

# Celebrating in style

## The Dewey and Cutter dinner menu

How would a group of enthusiastic 19th Century librarians celebrate their chosen profession at their annual dinner? Have a library-themed menu of course! At least, that is what the American Library Association did on 20 September 1894. It was, after all the middle of the Belle Epoque, the Golden Age, the Banquet Years. It must have been an exciting time in library science: there was superfluous wealth with which to endow libraries, and there was Melville Dewey and Charles Ammi Cutter. It seems almost certain that both men — active, founding members of the ALA — would have been there at Grand View House, Lake Placid that night.

The menu was both a demonstration and a celebration of their rival classification systems, each menu item appearing in each 'code', with a 'key' for those who needed it (shame!).

Images of the actual menu can be seen on the American Library Association site at <http://web.library.uiuc.edu/ahx/ala/clvf/34.gif>. An image of the venue as it was in 1893 is at [http://www.chapmanmuseum.org/Adirondack\\_Hotels.htm](http://www.chapmanmuseum.org/Adirondack_Hotels.htm).

Some of the letters and numerals in the menu image are not clear, but my attempt at transcription appears below. It is an interesting exercise in both culinary and library history to look at the 'translation' of the menu, but please bear in mind that I am a culinary, not a library historian!

Some menu items are easily translated: Peas, Potatoes and Lettuce are all Dicotyledons, Squab is a Bird (598), and Fruit is — well, Fruit (634). Some translations reveal other information about the dishes: Kennebec Salmon is a fish (597) from the river of that name in Maine (Northeastern USA: 947) cooked as in the Artois region of France (944). Classically a dish cooked 'd'Artois' would include Sorrel Mousse and be wrapped in pastry. Sounds delicious! The method of preparation is indicated by the 'code' too: Siberian punch would probably have been iced, hence the 'Applied Physics (621)', whereas heat (536) was applied to the squab.

Dishes called 'à l'Imperatrice' are named in honour of Empress Eugénia, the Spanish wife of Napoleon III of France, and always contain rice, which in this recipe would have been added to a clear 'healthy' meat stock.

It was common in the 19th Century for chefs to name dishes after famous or important people, so what of 'Godart'? It is most likely that this is a 'typo' for the classical beef garnish 'à la Godard', said to be named after the French composer Benjamin Godard, and described by the *Larousse Gastronomique* as a mixture of quenelles, small whole truffles, and mushroom caps. However, the French Minister of Justice at that time was Justin Godart, and he was famous for his personal library. It is tempting to consider that a dish might have been created in his honour for a library association banquet.

The Cutter names for the dishes have proven beyond this (non-librarian) writer, although RG seems to refer to vegetables, and the 'V' and 'O' in the lettuce salad must surely stand for Oil and Vinegar! All of the banquet items (apart from the Sunshine Cake) appear in Charles Ranhofer's famous work *The Epicurean*, which was published in the same year. Ranhofer was the enormously influential chef at Delmonico's in New York for more than three decades, and was responsible for feeding everyone who was anyone in the United States (and many distinguished visitors) over that time. If the letter 'R' which features so prominently in this menu represents an author's name, then it must surely have been Ranhofer.

For anyone who wishes to re-create this banquet, the scanned pages of Ranhofer's book can be found on the 'Feeding America' historic cookbook project at the Michigan State University site at <http://digital.lib.msu.edu/cookbooks/index.cfm>.

I am greatly intrigued by this menu. My personal experience of librarians is that they are completely unable to resist a challenge — so please, dear readers, enlighten and correct me! Send your comments and suggestions to [jclarkso@bigpond.net.au](mailto:jclarkso@bigpond.net.au).

Janet Clarkson

### Menu a la Dewey and Cutter

613.38 plus 596.48 a Eu 398.923.144

RN plus MJB a la eu8

614.394 of 583.32 a la 944.36

RNC of RGP a la 39

974.16 597.5 D944.37e

841K PBS D13

588.32 a la 944

RGP a la 39

636.2 – 591.49 a la G54

RM a la G54

583.79 944.36

RGP 39P

957 621.96 RRLP 65

598.6 plus 614.132 plus 536.46

RJND plus REQ

583.55 plus 665.3 plus 664.5

RGL plus RRBV plus RRBO

945.73 642 RZU 35N

618.19 in 641 MHJ RZT

634 613.38 RH and R8BC

### Menu key

*Consomme a l'Imperatrice*  
*Cream of Peas a la St. Germain*

*Kennebec Salmon Dartoise*  
*Peas a la Francaise*

*Filet de Boef a la Godart*  
*Potatoes Parisiennes*

*Siberian Punch*

*Roast Squab*  
*Lettuce Salad*

*Neapolitan Ice Cream*  
*Sunshine Cake*

*Fruit and Coffee*