

**Presentation title as announced in Program Book:** *Serving Tradition: Using Jewish Cookbooks and Jewish Websites to Preserve the Multi-faceted Jewish Culture* by Alice Crosetto and Daniel E. Feinberg.

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## **Description**

Remember going to Grandma's house and having her comforting matzo ball soup? So much of Judaism is based in our memories, even collective memories, and many of us hold them in our taste buds. The truth is, for much of Judaism, the written word is crucial for upholding tradition and religion—starting with the Torah all the way down to a family's cookbook. As the Jewish people evolve, their need to be rooted in tradition is prevalent and needs to remain paramount. And so, Jews continue to pass down their religion using traditional methods which includes the knowledge of a diverse culinary collection. One aspect of this culinary collection within Jewish Culture materializes in print form – the recipe. And with the advent of technology, this aspect continues to thrive on the Internet. What responsibilities do libraries, especially Jewish libraries, have in supporting and promoting culinary knowledge? Before answering this, another question arises - are cookbooks credible and valuable resources? Our answer is yes. From Collection Development to Reference/Instructional Services, cookbooks and websites are viable resources for all libraries. In many circumstances these are the only vehicles for transmitting culture. Cookbooks and even websites serve a wide-range of purposes for diverse audiences of all ages who want their tables alive with Jewish Culture. This paper will address how the library has become a place where these traditions can be found. We will also address how print and online cookbooks serve both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities.

*Serving Tradition:*

*Using Jewish Cookbooks and Jewish Websites to Preserve the Multi-faceted Jewish Culture*

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This paper explores the value and importance that cookbooks and websites play in preserving Jewish culture and how we, as librarians, can utilize this genre in both Jewish and non-Jewish libraries for educating individuals about Judaism. At first, this topic may seem humorous. But on further examination, the humorous gives way to the valuable.

In the following scene from *Julia's Kitchen*, a 2007 Sydney Taylor Award Winner, 11 year old Cara begins an awareness of the importance of cooking in passing along Jewish traditions and the role that cooking has in keeping the family together.

“But the smell of challah was so real. I wiped my eyes, then opened the bedroom door and followed the smell into the kitchen. I should have guessed-Bubbe.

“Well, hello, love.”

“You’re baking challah?”

“Tonight’s Shabbat.”

“But I thought we weren’t allowed to bake during shiva.”

“Well, maybe so, but I wanted to bake challah, so that’s what I’m doing.”

I put my face close to the loaves of braided dough. “It smells like Mom. Bubbe, I just dreamed about her. She was making challah, too. She was so . . . alive.”

Bubbe gripped the counter with both hands. Then she let out a long sigh and nodded. She beat an egg and brushed it gently on the braided loaves.

“Did you teach Mom to make challah?”

“Mmm-hmm. Like my mom taught me. This recipe has been in our family for generations.” I thought of all Mom’s recipes. Just ashes now. I wished Mom had taught me to bake challah. Not just the braiding and the egg wash, but the whole thing.”

Let us look at the importance of food in Judaism and the relationship to Jewish families.

For Jews, the saying *you are what you eat* is a very real statement. Arthur Schwartz states that “The purpose of eating and drinking is to give courage and strength to better serve G-d by using this energy to study, pray, and practice the teachings and lessons of the Torah.”

The Torah requires that ‘you shall eat, and be sated, and bless the Lord, your God, for the earth which He gave you’ In effect, Jews as a people are keeping up with traditions and customs.

The laws of kashrut, the fasting, the fabulous meals, all contribute to our being Jewish. The remains of food are forever in our bodies and souls. J. Cohen believes that “The proper food keeps

both body and soul healthy. The Physical becomes the spiritual, as we approach G-d through eating, worshiping at this unique altar, the table.” Food is sacred and has always been sacred because G-d has created it for humans to survive. E. Laurd believes that “While some foods serve as a sacred purpose because they are rich or rare, others are valued for practical, social, or religious reasons, still others for the way they guide us along the paths of ancestral memory...”

