



Tastes and Traditions: A Journey Through Menu History

Nathalie Cooke

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Nathalie Cooke's culinary history text *Tastes and Traditions* explores menus as strategic documents—much more than simple bills of fare. Menus, it says, do not always present their wares in a straightforward way; some go off the beaten path, becoming almost as important as the food itself.

Each chapter explores the material life of menus by examining them as historical documents, with various themes played out over the years. “Menus for Children And For The Children We Once Were,” for example, includes a nod to famed English restaurant The Fat Duck’s Anthology Menus, whose dessert “Like a Kid in a Sweetshop” included an audiovisual element with appeals to *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Elsewhere, menus designed by famous artists—indeed, pieces of art in themselves—and menus from important events appear, as well as menus used in prisons and hospitals. All are a delight to read through: Dishes like cantaloupe puree appear on an 1889 vegetarian menu; there’s a menu printed on playing cards.

In *Tastes and Traditions*, menus from across history are shared as an opportunity to “to take a leap of imagination,” vicariously peering over the shoulders of the guests who read them and experienced the inventive meals they represent.

ERIC PATTERSON (March / April 2025)

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