of a Business Woman* MacDougall described how she was born into a wealthy New York family and later married a promising coffee wholesaler, but was left a widow at forty with no money to speak of and three very young children to support. Her riches-to-rags-to-riches story describes how this upper-class woman who had no work experience and no marketable skills nevertheless managed to create a career for herself in a segment of the New York commercial world that no other woman had heretofore dared to enter. MacDougall began by succeeding where her husband had failed, in the male-dominated wholesale coffee business, and then went on to establish popular coffeeshops in the city and still bigger, more ambitious restaurants that were known as much for their exotic European ambiance as for their food.

Until recently, the achievements of African American cooks like Cleora Butler were lost to history, leaving only racist images that found their way into cookbooks as well as novels and movies. Typical of the condescension that reduced Black women cooks to anonymity was a foreword to Alice Foote MacDougall's first cookbook, *Coffee and Waffles* (1926), by Charles Hanson Towne. "The old Southern mammies who were unable to write down their priceless recipes had an almost divine intuition concerning the dishes they concocted," wrote Towne. "Through their own kind they passed their good things on to us; but they were inarticulate as to how they accomplished those menus which were fit for the banquets of Lucullus."[3] Such sentiments echoed in countless southern cookbooks that likewise conjured up nostalgic images of bandana-headed African American kitchen workers but never named a single Black cook and often never conceded that such women created the recipes contained in the cookbooks. "Publicly I acknowl-

edge an everlasting debt," wrote John Fox, Jr., in his introduction to *The Blue Grass Cookbook* (1904), "and to the turbaned mistress of the Kentucky kitchen gratefully this Southerner takes off his hat." But neither Fox nor the recipe compiler, Minnie C. Fox, quite made it clear that many of the recipes were created by the "turbaned mistresses" and not the named white contributors to the cookbook.[4] The same is true of Celestine Eustis's *Cooking in Old Creole Days* (1903), whose introduction by S. Weir Mitchell also invokes the familiar stereotype of the African American cook: "a fat woman of middle age, with a gay bandana kerchief about her head—proud of her art, somewhat despotic, and usually known as Aunty."[5]

Even when cookbooks began to credit African American women as originators of their recipes, white compilers rarely failed to mention how hard it was to extract precise directions from Black contributors when their approach to cooking seemed so innate and unscientific. In *200 Years of Charleston Cooking* (1930), editor Lettie Gay exemplified this tendency to belittle African American cooks as inarticulate primitives, women who felt their way through a recipe and would hardly know what to do in a modern kitchen.

> The difficulty in getting a Charleston recipe, we found, is not always due alone to the unwillingness of the cook to part with her secret. Her cooking instinct knows no rules, no measures. She is far more likely to conjure her oven than to use a heat control device. She wouldn't know what to do with a thermometer, but by hunches she knows when to take a boiling syrup off the stove. To translate hunches, a fine mixture of superstitions and a real knowledge of cookery, into intelligible recipes is no easy task. . . .[6]

It is only within the last twenty years or so that cookbooks have finally been compiled by articulate Black women like Cleora Butler. More than supplying recipes, Butler rescued African American cooks from anonymity and demeaning stereotypes when she told her story and that of her family in *Cleora's Kitchens*. For generations, Butler and her mother, Maggie Thomas, gained a reputation for their skills by working for wealthy white families in oil-rich Oklahoma, where they regarded themselves and were regarded as respected paid professionals, no matter how close and friendly they became to their employers. Throughout the Southwest, moreover, their cooking became practically legendary among African Americans, so that mother and daughter were regularly called upon to cook for celebrations in their own community and for famous Black entertainers like Cab Calloway and his band whenever they visited the region. Butler also went on to establish her

own successful pastry shop and catering business in the course of a long eventful career that she vividly described in a cookbook that is also an illustrated family history.

Born more than thirty years apart and into radically different social milieus, Alice Foote MacDougall and Cleora Butler nevertheless deserve comparison as determined, self-reliant women who simultaneously embodied and defied the prevailing stereotypes of women who made careers in cooking and food. In spite of her success and the satisfaction she took in her achievements, MacDougall remained true to her "anti-suffrage, anti-feminist proclivities," a self-declared "mid-Victorian" who believed that neither she nor any other woman should have the vote or aspire to be anything but a wife and mother. In making such statements, MacDougall never took into account the many American women who never had the luxury of being fully supported by a protective male or even expected that that would ever be the case. Such a woman was Cleora Butler, who knew from her parents' and grandparents' experience that whether or not she married, she would have to earn a living, and who did so with joy and professional pride for most of her long life. She also found ways to deal with racial discrimination in Oklahoma in the years before the civil rights and women's rights movements began to fight on behalf of all Black women. It was on their own terms and not as part of any militant collective effort that both MacDougall and Butler found ways to survive and succeed, overcoming obstacles they chronically faced on account of their race or sex or the economic conditions of their day.

The frontispiece for *Alice Foote MacDougall's Cook Book* (1935) is a photograph of the author as a dowager sitting primly in her Victorian living room where she is surrounded by an elaborate silver tea setting and platters of delicate cookies and scones. She might have stepped out of an Edith Wharton novel. The photograph perfectly captures this New York socialite long bereft of her birthright of old money and upper-class entitlements but still possessed of hauteur and noblesse. One would never know that at this stage of her life, she was fighting to save her restaurant empire from the ravages of the Depression.

In her autobiography, MacDougall described how she was born for better things in 1867 in the Washington Square home of her great-grandmother, whose husband was a former mayor of New York City. MacDougall's equally well-born father, to whom she was blissfully devoted ("my first and perhaps my only great love"), was a Wall Street financier and bon vivant who regularly stuffed the young girl's purse

with money and took her with him as he fraternized with other members of New York's social elite.

> Papa took great pride in his wine cellar. He was accustomed to having wine at dinner always, not so much for himself as for the many English and French gentlemen who were his constant guests. After our drive, Commodore Vanderbilt, Frank Work, Charles Lanier, Mr. Harbeck, or some other gentlemen would return with Papa to our home on Eleventh Street. Then Papa would set out his choicest wines for their delectation—brandy fifty years old, filling the room the moment it was uncorked with a delicious, indescribable aroma, whisky, sherry, port, all choice and very old. Conversation sparkled and the open fire glowed, but not more warmly than did my father as he thus entertained his friends.[7]

MacDougall's father also took his family on his many business trips abroad, where they hobnobbed with prominent Europeans and dined in Old World restaurants whose atmosphere MacDougall would later attempt to duplicate in her Mediterranean-style restaurants, to which she gave names like Firenze and Piazzetta. Her mother, on the other hand, provided a model of good housekeeping that contrasted with her husband's and daughter's impulsiveness but came in handy when Alice MacDougall later took on the mantle of restaurant owner: "You could tell the time of day by what the maid was doing. If Jenny was brushing the fourth step of the front stairs, you could lay your last dollar that it was ten-thirty a.m.; and as sure as it was Thursday night, so did we feast on chicken. Order and method carried to its *n*th degree—a little of a strain for irregular Papa and me, but excellent of the smooth running of the house."[8]

The first stage of the family's social decline began when her father's overconfidence somehow caused him to fall from financial grace.

> The wolf came to our highly respectable door, and Papa went from one mad venture to another in the get-rich-quick hope, only to be baffled, beaten at every turn. And I, his constant companion, shared this misfortune in the blind, uncomprehending way of a young girl, suffering the tortures of a profound sorrow over the incomprehensible trouble of my darling father. Night after night I lay awake, weeping and worrying, unable fully to understand, magnifying the danger, powerless to help, impotent to avert the approaching catastrophe.[9]

Worse was to come when her husband, Allan MacDougall, a handsome and successful New York coffee broker fourteen years her senior, also suffered failure that his wife felt was caused by some "inherent

weakness of his nature" but which looks from her description like clinical depression. "No longer was there the smile, the alert address toward the duties of life—rather a slinking, pathetic fear and a slow relinquishment, not alone of responsibility, but of all happiness and joy."[10] As with her father's downfall, Alice MacDougall vividly describes her all but overwhelming feelings of fear and desperation, including a momentary impulse toward suicide, but discreetly forbears to tell how her husband died save for saying that he left her badly in debt with three young children. Only elsewhere do we learn that he succumbed to throat cancer in 1907.

Throughout her *Autobiography*, self-pity alternates with self-congratulation, as when MacDougall describes her reasons not to seek employment as a secretary or retail sales clerk but to start her own business, using what little she already knew about the coffee business from her husband's career.

> I was forty, and the years had taken their toll. Hysteria and insomnia racked me day and night. I had no business training or business knowledge of any kind. My entire capital was $38. My expenses were $250 a month. My assets were three little children.
>
> Why, then, did I choose business instead of a salaried position?
>
> I chose coffee because it was a clean and self-respecting business. No friend, however much he might love me, would buy or drink bad coffee. Therefore I would be free of the stigma of charity.[11]

MacDougall's husband and his family had been in the coffee business as jobbers, dealing in green coffee only. However, she remembered that shortly after her engagement, Allan MacDougall had roasted small amounts of rich aromatic South and Central American coffees whose taste contrasted favorably with the standard Java-and-Mocha mix that was then being sold by New York's major wholesale grocers. It was from her husband's superior blend that MacDougall began her own coffee supply business.

> It was so rich and delicious in flavor, so economical and satisfying, that even before we were married I begged Allan to go into this branch of the business and distribute roasted coffee direct to the consumer. He laughed at the idea, but the conviction remained that there here was a means of livelihood. When necessity demanded some activity on my part, I decided upon the roasted-coffee business.[12]

In November 1907, Alice MacDougall rented a small, dark room that months earlier had been offered to her husband on Front Street, then the commercial center of the city. Here she learned to taste and test

coffee and master the rudiments of doing business among merchants who resented her presence and fully expected her to fail. "There was much antagonism to me on the Street," she recalled: "I was a dreadfully ill woman, and the men gave me 'six months.' At the end of that time they expected me to disappear as unexpectedly as I had arrived, and one can scarcely blame them."[13] In spite of these dread predictions, MacDougall managed to get credit, buy and blend her coffee, and distribute five hundred letters advertising her new enterprise to friends and relatives. Then, when orders came, she ground the coffee by hand and delivered it herself in ten- and twenty-pound packages, sometimes slogging through rain and snow, and occasionally entering through the back doors and basements of homes that formerly welcomed her as a social equal.

