

# The oxford companion to american food and drink



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Following *The Oxford Companion to Food* (1999) and *The Oxford Companion to Wine* (1999), here is another reference title to “feed” our fascination with the things we eat and drink. Food is a passion for many and this tome helps to fuel the imagination. *The Oxford Companion to American Food and Drink* is a newly adapted version of a similar book and was published in March 2007. Seven hundred and thirty six pages long and hardcover, the goal of the Companion is to combine historical, descriptive, and analytical articles with synthetic and interpretive essays and in order to offer this wealth of sources to a wider audience.

The general editor Andrew F. Smith teaches culinary history and professional food writing at The New School University in Manhattan. He also serves as a consultant to several food television productions (airing on the History Channel and the Food Network), and is the General Editor for the University of Illinois Press Food Series. Additionally, he edited the highly-acclaimed 2-volume *Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America* and has written several books on food, including *The Tomato in America*, *Pure Ketchup*, *Popped Culture: A Social History of Popcorn in America*.

In addition to Smith, more than two hundred professional food writers, chefs, and professors contributed articles to this Companion. The testimony of this number of experts in the field alone makes the book a valuable resource.

The organization of *The Companion* is clear. It contains more than 1000 entries, which are arranged alphabetically. Although the book is organized alphabetically, there are many types of entries within its pages. One such entry is chronological surveys that look at American history during different time periods from the pre-Columbian era to the early twenty-first century.

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These help to allow the reader to gain historical perspective. Also, there are product entries that focus on a specific food or drink, such as tomatoes, Manhattans, club sandwiches, Moxie, Twinkies, breakfast cereal, and anadama bread. In addition, there are entries about the contributions of ethnic, religious, cultural, and racial groups to American culinary life, such as those by African American, German Americans, Mexican Americans, Chinese Americans, Seventh-Day Adventists, Muslims, Catholics, and Jews. This is highly beneficial as so many foods come into America from different ethnic backgrounds.

This book also includes biographies of important contributors to American food and drink, including chefs, corporate leaders, critics, food writers, cookbook authors (e. g. , Fannie Farmer, Eliza Leslie), cookery bibliographers, and others whom the editors considered influential on American culinary life. Corporate histories and commercial products, including junk foods and fast foods, that have dramatically reshaped American culinary life for the last century and will likely continue to do so for the foreseeable future are also included.

Lastly, this book includes political and social movements with impact, such as temperance, Prohibition, vegetarianism, the drive for pure food, and the organic food movement. Entries on particular foods or gadgets are generally just two or three paragraphs long, but some entries cover many pages.

Longer entries include pieces that give historical overviews of specific eras. Native American foods and its subentries, for example, extend for almost 40 pages and include numerous sidebars, quotes from primary sources, a chart

detailing foods of the Columbian exchange, and a recipe for Navajo fry bread.

Historical and cultural context is addressed within individual entries and reinforced through an opening topical outline that assigns them to one or more of 17 subject categories (e. g. , Ethnic and Cultural Cuisines, Food and Society). The 200 black-and-white illustrations add significantly to the appeal of the set. Two eight-page sections of color plates inserted for visual appeal contain no direct references to or from corresponding entries. The articles define important terms and list important titles in their own right. Cross-references appear after many articles.

There are also cross-references within the body of a few articles, while blind entries direct the user from an alternate form of an entry term to the entry itself. For example, the blind entry for “ Train Food” tells the reader to look under “ Dining Car”. In addition, most entries conclude with a bibliography, and separate general bibliographies for food and drink follow the A-Z portion of the text. Listed in the appendix are a topical list of entries; directories of major food-themed festivals, related museums, periodicals, and organizations; and an extensive list of food Web sites.

Navigation is aided substantially by a detailed indexing and ample cross-referencing with many enrichment resources provided, as in the appendix. The Companion is not intended to be comprehensive, and readers are bound to find omissions. There are no entries for the Food Network and Weight Watchers, for example, although the index points to entries in which they are

discussed. This Companion covers a wide range of topics, but it only scratches the surface of most.

Similar information can be found in other standard culinary reference sources – e. g. , the classic Larousse Gastronomique and The Oxford Companion to Food (2006. 2d ed. ) – but Smith’s work creates its own valuable niche not only by combining all these subjects and more into one book but also by focusing on the ways in which they are specifically connected to American food culture and history. This provides an interesting twist for a topic that clearly has “ been done” and makes the volume uniquely American-focused.

There is some overlap with The Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America (2004). Many of the entries originally found in the Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America (2004) are repeated in this volume, so libraries already owning that set will not necessarily need to add this variation to their collections. Although it is certainly desirable for libraries to have the most currently adapted versions of books whenever possible. For all other libraries, this reasonably priced and practical food resource is highly recommended.