Look at Jewish holidays. Judaism is more than a religion; it is a culture, a way of life. Like most religions and cultures, Jewish activities center on family, holidays, prayer, and tradition.

But families grow and over time; they may lose track of their heritage. The younger generations often want to find and define themselves using Judaism. Renowned author and chef Joan Nathan observes that these young adults are often those who want to ground their lives in “...their roots and who question elderly relatives to track down cookbooks in seeking out the original recipes.” As generations continue, young children are left with these recipes and cookbooks, which are guides to their history. “Cuisine is one of the most distinctive expressions of an ethnic group, or, in modern times, a nation,” states Greenspoon, who, as well as others, believe that frequently the last sign of an individual’s attachment to his roots before total assimilation into the host community is the consumption of distinctive kinds of food. Memories are more than those of going to temple; they are time spent in the kitchen preparing meals, they are the time spent going through your families secrets, but even more so, they are growing and learning tradition. Nathan states that Jews, who are so assimilated into the American culture, use her cookbooks to go back to their Jewish roots in order to “understand the old tastes.”

We go to temple and then go home for our family meals.

One realizes that cooking has always been a part of Judaism, in the respect that it leads to families spending time together. Shabbat alone creates a time when families share their favorite recipes and eat together to honor G-d.

When it comes to food there is always the famous line about how your mother makes the best matzoh ball soup or beef brisket. The memories of having such traditional Shabbat dinners, Rosh Hashanah celebrations, and Seders, to name a few, will forever flood Jewish people's minds alike. Linda Amster states that "Foods shape our memories of home and childhood, and I am not sure I ever approach a Friday night without recalling, at least for a moment, the traditional Sabbath dinner - even though I often complained about it as a child."

We acknowledge that by passing down the family's commensal and culinary traditions, families express their spirituality. But how do we maintain and pass along all these culinary traditions? Since the beginning of man, people relied on the oral tradition which preserved history and maintained a collective memory. This collective memory includes the memories of one's own family as well as the shared communal knowledge based on culture or religion. Culinary traditions are indeed included in this collective memory – these culinary traditions were originally passed down in a most personal way – mother to daughter and so on.

In addition to relying on the oral tradition, the family recipes were also written down – how many of us have boxes or drawers filled with hand-written or photo-copied, hand-me-down recipes? The publishing of cookbooks was a natural outgrowth of this personal culinary experience. It is the written word of collective memory. Rosalyn Eves states that cookbooks are memorials and sites of memory transmission. These texts, that is, these written records, become a witness to something received and passed down through generations.

On a personal note – my grandfather was a professional chef from Hungary. When my mother tried to get my grandfather’s famous chicken soup recipe, she was not totally successful because he did not use measuring materials, a written recipe, or even a timer. My mother tells of her frantically writing down notes and trying to have him put the salt into a measuring spoon instead of directly into the pot. In this case, cookbooks and website creators are doing the exact opposite - an interesting contrast in passing down culinary arts.

Now for a closer look at the cookbook and its value.

J. Theophano states that the cookbook is like a diary and journal. In fact, cookbooks are “kitchen windows”.

Most see the cookbook as merely a vehicle for the instruction of food preparation. This is very important – of course. Not only does the reader learn how to prepare food, but the very recipes themselves can provide information about a culture, specific geographic regions and historical time periods, seasons, events, even an audience. Just as important as the recipes is the wealth of valuable information contained within the covers. Most of the time, this surplus text is overlooked. But is it really surplus? Readers can learn about the history of a culture, or a place; or the sponsoring organization, significant features of a religion, life cycle components; biographies. Most cookbooks contain graphics – not only of the food, but also of individuals, artifacts, maps, and much more. Today cookbooks are studied, preserved, and collected, not just by individuals, but by libraries and organizations. Usually cookbooks reveal their purpose. Early cookbooks from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century were instructional. Later on many organizations discovered that cookbooks were a great way to raise funds. And now cookbooks are how-to-guides for keeping up with popular trends. Jewish cookbooks do all these things – and even more.