Though she took pride in not asking for help beyond buying her wares, MacDougall got some timely financial assistance from one of her father's friends, a prominent banker who early on in her struggle gave her a thousand-dollar bill that she used to pay her outstanding debts. More often than not, however, MacDougall was served by little more than her indomitable will and self-confidence, as when, knowing nothing about cocoa, she took on a large order of both coffee and cocoa from the director of fresh-air camps run by a New York newspaper for poor urban children.

> From that day and for many after, cocoa salesmen led a weary life and my digestion all but passed away, for I tasted cocoa sweet and cocoa bitter; cocoa fair and cocoa most indubitably foul; cocoa made with xxxx sugar, and cocoa less proud, sweetened with God knows what. But by June large drums of cocoa, as well as bags of coffee, went to the Fresh Air Fund, and I had the satisfaction of knowing that I had lowered the price, bettered the quality, and supplied the little children of the New York slums with a pure and helpful drink.[14]

MacDougall not only succeeded in handling a growing mail-order business, but she took risks as a female commercial traveler and successfully sold her coffee to a variety of customers at some distance from New York City, including hospitals, hotels, clubs, and colleges in the New England area. That she often had better luck at men's colleges like Williams than Smith College and Bryn Mawr only confirmed MacDougall's contempt for the idea of female emancipation and the suffrage and feminist movements of her day. She blamed her rejection by female buyers at the women's colleges on their susceptibility to the flattery of salesmen and their timidity in purchasing from an untried vendor of their own sex: "my admiration of college intellect outside of

scholastic matters had a severe blow, and my opinion concerning women in general and a certain type of college woman in particular was strengthened."[15]

MacDougall subsequently turned her anti-suffrage convictions to her own account by gaining a reputation as a "conservative among women" among her customers, most of whom she knew to be similarly inclined. At the same time, she decided to cash in on the sentiments surrounding the movement to give women the vote, and did so by the simple expedient of changing her company's name from "the obscure A. F. MacDougall" to "the glory of Alice Foote MacDougall." Subsequently, she got an order for ten pounds of coffee from a suffragist leader and was still happier to find that "there were many kindly souls, men and women, who, not occupied by big reforms, could assist a woman struggling for another kind of independence, and with the establishment of my identity as a woman the business leaped forward to definite success."[16] Still later, in 1920, MacDougall was able to appeal to men and women equally when she changed the name of her company to Alice Foote MacDougall and Sons, Inc. By that time she had recruited her two sons, Allan and Donald, to serve as president and vice president respectively, and made herself chairman and treasurer of the company.

The year before, MacDougall had opened what would become the first of her uptown restaurants, the Little Coffee Shop in Grand Central Station, as a place to advertise and sell her company's products, which by then included cocoa and tea as well as her mainstay, coffee. The shop got off to a slow start until customers asked to taste her coffee and MacDougall set up tables and chairs for the purpose, turning the place into a small bistro. She also decorated the shop with brasses and blue-white china that she also began to sell, along with attractive pottery, glassware, leather gifts, and basket ware that she imported at low cost from postwar Europe. In addition, she made Wednesdays her "at home" days when she served customers directly, creating a friendly informal atmosphere. The turning point for the success of the shop and for MacDougall's career as a restaurateur came on a bleak, winter day in 1921 when she decided to make and offer free hot waffles to busy commuters. The story is told in several places but most characteristically in *Alice Foote MacDougall's Cook Book*:

> That funny first bowl of batter! Never can I forget my erratic impulse and its surprising result. Remembering the misery of some of my early days when, totally unprepared for storm, I tramped through a raging blizzard and spent the day wet and chilly as a result,

> or when, poverty-stricken, I made my own lunch of a hearty glass of cold water, I decided on a blizzardy day one February to practice a little bit of the Golden Rule and do as I had *not* been done by. The waffle iron came by taxi to the Little Coffee Shop in the Grand Central. The batter was made and cooked—and the waffles *given* away that cold wintry day. Entirely unpremeditated was the impulse. Startling was the result. A bowl of batter in a place 12 feet by 16 feet in February. 1921—six large Restaurants and a business amounting to about $2,000,000 in February, 1927![17]

It is hard to tell from her account whether her decision to make and give away waffles was truly a spontaneous act of charity and good will or a shrewd marketing idea that was certain to win new customers for her coffee. Either way, the waffles worked, for she claims that soon her establishment was serving coffee and waffles every day and "turning people away by carloads."

The following year, the father-in-law of one of her sons provided a large loan that allowed the company to open a second and even more successful coffeeshop a block from Grand Central. Here, the necessity of installing a ventilating system gave rise to another marketing ploy and the expansion of the new shop's menu.

> When we opened Forty-third Street we had a pantry but no kitchen, for we intended to serve nothing but coffee and waffles, and these were cooked in front of people's eyes on tables made especially for waffle irons. The ugly hood used to deflect steam and smoke from these tables was quickly turned into what we called a waffle house—a latticed, three-cornered-cabin affair under which a colored maid stood, suggesting the Southern-waffle, colored-mammy, log-cabin idea. Within a short time, however, we expanded our original plan of serving merely waffles and coffee, adding first sandwiches and then all of the delicious foods we could think of. In March, four months after our opening, we served eight thousand people with three full meals a day, and by August 1923 we took on more space, doubling our seating capacity less than a year after opening.[18]

It is easy to see from this passage where Fanny Hurst found the prototype for her waffle-shop franchiser in *Imitation of Life*. MacDougall's own empire building began in earnest in 1923 not long after she returned from a recuperative visit to Italy, where she was inspired to change the décor of her southern-style coffeehouse on Forty-third, turning it into a indoor replica of Mediterranean courtyards and naming it The Cortile. Two more Italianate establishments followed in the same part of the city, called The Piazzetta and Firenze, and, finally,

there came the Sevillia, a Spanish-motif restaurant with Moorish trappings and waitresses wearing mantillas and crimson Iberian costumes. Some two thousand customers were served the Saturday after the opening of this largest of the Alice Foote MacDougall Restaurants, which featured an Alhambra Room, an Early Renaissance Room, and a Wine Shop when Prohibition ended in 1933.

The ambiance of her restaurants notwithstanding, their menu remained as American as the maple syrup that adorned the tables. Hardly a recipe contained in either of her cookbooks includes anything close to Italian and Spanish cuisine. Instead, she offers directions for making canapés with peanut butter and chopped bacon, black bean soup, corn chowder, chicken fricassee, hamloaf, and for dessert such standbys as gingerbread, pineapple upside down cake, and tapioca pudding. As much as their menu, it was the atmosphere of MacDougall's eating places that appealed to her mostly female clientele, who were drawn to the ambience of far-off places while all the while stuck in the middle-class neighborhoods of Greater New York.

Among the ladies' luncheon set, MacDougall became a New York icon whose personal appearances at her restaurants were greeted with the same expressions of excitement and appreciation received nowadays by celebrity chefs. But beyond making waffles, her cooking skills were practically nil, as the former socialite was almost proud to admit. "Now I am not a cook," she declared in *Coffee and Waffles* (1926), anticipating former President Nixon's denial of criminality: "I am first of all a mother. When I became one I could make delicious salted almonds. That was all."[19] In *Alice Foote MacDougall's Cook Book*, the author's inability to bake is likewise seen as a badge of honor: "No one in my family can ever boast of the cakes, or bread, or pie, that 'Mother made' as I have never made any. Love of my family, if nothing else, would prevent me." In the same spirit, after a visit to Italy and its famous pastry shops, MacDougall further admitted that where cooking was concerned she had little knowledge or curiosity:

> Glad would I be if I could explain to you the process by which this or that dolce is made. By what combination of wine and water; of flour and sugar; of essences and seasoning the wonderful result is obtained, but since my days in Italy have been fully occupied with other interests, I must content myself with those dainties of home-bred type that have long satisfied a family each of whom has, as they say, "a sweet tooth."[20]

In lieu of cooking and baking expertise, MacDougall had a feeling for what kind of food her customers felt most comfortable with and

how to serve it attractively in a romantic atmosphere that blended European elegance and American cleanliness and efficiency. She knew instinctively that running restaurants had as much to do with show business as with fine cooking and proper management. In 1929, MacDougall demonstrated that she had learned much about the food service business when she published *The Secret of Successful Restaurants*, a book addressed to women but offering any prospective restaurateur a practical and detailed approach to every aspect of opening and operating a profitable restaurant. MacDougall's guide even includes an appendix that recalls her mother's punctilious housekeeping by providing the hour-by-hour schedules she set for her kitchen managers, service managers, and hostesses.

Even as MacDougall offered to show women the way to duplicate her success, she characteristically advised them to think twice about going into the business, suggesting that such an ambition can be confused in women's minds with a more normal desire for homemaking. At the same time, at the peak of her own success, she claimed to have a special sympathy for the conflicting claims of careerism and domesticity that she saw in women of her time and no doubt in herself. And just as characteristically, she assumed that all women had the luxury of making such a choice.

Unfortunately for MacDougall, her attempt to reach that ineffable goal that she herself seemed to be striving for as a woman was curtailed by the Wall Street Crash that took place the same year *The Secret of Successful Restaurants* was published. What caused the collapse of her restaurant enterprise was not only the general economic downturn but a long term million-dollar lease she had signed for her last and largest restaurant, the Sevillia. The catastrophic effects of this business decision are alluded to at the very end of *Alice Foote MacDougall's Cook Book*.

> For twenty and more years, through sheer necessity, I have battled in the arena of so-called business life. By God's mercy, I met with a certain success. Then came crushing disaster, and now once again I am climbing that steep and arduous business ladder, step by step, rung by rung. It's a big fight. It's full of zest. But it is cruel. Each day I envy that woman whose "place is in the home." That is why, perhaps, toward the end of a strenuous life, I am offering to other women A Cook Book [*sic*].[21]

By the time, she wrote these words, her restaurants had gone into receivership, and MacDougall, at the age of sixty-five, was obliged to resume personal control. Within four months, she managed to increase business by 50 percent and was able to repurchase her first two

restaurants, the Little Coffee Shop and the Cortile, but the Alice Foote MacDougall Restaurants finally succumbed to the Depression, and MacDougall herself was left to be supported by her older son, Allan, who abandoned the coffee business and became a buyer of wines and spirits for National Distillers.

