

Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History. Ranca Iacovetta, Valerie J. Korinek, Mariene Epp, eds. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. ISBN: 9781442644762 (bound) ISBN: 9781442612839 (pbk.)

Born out of a 2008 workshop funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and held at Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo, this book represents a concerted effort to understand how food fits into, and has shaped, Canada's history. Beginning with a powerful introduction that aims at helping readers understand the importance of studying food history, it is comprised of twenty three essays, case studies, and one photo essay divided into eight thematic sections. According to their introduction the editors' main goal in compiling this collection was to educate their readers on how food can be used as a lens to shed light on the way that diverse groups of people came together and shaped a nation. From the legacy of British colonialism, to the nostalgia of the Depression era, and finally to the vegetarian politics of the 1990s, *Edible Histories* offers something for everyone. Although the book covers a large chronological range, and a wide variety of subjects, the message is clear: food history offers a unique methodology for understanding how Canada came to be, not only in terms of lines on a map, but also the ways in which its people define themselves as "Canadian."

With twenty three different pieces comprising the whole, this book is rather intimidating to read all at once. However, the essays are grouped around eight major themes, allowing readers to prioritize based on interest or specific goals. The first theme, "cultural exchanges and cuisines in the contact zone," discusses the ways in which food helps us understand that cultural exchange between diverse groups included not only goods or information, but also aspects of identity. This section includes both a discussion of contact during the colonial period and during the twentieth century; the first two essays cover the actions of British colonist while the third essay, by Michel

and Ellen Desjardins, uses the change in Christian food practices in the 1960s to examine differences in immigration policies and the emergence of multiculturalism.

The essays found in sections two and seven would do well together in a discussion of nationalism and the tensions between embracing commonalities and celebrating regional uniqueness. Part Two addresses regional identity and tradition, while Part Seven focuses on the desire by Canada's administration to develop a single national identity. Each essay in the second section focuses on a specific region or ethnic group in Canada: Maura Hanrahan's discusses the foodways and food practices of Newfoundland, while Megan J. Davies explores the foodways of British Columbia's Peace River Region. On the other hand, the essays in the seventh section look at the attempts of Canadians to establish some kind of all-encompassing "national cuisine," that would embrace commonality between all of Canada's diverse regions.

The third section, which focuses on the formation of group identity along ethnic or racial lines, offers two essays that address the experiences of Ukrainians in Canada, by Stacey Zembrzycki and S. Holyck Hunchuck respectively, and an essay by Julie Mehta that discusses the large South Asian population in the predominately white city of Toronto. The essays that make up the fourth section use cookbooks and conversations about family spaces to help readers understand the ways in which the culinary universe has been gendered. This includes Marlene Epp's analysis of how Mennonite cookbooks served as a "female voice" in the Mennonite culture, and Andrea Eiding's essay that describes the ways in which Jewish-Canadian women dealt with their dual identity. Part Five addresses the connection between political strategy and social propaganda. James Murton's "The Creation of a British Imperial Food System" talks about how government agencies attempted to deal with the interwar economic downturn by

marketing of focus of trade within the Empire; Nathalie Cooke, on the other hand, uses a single food item, margarine, to explain the history of the concept “mindful eating,” and how margarine shaped this controversy between the late Victorian period and the 1960s. An interest in the politicization of food would lead a reader to the sixth section with essays that discuss the ways in which food has been used by different groups of people to protest social, economic, or political issues. Julie Guard and Catherine Gidney each address the use of milk as a tool in food protests: Guard discusses how Canadian housewives focused on milk to protest rising food prices in the 1930s and, alternatively, Gidney illuminates the way that university students used protests over food quality to develop relationships between student governments and university administration in the first half of the twentieth century. Finally, section eight addresses the role of nutritional standards in Canada, and includes a photo essay by Cheryl Krasnick Warsh that considers how advertising campaigns exploited parents’ concerns about their children’s health.

Although each essay is categorized under a single theme, the editors make plain in the introduction that many of them address multiple themes. The first essay in the collection, written by Alison Norman, is a great example of this. Norman offers an insightful look at the food exchanges between English settler women and those people native to Upper Canada, examining both the implications of gender in food exchanges, as well as the contact between settlers and natives. In fact, although Part Four specifically addresses the gendering of food, gender is a common theme in many of the essays, from the discussion of masculinity in Julia Roberts’ discussion of “Public Life for Privileged Men,” found in Part One, to the role of housewives in the food price protests of the Great Depression found in Part Six.

This book is not the sort of popular history that one would find in Mark Kurlansky's *Salt* or Jack Turner's *Spice*, but neither is it a work strictly for academics. Instead, each author uses a blend of traditional scholarly writing with a narrative style that makes the essays easy to read, yet very informative. This book would be an excellent resource in an undergraduate classroom, either in its entirety or by assigning individual essays. Although the book is largely written by and for historians, the essays are easy to read and are helpfully categorized in thematic sections, each revealing an interesting story in Canada's history. They would also be quite useful outside the field of history, as each theme goes beyond the bounds of traditional historical approach, and covers topics like political history, gender theory, and nutrition studies. The book also covers a wide chronological range, highlighting both the French and British colonial periods, as well as twentieth century narratives that illuminate the development of a "Canadian" identity. The variety of sources utilized by this volume, including oral histories, memoirs, menus, cookbooks, advertisements, and government documents, illustrate the varied nature of a "Canadian food history." Within such a diverse nation, historians find it difficult to relegate Canada's past into a single narrative; in the same way, writers of food history will find that Canada does not have one single food tradition, but rather many, that should be celebrated.

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