Jewish cookbooks are not only tools for calming your hunger, but they also tie Jews to their roots. In order to preserve Jewish culture and those best kept secrets, women have created these personal manuscripts, these cooking guides per se, of the past and the present. The following are examples of Jewish cookbooks that have made contributions to society:

Esther Levy's 1871 *Jewish Cookery Book on Principles of Economy: Adapted for Jewish Housekeepers with Medicinal Recipes and Other Valuable Information Relative to Housekeeping and Domestic Management*, considered the first American Jewish Cookbook, covered all aspects of Jewish home life. Levy saw her book as a guide for keeping a Jewish home that is, based on her Philadelphia German Jewish community.

Lizzie Kander's 1901 *The Settlement Cook Book: the Way to a Man's Heart* and all of its subsequent versions have to date sold over 2 million copies. Originally published to benefit the first settlement house in Milwaukee, this title helped countless immigrants adapt to a new country as well as preserving a slice of history. Not only were recipes included, but also other helpful tips for the house, such as washing dishes and setting the table.

Then there is the organizational cookbook – originally published by private groups, is now an industry all in itself. The organizational cookbook, sometimes called a charity cookbook, is not an inclusively Jewish genre, but it does represent one of the largest percentages of Jewish cookbooks types.

Various groups, schools, synagogues, and women's organizations compile their favorite recipes in order to raise funds for a variety of projects. And, as mentioned earlier, the surplus text in these cookbooks contain a wealth of personal, organizational, and regional information that may not exist anywhere else.

And now for the library - we ask how libraries play a role in preserving Jewish culture. The answer is simple - by having materials that serve Jewish populations, by providing students, teachers, and patrons access to materials.

Recent years have witnessed an explosion of interest in cooking – television shows, entire networks devoted to cooking, celebrity chefs and their cookbooks as well as their products, from food to roasting pans.

Libraries are responding – public libraries have traditionally provided culinary resources for the general public. But now we see that academic libraries are beginning to acquire culinary literature also. The majority of these resources have been sociological in nature – research regarding food. But in checking on WorldCat, Joan Nathan's *The Foods of Israel Today* is found in 639 libraries. In Ohio, 25 public libraries own it, and only 3 academic - but one of these academic libraries is Case Western Reserve – the renowned research university - here in Cleveland. And further examination reveals that this title is at UCLA, UC Berkeley and even at Harvard. Harvard libraries even have copies of Levy's and Kander's cookbooks. Possibly academic libraries are waking up to the value of cookbooks.

Finally, we cannot overlook the importance of K-12 libraries. There is a body of juvenile literature that contains Jewish cooking themes, and the librarians and teachers as book providers bring these books and children together. Many consider the K-12 library the nucleus of the school – the second classroom.

Librarians know that teachers need resources, print, non-print & online, to build instructional units – lesson plans. Students are also encouraged and supported in their own need to know and their desire to be surprised and delighted. By providing resources for teachers, and students, the librarian supports the whole education process.

One of the primary ways to support the curriculum is to develop a collection that covers a wide-range of multi-cultural resources – and this includes Judaism and Jewish culture. It is essential to have both fiction and non-fiction items that contain meaningful, accurate and authentic representations of Jewish culture – just as we have heard in *Julia's Kitchen*. Non-fiction titles should include religion, histories, biographies, and even cookbooks aimed for young readers. One of our handouts contains a list of selective titles of juvenile literature containing Jewish cooking themes. An interesting note – a search in WorldCat reveals almost 3,000 books on Jewish Cookery. The top 3 titles are, in fact, juvenile titles: *Cooking the Israeli Way*, *Grandma's Latkes*, and *Jalapeño Bagels*. Although the total number of juvenile titles is relatively small, only 63 titles, the fact that the top 3 titles – out of the 3000, are juvenile, signals that publishers and librarians realize that value of culinary literature – especially for school age children.