Despite her frequent proclamations that she would have preferred a life of elegant leisure as the wife of a wealthy man, someone like her father, she took pardonable pride in building her business and gave others hard-won good advice about how to run their own restaurant operations. As early as the 1920s, she had the prescience to see what changes were being wrought in national dining habits and what new roles restaurants were beginning to play in the lives of busy Americans in the cities and suburbs, observing that restaurants were taking their places as substitutes for the home as places of leisurely gatherings. Her ability to supply a feeling of intimacy in well-run eating places where American home cooking could be mixed with a sense of the foreign was the key to her brief success and considerable personal celebrity as an American businesswoman.

To the modern reader, Alice MacDougall often comes across in her floridly written books as supercilious and self-dramatizing, sometimes even somewhat bigoted and prejudiced against her own sex. In the end, however, she deserves credit for her courage, hard work, and creativity in building a business that supported her family and hundreds of employees whom she evidently treated well and fairly even though her strict rules and regimented restaurants must have been demanding.

Cleora Butler could also lay claim to a family tradition in food, one in which the women gained a measure of fame for their cooking, unlike earlier generations of Black cooks who remain mostly anonymous. Butler came from an African American heritage that included former slaves who became landowners first in Texas and later in Oklahoma. Before the Civil War, her great-grandmother, Lucy Ann Manning, served for many years as a house cook on a large plantation near Waco, Texas, where she and her husband Buck had migrated with their owner from Mississippi. Following emancipation, her great-grandfather was given a tract of land by his former owner and in turn gave fifty acres to each of his seven children. (Only parenthetically does Cleora Butler mention that Buck Manning's former owner was also his father, suggesting how common was the practice of plantation owners begetting illegitimate children by their household slaves.) Besides working his land, Cleora Butler's grandfather, Allen Manning, had to put to use some of the kitchen skills he had learned from his mother while his wife attended to

their eleven children, the oldest of whom, Mary Magdalena or Maggie, would become Butler's mother. "It was natural that, as the oldest, Maggie was required to assist in the Manning kitchen and, in time, to take full responsibility for it," her daughter observed. "Maggie was quick in developing the talent that established her as one of the finest cooks in northeast Oklahoma."[22]

While cooking for so many may have added to her mother's skills, Butler believed that it may have come as a relief for Maggie to accept the proposal of a local farmhand, Joseph Thomas, though in fact Allen Manning would not give up his daughter (and her cooking) for another five years. The couple's marriage took place in 1898, at which time they moved into a three-room house provided by Thomas's employers, a young Waco doctor and his new wife, and Maggie Thomas began doing the cooking for the couple. "The closeness in age of Joe and Maggie to their employers soon led to a friendship that transcended the normal employer/farmhand relations of the day," Butler remarked. In fact, her mother and the doctor's wife exchanged cooking and sewing skills, so that Maggie Thomas also became a fine seamstress and was able to pass this additional talent on to her daughter.

Cleora Thomas was born in 1901 into a new era when children of her race in America had no personal recollection of slavery and when the newly opened Indian Territory held promise for African Americans of free land and further independence in totally Black townships. The young girl left Texas with a large wagon train that included her parents, her widowed grandfather and his new wife and remaining children, sisters and brothers of her father, and a number of other farmhands, all hopeful of opportunities in what would soon become the state of Oklahoma. "Dad was confident," she recalled, "as was Mother, who knew her cooking and sewing skills would always be on hand if outside income was needed."[23]

Most of the migrators settled in Muskogee where Maggie Thomas did in fact make dresses and other garments for wealthy families in the area. However, she stubbornly refused to turn the money she earned from her sewing into a family coffer presided over by her father, with the result that the Thomases built and lived in their own house. There at the age of five and a half, Cleora Thomas made her first attempt at cooking dinner from leftover slices of pork liver while her mother was giving birth to a baby brother. Later, at ten, the young girl successfully baked her first batch of biscuits using a new baking powder and cookbook supplied by Calumet, and two years later she began a series of kitchen forays inspired by witnessing her mother's success in baking and selling cakes.

> When I was twelve, the time spent in the kitchen at my mother's side was the most precious to me. I watched as she magically mixed liquids and powders, added dashes of pepper and salt (plus assorted and crumbled leaves that I learned were called spices), placed them inside or atop the stove and produced marvelous concoctions that invariably tasted yummy. The apparent ease with which she cooked convinced me that turning out cookies and cakes must be a pushover.[24]

Her mother's inspiration notwithstanding, the child's first attempt at baking a cake was judged by her brothers to be a failure and was buried in the back yard in what she would call "the dough patch," a graveyard for failed experiments that subsequently included "the molasses caper."

> My efforts at blending sorghum molasses and flour to make cookies resulted in a solid sheet of gummy residue. My tasters, Walter and Joey, refused outright to even smell it. So adamant were they that they snitched to my mother about the secret dough patch. Mother was furious. She started out giving me a tongue lashing, but somewhere in the middle of it began to laugh and laughed till she was weak. She told me to stick to making good biscuits and to experiment only when she was there to guide me.[25]

Among the affluent people for whom her parents worked was Harriet Weeks, the sister of Oklahoma's first governor, and the Weeks family generously left their house to Joseph and Maggie Thomas when they left Muskogee. The northeast section of Muskogee in which the Thomases lived had belonged to a Black man before it became the site of mini-farms with livestock in the early 1900s and later a purely residential area. Here Joseph Thomas farmed his own land, took care of the family livestock with his sons, and milked cows for other families in the neighborhood, while his daughter helped her mother perform household tasks that included work in the kitchen and delivery of Maggie Thomas's valued baked goods.

> We were pretty self-sufficient. Dad's work at the Weeks' provided cash for store-bought items and, to help along these lines, Mother baked and sold bread to families in about a five-block area around our house. Starting on Friday evenings and throughout most of Saturday, we'd all pile into the wagon and make deliveries. As we pulled up to each house, my brothers and I would run up to the door, make the delivery, and collect twenty-five cents for each loaf. This, mind you, was when a loaf of bread could be purchased for a nickel in the store.[26]

Maggie Thomas also staged "cook-ins" during the winter months in which she would ask her children what kinds of cookies or desserts they wanted and then see to it that sister and brothers alike were taught how to make the treats properly. "Learning to be self-sufficient, especially in the kitchen, was something Mother insisted upon for all of her children," Cleora Butler recalled "We didn't mind it a bit. After all, it was a family tradition."

Though the young girl also learned from her grandfather, who had a special talent for preparing hog meat and making pork sausages, her special bond was with her mother, whose cooking began to win awards in Oklahoma and caused her to be hired by some of the best hotels in Muskogee.

> My mother was not only my first teacher, but, without reservation, the best. I always marveled at how she turned out so many delicious dishes on a wood-burning stove. Mother mastered things like popovers, cream puffs, all kinds of cakes—from plain pound to angel food—and won blue ribbons at the state fairs. Of course, I used the same kind of stove when I started, but would hesitate to do so today, now that I have become accustomed to the plethora of devices designed to help out in the kitchen. When I use my blender, mixer, or Cuisinart, I think of what a thrill my mother would have gotten using them. Late in life, long after she had established her reputation as an exquisite cook, she did use some of the appliances that became available on a limited basis when she worked as a pastry chef at Sever's hotel in Muskogee and in the same capacity at the Ambassador Tea Room when the family moved to Tulsa in 1925.[27]

Cleora Butler never stopped feeling privileged at having her mother as her teacher: "Throughout my young life, she filled me with confidence and taught me that cooking was a fine art. Foodstuffs were but raw materials—the sculptor's stone, the artist's paint, the musician's instrument. Mastering the art of cooking rested on following the basic directions of a recipe (reading it four or five times if necessary), then improvising where desired. I learned early that 'dumping and stirring' could be hazardous to your results."[28]

At the age of fifteen, the future cook and caterer also received formal instruction in cooking at Muskogee's Manual Training High School, where her class was chosen to prepare a meal for members of the Muskogee Board of Education. The success of the meal insured the job of her young instructor, Lucy Elliot, the sister of a prominent local clothier who was president of the Oklahoma State Negro Business League.

(Years later, when Cleora Butler looked back over her seventy years as a cook, she recalled that the most memorable affair she ever catered was the silver anniversary of her former high school teacher. She recollects that the affection and appreciation she felt for that teacher, and not the menu, was what meant the most.) Upon graduation, Butler left with an affluent friend for Oberlin Junior College but had to quit after her first year when, as it seems, her family could no longer afford the tuition. She was overjoyed when her friend married the son of a well-to-do rancher of Creek Indian and African American heritage but worried about her own future when for a time she wound up cleaning floors at Muskogee's Central High School instead of cooking for a living, as she wanted to do.

In 1923, at the recommendation of an aunt, she found her first job as a cook for a family in Tulsa, which by the mid-1920s had become the social and commercial center of Oklahoma. "It was *the* place to be." Butler recalled. "One black entrepreneur had reportedly moved to Tulsa and opened a bank account with $75,000 *in cash*! Everybody was caught up in the high style of living that was characteristic of the entire nation."[29] Four of her closest friends followed the young woman to the city, and in 1925 her parents also moved to Tulsa, to which her father had been commuting as a cook, he too following the family tradition. Once settled in, Maggie Thomas, who had been coming to the city occasionally and sewing for her daughter's employers, began to work as pastry chef for the newly opened Ambassador Tea Room.

The first sign of the crash to come occurred when the family for which Butler was working had to dismiss her following the failure of a Mexican silver mine in which they invested all their cash reserves. For a time, the young woman freelanced as a caterer, serving at many farewell parties for Tulsans whose fortunes were lost, before she found work with the family of a busy oil worker. In spite of the nation's need for oil, jobs had become scarce in Tulsa and breadlines started to form, but her parents continued to find work and receive support from their daughter and sons, one of whom had begun playing saxophone for the Cab Calloway band. "Times may have been tough," Cleora Butler remembered, "but the Thomas/Manning clan was holding its own."

The collapse of the stock market also caused changes in the way that Tulsa's African Americans entertained themselves.

> Tulsa's black community had felt the effects of the financial crash long before October of 1929. Money had already become scarce on the north side of town, where most blacks lived, and unemployment had been growing since 1927. Still everyone loved parties and a good

> time as much as they ever did, even though few could afford to throw a bash for even four or six friends. Our way around this was for everyone to bring something. We'd get together and brew our own beer. Then each would bring his or her share of ingredients for the planned menu. It always turned out to be an exciting evening.[30]

Cleora Butler observed that such BYOB parties also became popular even among the wealthier white population. "Their parties were perhaps more grandiose than those we had, but I know they were never more fun."

As their fortunes rose, the oil worker's family for which Butler was working purchased one of the most elegant houses in Tulsa where, by coincidence, her mother had been working for the former owners. Between 1932 and 1940, the younger woman cooked hundreds of meals and prepared or supervised countless parties, including the elaborate reception for a young bride who had married into her employer's family. Cleora Thomas was herself married at the end of this period to George R. Butler, a hotel worker who had been courting her for several years. However, her most vivid memory of this time was the visit of the Cab Calloway orchestra in June 1937, which occurred simultaneously with the World Heavyweight Championship fight in Yankee Stadium between Joe Louis and Max Schmeling, when Louis knocked the German boxer out in the first round. "The blacks of North Tulsa literally danced in the streets," Butler remembered. "This was a most special occasion. We didn't often get a chance to cheer about anything, let alone a hero of our own." Following the radio broadcast of the fight, the victory was celebrated with fried chicken and homemade ice cream by family and friends of the Thomases and Mannings and members of the visiting Calloway band. Nor was this the first time Cleora Butler and her mother cooked for visiting Black musicians. Whenever bands came to town conducted by the likes of Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Jimmy Lunceford, the groups played separately for whites and African Americans and stayed in Black hotels and homes. Butler's saxophonist brother Walter customarily brought Calloway to his parents' home, after which the band leader never stopped raving about the cooking skills of his saxophonist's mother and her daughter.

For a while, Butler's marriage prevented her from working full-time, but the advent of the Second World War created new opportunities:

> In 1942 Tulsa was gearing up for war. There were parties galore, especially beginning when most everyone thought the whole thing would be over in a matter of months if not weeks. When sons and daughters, fathers, uncles and aunts were going away, people said,

> "Let's have a party!," so I did a lot of catering during that period. I've always felt it was a little like returning to the roaring twenties. There were parties all over the place. Parties for departing soldiers and sailors and a lot of parties for no specific reason at all.[31]

In 1944 Cleora Butler again began working for a prominent Tulsa family but left after a few years, this time to take care of her father-in-law, who had developed cancer and required constant care. In the early fifties, apart from occasional catering, her cooking career took a back seat to nursing duties, but she took up another career that had begun a decade before when she experienced racial discrimination at a hat sale in an exclusive downtown Tulsa department store.

> While society in the 1940s had changed to the point where blacks could shop in a few white establishments, it was not usually permitted for one to try on clothing, especially hats and shoes. Occasionally, you might be permitted to try on a hat, but you were given a hand mirror and shown to a back room where "preferred" customers could not see you trying on your selection.
>
> The hat I wanted was exquisite, so despite the horrible treatment, I purchased it. In fact, I bought two, but left the store infuriated and totally resolved never to buy another hat as long as I lived. Because of my continuing passion for hats, however, I found a way out of my problem. Research turned up a millinery correspondence school in Chicago, in which I immediately enrolled.[32]

Butler's solution was typical of her can-do attitude, and in no time she mastered the millinery craft and was able to supply her North Tulsa friends with hats that she could sell for as much as $50 each.

Even after Tulsa department stores began to abandon their pattern of segregation and discrimination, Butler continued her home millinery business, along with occasional catering since cooking and especially baking were always closest to her heart and she was always being called upon to cook for Tulsa's social elite. In the mid-fifties, she also took a job as a stock clerk in a dress shop, where she learned the rudiments of running a business and became friendly with people at every level of Tulsa society. When the store closed in 1961, Cleora Butler decided to start her own business so that in April of the following year, with a loan from the Small Business Administration, she and her husband opened Cleora's Pastry Shop and Catering. Like her millinery enterprise, the idea of a pastry shop had been hatching since the 1940s when she supplemented her family's income by selling small pies for five cents apiece in her father-in-law's billiard parlor. With her mother's help, she had been baking some 150 pies a day in her own kitchen, and later, just

before she opened her shop, a contact from the dress shop resulted in orders for her to bake batches of tarts each week for a lunchroom in South Tulsa. With this experience in production baking, Cleora Butler felt ready to run a pastry shop of her own.

The couple expected that the work would be hard but were not prepared for running a business with limited help. Their work day began at six a.m., and after a full day of making doughnuts, pies, and cakes, they would finally return home at nine p.m.

Take-out chili and hamburgers were added to the shop's bill of fare, and bread soon followed at customers' insistence. Sourdough French bread became a favorite after one customer supplied Butler with the ingredients for making a starter and taught her all she knew about baking the bread. The sourdough recipe proved particularly successful and was especially favored by a customer who bought the bread as part of a weekly ritual:

> One of my North Tulsa friends would come into the shop every Thursday evening, just as our bread for the next day' sale was coming out of the oven, to purchase a loaf of our sourdough bread for the family for whom she worked. Each week she would also buy a second loaf for herself, but before she would let us wrap it, she'd break open the top of the loaf with her fingers. Reaching into her purse, she would withdraw a stick of butter, push it down into the still warm loaf and hand the bread back to us for wrapping. This, she allowed, was her weekly treat, to herself.[33]

At the same time that large orders of food were coming in from work crews building the Turner Turnpike through Oklahoma, the catering side of the business began to expand rapidly with calls from the Tulsa Opera Guild and the Tulsa Philharmonic auxiliary to serve at special parties and brunches. Only when it became obvious that her husband, who suffered from diabetes, could not keep up with the pace did the enterprise close down in 1967 and Butler began to nurse him, as she had his father, until he succumbed to his disease in 1970. After her husband's death, Butler began slowly to rebuild her catering business, serving food first to a local school and church, and eventually remodeling her kitchen to accommodate the increased business that her reputation had attracted over the years in Tulsa and Muskogee. Her best memories of this period, other than the silver anniversary of her old teacher, was the picnic she prepared for the family and friends of the childhood friend she had gone to college with and who had married into a family of successful African American oil industrialists. She took pride in the fact that her friend's husband had served for years as presi-

dent of the Oklahoma NAACP and had drilled the first successful oil well in Africa.

The differences between Alice Foote MacDougall and Cleora Butler go deeper than class and race and regional origin. They have as much to do with the fact that one was a talented businesswoman who almost never cooked or wanted to, and that the other was a talented cook who made cooking her business and her means of self-fulfillment. As much as their memoirs, the recipes they left behind are evidence of their essential approaches to life, the kind of people they were, and the way they connected with others.

"While I had never cooked a meal myself, I taught others to do so," MacDougall proudly claims in *Coffee and Waffles*.[34] For all her trips to Italy, she found garlic to be "insinuating" and declared that "many a happy day in Europe . . . has been ruined by that little vegetable." (Salt and pepper were her favorite seasonings, with paprika and bay leaves making an occasional guest appearance in her dishes.) She does, however, extol the virtues of olive oil, but only in connection with green salads if you don't count her recipe for "Sauce Napolitana," which does contain olive oil, a little garlic, and Parmesan cheese but is Americanized with a cup of tomato catsup.

Concern with the attractiveness of food and the need for frugality during the Depression led MacDougall to offer recipes for canapés that make use of almost any scraps one can find in the refrigerator so long as they are served on bread cut into fancy shapes. At the same time, her first three canapé recipes call for caviar, paté de fois gras, and Roquefort cheese—not quite what one would expect to find in middle-class refrigerators of the day. The contradiction is most apparent in the first chapter of MacDougall's *Cook Book* called "Reflections on Waste but Not Wasted Reflections" where she offers money-saving suggestions for roast beef leftovers—re-warm it, serve it chopped on toast, slice it in a salad—that are salvaged from nothing less than a ten-pound rib roast, first cut! Clearly, MacDougall wants to have it both ways—to show us that she too has had to scrimp and save but also that she still knows her way around haute cuisine and could afford expensive cuts of meat.

In contrast, Cleora Butler saw food as a sensual pleasure and cooking as a way of sharing love with the many people who mattered in her life. She was also able to grow and develop as a cook, so that her account of the eight decades of great American food includes not only traditional regional dishes of the Southwest but stylish dishes of the 1970s and '80s that introduced new ingredients and combinations of food into American kitchens. Her earliest recipes were for dishes she learned from her

mother such as hickory nut cake (with nuts that were gathered on the mountain behind her grandfather's house), burnt sugar ice cream, grated sweet potato pudding, and corn fritters. In later years, she was cooking rice pilaf with pine nuts, buckwheat cakes with chicken livers, tomato-mozzarella salad with red onion and anchovies, jalapeno corn bread, and a macadamia nut chess pie.

When Cleora Butler describes her food memories, she speaks about how dishes tasted and smelled as well as how they looked. She vividly describes the yams she ate in childhood, which oozed syrup as they came from the oven. Her most vivid recollections of food are inevitably tied to family and friends, as when she described the wedding she catered for her childhood friend. "That summer afternoon was sheer intoxication for me," she recalled. "I gave my utmost to the preparation of the baked ham, filet of beef and fried chicken, of course, but the opportunity of putting my talents to use for the children of my old friend gave me a complete sense of fulfillment."[35] Most telling was Butler's willingness to sacrifice her career to the care of the people she loved, inevitably making do with less during critical times.

Alice Foote MacDougall and Cleora Butler not only achieved a measure of local fame but managed also to make some lasting contributions to the world of food and the history of their times. Still worth reading today is *The Secret of Successful Restaurants*, MacDougall's detailed guide to running an efficient and profitable eating place. And even her unsurprising recipe collections tell us much about New York dining in her time, and about the difficulty restaurants had in reconciling fine dining and Depression austerity. Cleora Butler's book likewise preserves an important part of the culinary and cultural heritage of the American Southwest by giving us many African American regional recipes and a unique account of more than a century of Black family life in Texas and Oklahoma. More than anything else, however, their writings recall two remarkable women who managed to make creative, fulfilling lives for themselves in the world of food, although that world represented such different experiences for each of them.

Notes

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22. Cleora Butler, *Cleora's Kitchens; The Memoir of a Cook & Eight Decades of Great American Food* (Tulsa: Council Oak Books, 1985).
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26. Ibid., 29.
27. Ibid., 34.
28. Ibid., 35.
29. Ibid., 40.
30. Ibid., 43.
31. Ibid., 48.
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34. MacDougall, *Coffee and Waffles*, 26.
35. Butler, *Cleora's Kitchens*, 58.