A multitude of research has been conducted on the value and permanent impact that quality literature has on school age children. As librarians, we know the power of literature – it is one of the earliest vehicles for conveying information about cultures as well as being an identifiable source for the reader. And we know that the cookbook-like format has been used successfully for some time now – and across all subject areas.

Librarians know that by using credible sources, they can identify, purchase, and develop worthwhile collections that provide resources so that their patrons can learn about Jewish culture. Librarians know that culinary literature, especially cookbooks, is an essential contribution to these collections. And now technology provides a whole new way to pass along Jewish tradition.

Going along with times, cookbooks are changing formats. From paper copies, to the Internet, cookbooks have truly evolved. And what a blessing it has truly been as a way to share information. Today anyone can get a recipe of any culture, religion, or nation. The number of websites that are

“home-made” by grandmothers, mothers, and others, is remarkable. It has given Jews a way to try new recipes and pass down their traditions without having to ever purchase a cookbook. This is preserving Judaism in a non-profit and simple manner. One might wonder how preserving culture deals with internet sites, but in actuality it could be considered the new wave of remembering and reliving one’s past.

*Ruth’s Kitchen* demonstrates the benefits of using the Internet in order to preserve her family’s Jewish culture. As Ruth’s daughters went off to college, they would call or email her to get the recipes for their favorite Jewish foods. Modern technology is playing a role in getting Jews to remember where they come from, especially when the family is not together for special holidays and times.

*Bubbe Lottie* provides a good example of another home-grown website containing many recipes – and Bubbe includes numerous personal anecdotes. It is interesting to note that it is very common for cooks to withhold certain ingredients when passing out personal recipes so that your dish can never be exactly like the one that you got from someone else. My grandfather did this all the time.

It must be stated that one sort of Jewish cookery site is not better than the other, but rather they simply give a person the opportunity to experience the variety of Jewish cuisines. One of our handouts includes a list of selective titles of user-friendly Jewish cooking websites and websites containing lesson plans for using Jewish recipes.

*Gourmania.com* has become a well known site for its combination of recipes incorporating Jewish cooking with healthy eating – this has been the key for its success. The creator, Norene Gilletz, combines her eclectic recipes, nutrition expertise, to create an innovative and very user

friendly website. Recipes, cookbooks, reviews and much more information has led to the popularity of *Gourmania.com* – which, by the way, is a well maintained website.

Julia Child once said that “Cookbooks are the history of an epoch. They show how people prepared and ate the ingredients available to them. Cookbooks provide answers to social, political and economic questions about the society for which they were written, they are an essential ingredient to preserving our past and enhancing our future.”

There is one outstanding cookbook that preserves Jewish tradition and much more - *In Memory's Kitchen*.

“Cooking with the mouth” has been a phrase associated with Jews and the Holocaust because it was a way to fight back. Captive Jews would describe the cooking of their meals that they had made their whole lives. It was a way to feel free and to preserve their culture, their religion, and their minds. Mina Pachter, a Holocaust victim, made sure to find a way to pass on a cookbook that she and other women in the Terezin Concentration Camp created. And even though they did not survive, their treasured cookbook did.

This paper has explored the idea that Jewish families pass on their memories and preserve their Judaic roots through cooking, recipes, cookbooks, and websites. We have also seen what role libraries can play. We as Jews must remember our roots; and while it may seem humorous, some of these roots are based in our cooking.

Just as in *Julia's Kitchen*, Cara discovered that family cooking experiences are powerful—

“As I ate the cookies, my mind started spinning. ...

...talking to Dad last night had helped me figure out how I could honor Mom and Janie's memory...

Plus, it was Friday – tonight was Shabbat. Mom had always made sure our Shabbat dinners were extra special when we were celebrating something – a birthday, their anniversary, the end of the school year, whatever. I felt Dad and I had something to celebrate, too. A new beginning.”

For what is a Jewish Cookbook?

If nothing but a personalized mirror of the past, our gateway to the future.

And a way to preserve our traditions for generations to come.

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