Women under Siege: Leningrad 1941–1942

Darra Goldstein

Who can measure the trauma of differing wartime experiences? Suffering is relative and unquantifiable, and comparisons can seem tasteless, even disrespectful. Yet even if suffering cannot be quantified, human deprivation can be. Starvation is a matter of simple subtraction: Below a certain number of calories per day, the body begins to consume itself, and several universal physiological consequences ensue. First come listlessness and apathy. As the body grows emaciated, the skin assumes an unhealthy pallor and stretches tight against the bones. Often the body becomes bloated, with fingers and toes so swollen that even buttoning a coat is difficult, and walking an ordeal. Gums bleed; the body is covered with open sores that refuse to heal. Certain psychological symptoms are also universal enough to be considered chemical. Starvation tends to reduce us to a primitive, "dehumanized" state in which our only concern is to find food.

The experience of the siege of Leningrad shows that even when facing starvation, people will fight to keep their humanity intact. And though their heroism was not always voluntary, women were the acknowledged saviors of Leningrad. Admittedly these women had a physical advantage over men: their better-insulated bodies enabled them to endure greater privation, at least initially. But something else was at play, which had more to do with nurture than with nature. Women's traditional familial and social roles made the crucial difference in their ability to negotiate through the seemingly endless days of the siege. Their primary impulse to focus first on their families helped them to overcome the forces of inertia, both physical and psychological, during the nine hundred days of extreme deprivation when continuing to live seemed pointless and irredeemably bleak. While it would be erroneous to imply that all women behaved nobly during the siege—numerous cases document the selfish, even savage, behavior of some—women

made sacrifices that often proved life-saving, both for themselves and for others. The very fact of their femaleness arguably helped the women of Leningrad to survive the terrible blockade of the city.

In the United States and Great Britain the preferred wartime attitude of women was an admirable pluckiness coupled with an enthusiastic embrace of innovation: If sugar and eggs are in short supply, we'll still bake our cake, we'll simply use substitutes! This positive ideal presupposes the availability of a certain basic amount of foodstuffs, with which people can afford to be creative. Leningrad women had to be creative beyond measure. Tested by want, they searched their apartments for edibles in the forms of tooth powder, Vaseline, glycerine, cologne, library paste, and wallpaper paste, which they scraped from the walls. They tore books apart and gave their children the glue off the bindings. Hardship demanded innovation, but it was hardly light-hearted. In wartime Britain, butter and eggs may have been scarce, and flour dark and heavy, but people did not starve. Such cookbooks as Ambrose Heath's *Good Food in Wartime* insist that many prewar recipes "by some very slight adaptation to present needs, can still appear with success upon our war-time tables, not quite up to their pre-war form perhaps but certainly more than merely presentable."[1] The British Ministry of Food worked hard to educate housewives in wartime economy, providing information about unfamiliar products like dried egg powder and recipes for belt-tightening meals. Thus the Ministry's Food Facts No. 331 suggests a "Swiss Breakfast," a highly nutritious muesli touted as "a delicious change from porridge."[2] One might argue that Britain's wartime exigencies actually broadened people's palates by introducing them to a wider range of foods once they had to forgo their beloved bacon and eggs.

Though it is a commonplace that the nurturing of the family falls largely to women, the extent to which women will sacrifice their own well-being for their family's has not been fully examined. One wartime study in Britain showed that mothers regularly gave their husbands and children the best food from their own plates,[3] and the women of Leningrad largely did the same. But amid widespread hunger, against the absolute limits of human endurance, such acts of maternal self-sacrifice become something other than noble. During the German siege of Leningrad, which lasted for nearly nine hundred days, over one million people died of starvation and related causes; nearly 200,000 died in February 1942 alone.[4] The resourceful women of Leningrad painstakingly retrieved old flour dust from the cracks in the floorboards and licked decades of spattered grease from the kitchen walls, savoring it slowly.

The question of how much food to share was problematic, and in

ways we can't fully imagine. If a mother had children who were slowly wasting away, her inclination was to feed them first, above all. But it was also imperative that the woman keep up her own strength in order to take care of them, especially if they were young. If she didn't survive, how would they? Hunger weakened one's ability to think logically, to calculate in any meaningful way. The world seemed blurry; the small piece of bread on the table represented all that was tangible. Should the mother give her children extra food from her own meager ration, or should she try to conserve her strength to hold the family together?[5] The women of Leningrad were forced to face these questions daily, and the simple answers were all deadly. Two-thirds of the city's civilian population during the siege was made up of female office workers, housewives, children, and the elderly[6]—groups whose food allowances were considerably smaller than those of factory workers or front-line soldiers; consequently, a decision concerning 50 grams of bread could (and did) mean the difference between life and death.

Before examining the ways in which women fought to survive, we must understand the constraints under which they lived. The siege effectively began on September 8, 1941, when German forces cut off all land access to Russian-controlled territory; it ended only on January 27, 1944, with the breaking of the German blockade. Like other Russians, Leningraders had been on war rations ever since the German invasion began on June 22. As in England, these rations created hardship without much urgency. Factory workers were entitled to 800 grams of bread a day,[7] while office workers received 600 grams, and dependents and children under twelve were allotted 400 grams—somewhat less than one pound. Still, most people were able to supplement the bread rations with meat, grains, fats, and sugar. On September 2, however, as the German forces closed in on the city, the bread ration for factory workers in Leningrad was reduced to 600 grams a day, with office workers receiving 400, and dependents and children only 300 grams of bread, or about three-quarters of a pound.

In the first week of September, the Germans began to shell Leningrad. An emergency inventory of the city's food supplies revealed that there were only enough grain and flour reserves to last the civilian population for thirty-five days.[8] The situation worsened on September 8 with the bombing of the Badaev warehouses, where stores of flour and sugar were kept. Although workers managed to salvage much of the molten sugar, the flour was a total loss. Authorities responded by cutting the bread ration further, to 500 grams for factory workers, 300 grams for office workers and children, and 250 grams for dependents, including housewives, whose tasks were arguably more strenuous than those

of office workers.[9] But it soon became clear that even this curtailment was insufficient to feed the population with the flour remaining in the city's storehouses. And so the allowances were reduced even more drastically, culminating in the November 20 ration of 250 grams of bread a day for factory workers, and only 125 grams of bread—a mere two slices—for all others.[10]

Technically these bread rations should have been supplemented by other foods, but in that first fall and winter of the blockade nothing else was available, or available only sporadically. Thus the bread ration was the only guaranteed source of nourishment. If you were too weak to go to the designated store to receive your daily ration, and if you had no one to trust with your card, you got nothing to eat. In an effort to conserve food supplies, the authorities strictly controlled the issuing of ration cards. If your card was lost or stolen, it could not be replaced. The reality was as simple, and as harrowing, as that. A small piece of cardboard determined your fate.

Even when the bread ration was safely brought home and divided among the family, what sort of nourishment did it provide? Traditional Russian rye bread is famous for its rich, sour flavor, its dense texture, and its high nutritional value. But because ingredients were so scarce, the proportion of flour used in the siege loaf was continually revised. In mid-September, oats that had formerly been reserved for horse fodder were added to the commercial bread recipe, as was malt, which previously had been used in the production of beer (the breweries were now closed). By late October the percentage of malt used in commercial loaves was increased to 12 percent, and moldy grain that had been retrieved from a ship submerged in Lake Ladoga was dried out and added to the dough.[11] The taste of this loaf was extremely unpleasant. Yet even these fillers were not sufficient, and in late November, when minimum rations dropped to 125 grams of bread, the composition of the standard loaf was set at 73 percent rye flour, 10 percent "edible" cellulose, 10 percent cottonseed-oil cake (*zhmykh*), 2 percent chaff, 2 percent flour sweepings and dust shaken out of flour sacks, and 3 percent corn flour.[12] The seemingly high proportion of rye flour masks the fact that the dense fillers made this siege loaf 68 percent heavier than a normal loaf of bread. Thus from their 125-gram ration people effectively got only 74.4 grams of nourishing rye flour. And while the cottonseed-oil cake originally intended for cattle fodder did contain protein, the "edible" cellulose was not digestible. Dmitri Pavlov, who oversaw Leningrad's food supplies during the siege, writes that "the bread was attractive to the eye, white with a reddish crust. Its taste was rather bitter and grassy."[13] But others who survived on this bread are

less gentle in their assessments. The bread was so damp and heavy that "when you took it in your hand water dripped from it, and it was like clay."[14] It appeared "greenish-brown . . . , half wood shavings."[15] "Nothing was issued but bread, if you could call it that. Those four ounces on which life depended were a wet, sticky, black mash of flour waste products that fell apart in your hands."[16]

In 1997, when visiting St. Petersburg's new Museum of the History of Breadbaking, I had the experience of tasting siege bread. The museum director, Liubov Berezovskaia, accommodated my request to find out more about wartime bread by asking a survivor to bake me a loaf. Unlike the traditional round Russian loaf, siege bread was rectangular in shape. In order to incorporate as many additives as possible, the bread had to be baked in pans, since free-form loaves would not hold together.[17] The bread was heavy and pale in color, its texture rather crumbly, yet gummy on the tongue. Most memorable were the sensation of chewing on sawdust and the splinter of wood that pierced my mouth. Swallowing even a small piece required considerable effort.

Picture a mother with two children, whose husband is away at the front. As is typical for most Russian families, her elderly mother lives with them. This woman is one of the lucky ones—she has a factory job that affords her the highest category of rations, while her children and mother receive only the third, or lowest, category. Yet she lives in fear that her strength will give out and she'll lose her good ration along with her job. It is late November 1941. For a week now her family has had almost nothing to eat but two slices of coarse bread a day. They survive on the factory dinner she brings home. Each day she goes to the canteen at work and receives an ample portion of thin soup. She drinks the liquid from the top of the bowl, then carefully transfers the bits of grain and cabbage left in the bowl into a jar she's brought from home. This hot liquid doesn't relieve her hunger, and it makes her legs swell, but at least she has something left for her family.[18] Her mother has grown too weak to move; in fact, she is like another child who needs tending.

Her children spend all day in the apartment, waiting listlessly for her return. She tries to focus on her work, but it's difficult. She has to get up at six in the morning because most of the trams have stopped running. She stands in a long line at the bakery for the family's bread ration and brings it home, then drags herself several miles to work on swollen legs through streets that have not been cleared of snow. Every day she sees heavily swaddled figures swaying along the narrow footpaths. She can recognize the goners from their shuffling gait, and every day she worries whether to follow them or pass them by. The moment that

they fall is the worst. They crumple and drop. She wants to stop—it's the humane thing to do—but she has no strength to help them. So she tries to make her way past them, stepping around them, not over them, and never looking at the pile of cloth itself, lest an arm reach up or a pair of eyes implore. Bodies lying in the street no longer concern her; it is the ones still in motion that cause her pain. The woman concentrates on each step, trying not to think about the people inside the other bundles of clothes, or even about her family at home. It is the darkest time of year, with only five hours of daylight, when even daytime seems like twilight because the sun hangs so low in the sky. The apartment is very dark. Ever since September the windows have been covered with plywood to protect against air raids; weak blue lights have replaced normal bulbs in an effort to conserve energy.

Then on December 9 the electricity is shut off throughout Leningrad; there isn't enough fuel for the power stations. Only a few commercial bakeries and factories are kept running. People pin phosphorescent patches onto their coats so that they won't bump into each other in the dark. The woman's factory has closed down; she has lost her worker's rations. Now her family of four must make do with only 500 grams—a little over a pound—of bread a day, with no supplemental soup from the factory canteen. Even though she no longer has to walk miles to work, continuing to live feels impossible. With no electricity, there is no heat. The pipes have frozen and burst. The plumbing no longer works. Panic flutters in her chest. The woman reminds herself that her family is luckier than most: they at least have a *burzhuika*, a primitive wood stove, and they still have a few books to burn, and a few more pieces of furniture. Some kerosene is left over from September, so they can eat their bread by lamplight. Now, instead of going to work, each morning she joins hundreds of other women who head to the Neva River, where holes have been cut in the ice. She fills two buckets with water and struggles back up the icy embankment, trying hard not to spill too much. She puts sticks in the water to keep it from sloshing and ties the buckets onto her child's sled. By the time she gets home the water has frozen. She's not surprised: the thermometer has not risen above −30° F for a week.[19] In the dark she can barely manage to haul the buckets up the four flights of ice-glazed stairs to her apartment. Finally, she is inside. She lights the stove and melts the ice, using some of the warm water to wash her children's faces, sooty from the kerosene. She tells herself that at least she doesn't have to try to wash diapers like her neighbor down the hall, who struggles to change her infant daughter under layers of blankets so that she won't freeze to death. She pours

the rest of the hot water into mugs for her family. They drink it, relishing the warmth, trying not to focus on the sweet, musky taste of the water, the taste that comes from the hundreds of corpses that have been thrown into the Neva by people too weak to bury their dead in the frozen ground.[20] The walls of the apartment are covered with a thick layer of frost. The family huddles together, wrapped in winter coats and blankets.

It was the men who died first. Olga Grechina, a survivor, writes:

> The men were the first to go. There was no sight more pitiful and terrible than a siege man! It was then that women understood how well nature had made [us]—[we] had huge reserves of inner strength, which, it turned out, men did not have. The lack of meat, fats and tobacco severely sapped their strength, and they somehow immediately fell apart. At first they began to grow weak, to let themselves go—they stopped washing and were covered with gray stubble. There were very few of them in the city in comparison to the number of women, but their inability to adapt to the tragic conditions of life was striking. They began to fall down in the street, they didn't get out of bed, they were dying and dying. . . .[21]

It is true that the male metabolism requires more calories to survive; nevertheless, the claim by journalist Harrison Salisbury that men died because they "led more vigorous lives"[22] is objectionable as well as incorrect. In fact, the burden of getting water, scavenging for firewood, and searching for food—all "women's work," even in these most extreme circumstances—required huge expenditures of energy. Retrieving water from the frozen rivers and canals was difficult enough, but getting firewood was far more strenuous. The river was filled with logs that had washed downstream and been trapped in the ice. Weak with hunger and fatigue, women used axes to chop the ice around the logs until they were released. Once free, the logs still had to be tied onto sleds and dragged back home, then sawed into pieces small enough for the stove. Paradoxically, despite the extra expenditure of calories, these grueling tasks helped to keep women alive. It was the elemental nature of their duties that gave women an advantage.[23]

It was especially difficult for new mothers. Most babies born during the blockade were small and weak from lack of nourishment in the womb. (It wasn't until June 1944 that the government finally issued a decree to increase the ration for pregnant women.)[24] Infants officially received only 3 ½ ounces of soy milk a day. Mothers like Elena Kochina

drank a pot of water every night to try to keep their milk flowing, but it rarely helped. Kochina's baby daughter screamed and tore at her dry breasts.[25] Here is how Lidia Okhapkina nourished her baby:

> My Ninochka cried all the time, long and drawn out, and she couldn't go to sleep. Her crying, like moaning, drove me out of my mind. So to help her fall asleep, I gave her my blood to suck. I hadn't had milk in my breasts for a long time, in fact I didn't have any breasts left, everything had just disappeared. I pricked my arm with a needle just above my elbow and placed my daughter on this spot. She sucked noiselessly and fell asleep. But I couldn't fall asleep for a long time. . . .[26]

The city authorities intermittently provided the populace with foodstuffs salvaged from industry, and along with the new terminology for the different stages of dystrophy, their harsh-sounding names became part of the everyday language of the blockade. Especially distasteful and hard to digest were *shroty* (also known as *zhmykh* and *duranda*), hard cakes of pressed seed hulls left over from the processing of oil from sunflower, cotton, hemp, or linseed (*duranda* most often referred to linseed cakes). These seed cakes, commonly used as cattle fodder, sustained many lives. Often they were too hard to break into pieces by hand; instead a knife or axe blade was used to plane them like wood, and the shavings were fried like pancakes.[27] Other industrial products included *olifa*, boiled linseed or hempseed oil. Used in classical oil paints, *olifa* could be metabolized like edible oil, with the same nutritional value, but the flavor was vile. Still, it was preferable to machine oil, which people stole from factories that had ceased production. Although machine oil generally went right through the system and had no nutritional value, there was always a chance that it was based on animal fats or vegetable oil rather than petroleum. Similarly, coarse, wet bread seemed more palatable when fried in paint thinner,[28] and *mezdra*, the inner side of pig- or calfskin, could be boiled for hours to make a kind of soup. If you could endure the nauseating smell, the liquid afforded some protein, and it was better than the old leather straps people otherwise boiled. One woman cut up her gopher fur coat, boiled it, and ate it.[29] Sometimes the grain ration provided a coarse, grayish-black macaroni made of rye flour and linseed cake,[30] and in the late fall of 1941 a murky white yeast soup derived from cellulose began to replace grain. To make the soup, water and sawdust were allowed to ferment into a foul-smelling liquid, which contained some protein.[31] Soup is an important component of Russian cuisine, an integral part of the daily meal, and therefore women often made soup out of the family's bread

ration instead of just serving the bread plain. Although this soup consisted of nothing but breadcrumbs and water, the whole felt like something more than its parts.

As the siege continued, and hunger grew, the women of Leningrad had to find sources of food beyond the official rations.[32] They brought home the tough, dark green, outer leaves of cabbage they had previously discarded. Slowly braised and softened, the leaves were turned into a dish known as *khriapa*.[33] Women scoured the city, braving artillery fire in their search for food. At night, dressed in dark clothes, crawling from row to row, they chopped at the frozen ground to dig the potatoes that lay rotting in the fields. With true hunger, squeamishness disappeared, and survivors tell of readily, even avidly, eating the wood shavings, peat, and pine branches they scavenged. Often, though, the metabolism proved more discriminating. Zoya Bernikovich nearly died after eating pancakes made of dry mustard, which she was told were delicious. Soaking was supposed to remove the mustard's volatile oils, so Bernikovich duly soaked two packets of dry mustard in water for seven days, then poured off the water and added enough fresh water to make a thick, pasty batter, which she formed into two pancakes and fried. Her doctor later remarked that she was lucky to have eaten only one pancake before feeling the first burning sensations; others who ate more pancakes didn't survive, their stomach lining eaten away by the mustard.[34]

The more heartbreaking and horrifying issues surrounding food were moral ones, and different people recognized different limits. For many families, sparrows, pigeons, crows, canaries, cats, and dogs became acceptable food, despite reluctance and shame. But consume them they obviously did, because virtually all animals, including pets and house mice, disappeared from Leningrad within the first four months of the siege (the mice, like the people, died of hunger).[35] The only creatures left were rats, the scourge of the city, who fed on the bodies of the dying and the dead. Except for the most depraved or those whom hunger had deprived of reason, the people of Leningrad refused to purchase the large chunks of meat sold by suspiciously well-fed vendors at the market. Described variously as bluish or pale white in color, this meat was undoubtedly human flesh. Memoirists frequently refer to the sight of corpses lying on the street, their fleshy buttocks carved out.[36] Bits of desiccated skin from the corpses were boiled into soup.

Perhaps the only salutary consequence of such conditions was the generous community of women that evolved. Leningrad had always maintained a conscious distinction between the intelligentsia and the uneducated peasants who had flocked to the city from the countryside

following the 1917 Revolution. Now, standing for hours in a bread line, or helping someone cross a street under enemy fire or pull a heavy sled, women who ordinarily led separate lives began to converse with one another. And in many cases, the impractical *intelligentki* survived largely thanks to the wisdom of old peasant women who willingly shared what they knew. Women who had never given much thought to domestic exigencies learned how to dry tree bark and grind it into flour (the bark stripped from oak trees stopped the bleeding of gums), and how to extract vitamin C from pine needles for a scurvy preventative. Such folk knowledge far surpassed Tolstoy's celebration of the peasant arts. Beyond providing practical benefit, this advice reconnected intellectual city dwellers with a more elemental mode of life.

Conversations about food took on significant social meaning, transcending the sphere of women's relationships to encompass society at large. Unlike the great nineteenth-century Russian gastronomes who celebrated the art of dining well, the Soviet intellectual, nurtured on revolutionary idealism, disdained any talk of food as crass and bourgeois. For the intellectual, the higher life of the mind was all-important, and giving as little thought as possible to domestic concerns was a point of pride. But such lofty ideals inevitably clashed with the reality of siege existence. Even the most consummate intellectuals found themselves preoccupied with food, theorizing about it, rationalizing their actions surrounding it.[37] Suddenly they recognized the artistry involved in obtaining and preparing food. The lowly housewife was now ascendant, her daily occupations ascribed a greater value. The literary critic Lidia Ginzburg explains how siege conditions transformed the intellectuals' attitude toward food:

> This conversation [about food], which had previously drawn down the scorn of men and businesswomen (especially young ones) and which [the housewife] had been forbidden to inflict upon the thinking man—this conversation had triumphed. It had taken on a universal social meaning and importance, paid for by the terrible experience of the winter. A conversation on how it's better not to salt millet when boiling, because then it gets to be just right, had become a conversation about life and death (the millet expands, you see). Reduced in range (siege cuisine), the conversation became enriched with tales of life's ups and down, difficulties overcome and problems resolved. And as the basic element of the given life situation, it subsumed every possible interest and passion.[38]

At the same time that conversation became more elemental, so did the foods that people ate. Joiner's glue became standard fare for many.

Like the wallpaper and library pastes used before the introduction of synthetic adhesives, joiner's glue was based on animal proteins such as casein from milk, blood, and fish residues. Thus it contained proteinaceous material that provided some nutritional value. From a chance acquaintance on the street, Olga Grechina learned how to prepare an aspic from joiner's glue. The glue was soaked for twenty-four hours, then boiled for quite a long time, during which it gave off a terrible odor of burnt horns and hooves. Then the glue was allowed to cool and thicken. A bit of vinegar or mustard, if available, made it palatable.[39] Nearly all of the siege survivors express nostalgia for the "sweet earth" they consumed—soil from the site of the Badaev warehouse fire in which 2,500 tons of sugar melted onto the ground. Eating dirt may seem to us degrading, but those who ate it were grateful. The government had salvaged most of the thick, crusty, black syrup from the surface of the warehouse soil, using it to make candy,[40] but seven hundred tons were lost.[41] Starving Leningraders, however, did not consider the sugar a total loss. For months after the fire they used axes to chop away at the frozen earth and loosen the soil, still saturated with sugar. Retrieved down to a depth of three feet, the soil sold for one hundred rubles a glass; from more than three feet below the surface it cost only fifty rubles.[42] This "sweet earth" could be heated until the sugar melted, then strained through several layers of muslin. Or it could be mixed with library paste to make a kind of gummy confection. "This was 'candy' or 'jelly' or 'custard,' whatever the imaginative housewife decided to call it."[43] Some people simply ate the earth raw. Valentina Moroz describes its flavor:

> The taste of the earth has remained with me, that is, I still have the impression that I was eating rich curd cheese [full of fats]. It was black earth. Could it actually have had some oil in it? [You couldn't perceive] sweetness, but something rich [fatty-tasting], maybe there really was oil there. You had the impression that this earth was very tasty, genuinely rich [full of fats]! We didn't cook it at all. We would simply swallow a little piece and wash it down with hot water.[44]

In the spring of 1942, when the ice and snow melted after the first long winter of the siege (which proved to be one of the harshest winters of the century), the women of Leningrad extended their search for food, eagerly foraging for grass and weeds. Anything green contained vitamins, and many people, though clinging to life, suffered from scurvy, pellagra, and rickets. Grass disappeared from the city and its environs; trees were picked clean of their pale, new leaves. Grass could be mixed with *duranda* into pancakes, or savored fresh by the handful. Nettles

and dandelion leaves made excellent *shchi*, the classic Russian soup traditionally based on cabbage or sorrel. Juicy dandelion roots were ground and made into pancakes.[45] Angelica (from the Botanical Gardens), orach, and other grasses all served as welcome food, giving Leningraders hope that, against all odds, they might yet survive. One factory canteen made inventive use of wild greens in the spring and summer of 1942, listing the following menu choices: Plantain soup (*shchi*), pureed nettles and sorrel, beet green cutlets, orach rissoles, cabbage-leaf schnitzel, seed-cake (*zhmykh*) pastry, seed-cake (*duranda*) torte, sauce of fish-bone flour, casein pancakes, yeast soup, soy milk (in exchange for coupons). After a winter of starvation, this menu seemed like a feast.[46]

Physical survival was one thing, and the daily quest for food certainly overshadowed all other concerns. But the diary entries of survivors afford glimpses into another difficult aspect of blockade life: the deterioration of relationships. Hunger caused tempers to be short, a physiological as much as a psychological condition. Husband and wife, mother and daughter—the siege unavoidably changed the way people treated one other. Love and hatred became mixed up: you wanted to share your food with your family, but at the same time you resented their needs.[47] Elena Skriabina describes the way hunger can affect personality:

> People are growing brutal right in front of our eyes. Who could have thought that Irina Kliueva, recently such an elegant, quiet, beautiful woman, was capable of beating the husband she's always adored? And why? Because he wants to eat all the time, he's never satisfied. All he does is wait until she's found some food. She brings it home, and he throws himself on it. Of course, she herself is hungry. And it's hard for a hungry person to give up the last bit.[48]

One's very style of eating could cause aversion in others. Merely watching someone else chew—even someone you loved—was agonizing if you had already finished your morsel. Those who ate quickly, swallowing everything in a few desperate gulps, felt anger toward those who lingered long over every bite. Elena Kochina writes of her struggles with her husband, who became so crazed from hunger that he even stole food from their infant daughter. He could not bear to watch his wife eat: "I happened to get a particularly hard piece of crust, which I chewed with delight. I sensed how he was looking with hatred at my evenly moving jaws."[49] This response was instinctive; Kochina's husband had lost the ability consciously to choose good behavior over bad,

sacrifice over self-interest. In this way, for some people questions of morality all too easily slipped away.

Sexuality was also affected. Sexual relations mainly ceased. This had to do less with a lack of energy than with an increased alienation from one's diminishing body. The physical characteristics that mark gender largely disappeared. Shrouded in layers of heavy clothing, people all looked alike. It was impossible to tell who was male, who female. Hunger eroded the differences between old and young. Women traded their few good dresses for food and wore the clothes of their husbands, fathers, or sons.[50] Holding the baggy pants and quilted jackets together with belts and long scarves to keep out the cold, they wrapped their feet in cotton rags and made makeshift galoshes from old automobile tires to keep their feet dry. Women stopped menstruating; their breasts atrophied until only nipples were left. Like most people during the winter of 1941–1942, Olga Grechina did not even see her body for several months (it was too cold to undress for bed). Finally resolving to rid herself of the lice that plagued her, she got a coupon for one of the few working public baths. When she undressed she was horrified to find that she had neither a belly nor breasts. All of her bones stuck out; her legs were like sticks. Grechina felt a "disconnection" from her own body.[51] Lidia Ginzburg describes the sensation more fully: "In the winter, while people were discovering bone after bone, the alienation of the body proceeded, the splitting of the conscious will from the body, as from a manifestation of the hostile world outside. The body was emitting novel sensations, not its own."[52]

Under such conditions so far beyond our everyday understanding of "alienation," when one's very sense of self was undone, it was difficult to care about anyone other than oneself. The usual niceties of social interaction had long since disappeared. As bodies diminished, normal social structures also shrank and vanished. Food, once the pretext for friendly gatherings or their impromptu outcome, now ceased to be an element of social sustenance or succor. Although Russian culture holds that food has meaning only when it is shared, in blockaded Leningrad this practice was of necessity ignored. People simply ate what they had, when they had it, regardless. This unnatural role into which food was cast represented a particularly debasing aspect of siege life, and one which went to the core of what Russians hold most sacred; the loss of hospitality contributed to a sense of barbarism, of not belonging to a larger world than the one the body inhabited, and yet the body itself had become alien and strange.

Even so, when there was strength enough, some people engaged in small celebrations. Kira, a young hospital worker, sprinkled tiny squares

of bread with a bit of hoarded sugar to treat her colleagues to "blockade pastries."[53] A simple crust of bread could become something special, if you only allowed it to: "Thickly sliced crusts, toasted on the outside and left moist on the inside went especially well with tea. If you left the bread in the frying pan and ate it with a knife and fork—then you had a *meal*."[54] On her birthday the critic Olga Freidenberg helped her mother set a special table, creating beauty in the midst of austerity:

> It is a parade of a home and a spirit that has been preserved; it was my own personal triumph. . . . To get my daily bread, I had sold the better part of [our china] for next to nothing. And yet there was still enough to adorn the table, and these old family members appeared on the white tablecloth in their former luster and coziness. Only Mama and I could understand the importance of this holiday table . . . like us, it lived and existed after terrors, deaths, siege, and hunger; and like it, we were still living and could still revive our hopes for our future arrival in real, living life.[55]

No matter that Freidenberg's stomach, unaccustomed to real food, vomited the meal; the emotional sustenance it provided outweighed any loss of physical nourishment.

Those who survived the siege were rewarded by the Soviet government. The presentation of the medal "For the Defense of Leningrad" was accompanied by much high-flown rhetoric about the courage and resilience of the women, who accounted for most of the survivors. Even Dmitri Pavlov's generally sober account of the siege underlines the heroism of Leningrad's women: "Their will to live, their moral strength, resolution, efficiency, and discipline will always be the example and inspiration for millions of people."[56] But at what price did such fortitude come? As Dmitri Likhachev has noted, their heroism is more accurately seen as martyrdom. Yet it is important to stress that unlike religious martyrdom, that of the women of Leningrad was not elected, at least not by them. In fact, the residents of Leningrad suffered largely because Stalin did not care enough about them to surrender the city. Stalin had always despised Leningrad with its large population of intellectuals, and perhaps now he chose to take his revenge. He did not attempt to save the citizenry; quite the opposite. Local collective farms that could have helped feed the population were quickly evacuated, their cattle and goods dispersed elsewhere.[57] And just days before the Germans encircled the city, large quantities of foodstuffs were ordered sent *out of* Leningrad.[58] This efflux ended only when the city was sealed off by the blockade. Though there have been other sieges in history,

the blockade of Leningrad stands out for the government's refusal to spare its people.

Survivors of the Leningrad blockade report truly tasting bread for the first time, and savoring the essence of even the most rudimentary foods. And they gained a new awareness of texture: sunflower oil lush on the tongue, each grain of porridge a revelation as it burst in the mouth. Once-odorless foods like sugar or dried peas suddenly acquired an aroma that the pre-siege senses were unable to detect.[59] Along with the newly sensitive palate came a deeper appreciation of cuisine: "Siege cookery resembled art—it conferred tangibility on things. Above all, every product had to cease being itself. People made porridge out of bread and bread out of porridge. . . . Elementary materials were transformed into dishes."[60] The aesthetics of eating became newly attenuated. Such was the human cost of art.

Notes

1. Ambrose Heath, *Good Food in Wartime* (London: Faber and Faber, 1942), 5.

2. Reprinted in Marguerite Patten, *Marguerite Patten's Post-War Kitchen: Nostalgic Food and Facts from 1945–1954* (London: Hamlyn, 1998), 14.

3. An unnamed study of the British worker's diet found that "mothers give to fathers and children the lion's share of rationed foods. Other studies of family diets have revealed these deep-rooted habits, common to mothers everywhere, of which there is plenty of evidence at first hand. When there isn't enough chicken to go around, mother prefers the neck." In *The New York Times Magazine*, September 27, 1942: 32, cited in Amy Bentley, *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 91.

4. Leningrad's (now St. Petersburg's) Piskarev Cemetery houses a memorial to those who died during World War II. Their statistics state that 650,000 people died of hunger; but statistics from the Museum of the History of Leningrad place the number who died of starvation at one million. Russia's esteemed cultural historian Dmitri Likhachev estimates the total at closer to 1,200,000—and these were only the officially registered deaths, not those of displaced persons or other people living illegally in the city. See Dmitri Likhachev, "Kak my ostalis' zhivy" ("How We Remained Alive"), *Neva* 1 (1991): 31.

5. Likhachev writes: "There were very many women who fed their children by taking the last necessary piece from their own mouths. These mothers would die first, and the child would be left alone." In "Kak my ostalis' zhivy," 15.

6. See Dmitri V. Pavlov, *Leningrad v blokade*, 5th ed. (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1983). Pavlov was in charge of the Leningrad food supply during the siege. All citations are taken from the English translation of his book, *Leningrad 1941: The Blockade*, trans. John Clinton Adams (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 77.

7. There are approximately 28 grams in one ounce. Thus 800 grams of bread is equivalent to roughly 1 ¾ pounds.

8. Pavlov, *Leningrad 1941*, 49. It is estimated that the population of Leningrad at that time numbered around three million.

9. This hierarchical Soviet system of rationing dates back to the Civil War period of 1919–1921, when Petrograd endured widespread hunger: "There were three categories of ration cards. Manual workers received the first; intellectuals, artists, teachers, office workers, etc., received the second; and the parasites of society—housewives and old people, especially of bourgeois origin—received the third." Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Hunger as a Factor in Human Affairs*, trans. Elena P. Sorokin (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1975), xxxii. Sorokin's book offers a compelling analysis of the social and psychological effects of prolonged hunger.

10. With the opening of a transport road across the frozen Lake Ladoga, limited supplies could finally be brought into the city, and on December 25 the bread ration was increased to 350 grams for factory workers and 200 grams for all others. By February 11, 1942, the bread ration was restored to 500 grams for factory workers, 400 for office workers, and 300 for dependents and children. See Pavlov, *Leningrad 1941*, 79, for a chart detailing the fluctuating rations.

11. Ibid., 60.

12. Ibid., 63. I have taken Pavlov's figures as the most authoritative, but according to other sources the composition of the bread was even worse. Harrison Salisbury writes that as of November 13 it contained "25 percent 'edible' cellulose." See Salisbury, *The 900 Days: The Siege of Leningrad* (New York: Avon Books, 1969), 449. In her memoirs, the writer Vera Inber describes the bread exhibit at the Museum of the Defense of Leningrad. The descriptive label under the bread listed the following ingredients: "Defective rye flour—50%, Salt—10%, Seed cake (*zhmykh*)—10%, Cellulose—15%, and 5% each of soy flour, flour dust, and bran." See Inber, "Pochti tri goda (Leningradskii dnevnik)" ("Almost Three Years [Leningrad Diary"]), *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Gos. izd. Khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1958), 457.

13. Inber, "Pochti tri goda," 457.

14. Veronika Aleksandrovna Opakhova, in Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *Blokadnaia kniga* (*A Book of the Blockade*) (Sankt-Peterburg: Pechatyni dvor, 1994), 11.

15. V. S. Kostrovitskaia, in "Primary Chroniclers: Women on the Siege of Leningrad." I am deeply grateful to Nina Perlina of Indiana University and Cynthia Simmons of Boston College for making available to me this important manuscript, an unpublished collection of women's memoirs about the siege, which they have meticulously translated and edited.

16. Galina Vishnevskaya, *Galina: A Russian Story*, trans. Guy Daniels (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 27.

17. Nikolai Antonovich Loboda describes these loaves, stating that "you can pour water or whatever else you want into pans, but a round loaf will fall apart." In Adamovich and Granin, *Blokadnaia kniga*, 81.

18. Ol'ga Grechina thus describes how she fed her dying mother. See Grechina, "Spasaius' spasaia" ("Saving Others, I Save Myself"), *Neva* 1 (1994): 236.

19. The relentless cold drove some to desperation: "I [remember] walk[ing] along Zhukovskii Street. A building is burning. A woman with long, wild, red hair is passing by. She sees the fire and says, 'Oh, warmth, fire!' She goes into the building and burns to death." Valentina Mikhailovna Golod, on "Tikhii dom" (The Quiet House"), a broadcast on the Russian television network ORT, February 10, 1999, 12:25 a.m.

20. Vera Inber states that even after filtering the water from the Karpovka River through eight layers of cheesecloth, it remained "terrible." Inber, "Pochti tri goda," 298–299.

21. Grechina, "Spasaius' spasaia," 238. See also Vishnevskaya, who writes: "We all went hungry together, but the men succumbed sooner than the women." *Galina*, 28.

22. Salisbury, *The 900 Days*, 436.

23. Lidia Ginzburg considers this instinct to endure atavistic. Writing of the long lines women waited in for food before setting off for work, she states: "Working women have inherited from their grandmothers and mothers time which is not taken into account. Their everyday lives do not allow that atavism to lapse. A man considers that after work he is entitled to rest or amuse himself; when a working woman comes home, she works at home. The siege queues were inscribed into an age-old background of things being issued or available, into the normal female irritation and the normal female patience." Lidiia Ginzburg, "Blokadnyi dnevnik," *Neva* 1 (1984): 84–108. All citations are from the English translation, Lidiya Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, trans. Alan Myers (London: The Harvill Press, 1995), 39.

24. Yulia Mendeleva, Director of the Leningrad Pediatric Institute during the siege, provides chilling statistics on infant health. Many babies born in 1942 were stillborn; the birth weight of those who lived was on the average over 600 grams (about 1 ½ pounds) less than that of prewar infants, and their overall length decreased by 2 centimeters. Less than 1 percent of the children admitted to the Institute during the siege were of normal weight; often they weighed three times less than they should have. Iuliia Aronovna Mendeleva in *Primary Chroniclers*.

25. E. I. Kochina, "Blokadnyi dnevnik," in *Pamiat': Istoricheskii sbornik*, vyp. 4 (Moscow, 1979, and Paris, 1981), 153–208. All citations are taken from the English translation, Elena Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, trans. Samuel C. Ramer (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1990), 44.

26. Adamovich and Granin, *Blokadnaia kniga*, 290.

27. Elena Skriabina reports that *duranda* always caused heartburn. See Skriabina, *V blokade (Dnevnik materi*) (*In the Blockade [A Mother's Diary])* (Iowa City, 1964), 43.

28. Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, 63.

29. Adamovich and Granin, *Blokadnaia kniga*, 36.

30. Pavlov, *Leningrad 1941*, 64.

31. See the description in Likhachev, "Kak my ostalis' zhivy," 17.

32. Pavlov provides daily caloric estimates for December 1941, which are predicated on the availability of some meat, fats, grains, and sugar in the diet. He readily admits, however, that more often than not only bread was available. Even with the optimal, full norm of rations, the daily caloric count for dependents (category 3, which included housewives) was only 466 calories. See Pavlov, *Leningrad 1941*, 122.

33. Information from Marianna Tsezarovna Shabat, Moscow, February 4, 1999.
34. In Adamovich and Granin, *Blokadnaia kniga*, 35.
35. Apparently, against all odds, a female zookeeper managed to keep the Leningrad zoo's beloved hippopotamus alive. See ibid., 179.
36. See, for instance, Grechina, "Spasaius' spasaia," 239; Likhachev, "Kak my ostalis' zhivy," 15; Salisbury, *The 900 Days*, 550; Vishnevskaya, *Galina*, 28; Skriabina, *V blokade*, 46; and Golod, "Tikhii dom."
37. Sorokin writes: "Under the influence of hunger the whole field of consciousness comes to be filled with notions and ideas, and their complexes, which are directly or indirectly associated with food. They intrude into the field of consciousness, unexpected and uncalled for, and displace other notions and ideas, crowding them out of the mind, regardless of our will and even contrary to it." *Hunger as a Factor in Human Affairs*, 73.
38. Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, 43.
39. Grechina, "Spasaius' spasaia," 239.
40. The clumps of sweet black earth were processed into hard candies. "In taste the candy was reminiscent of the famous pre-Revolutionary candy Landrin [named after a French confectioner], a popular candy with a slightly bitter taste." See Adamovich and Granin, *Blokadnaia kniga*, 30.
41. Pavlov, *Leningrad 1941*, 56.
42. Salisbury, *The 900 Days*, 546.
43. Ibid.
44. Adamovich and Granin, *Blokadnaia kniga*, 35.
45. Ibid., 179.
46. Ibid., 68.
47. Lidia Ginzburg writes perceptively about this. See *Blockade Diary*, 7–8.
48. Skriabina, *V blokade*, 38–39.
49. Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, 55.
50. Likhachev's wife, Zina, was able to trade a dress for 1200 grams of *duranda* to help keep the family alive. "Kak my ostalis' zhivy," 13.
51. Grechina, "Spasaius' spasaia," 269–270.
52. Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, 9.
53. Lidiia Samsonovna Razumovskaia in *Primary Chroniclers*.
54. Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, 66.
55. Ol'ga Mikhailovna Freidenberg in *Primary Chroniclers*.
56. Pavlov, *Leningrad 1941*, 134.
57. Grechina, "Spasaius' spasaia," 256.
58. Likhachev, "Kak my ostalis' zhivy," 9.
59. Kochina, *Blockade Diary*, 57.
60. Ginzburg, *Blockade Diary*, 65.