

CHAPTER 12.

LAYING THE MATTER ON THE TABLE: COMPOSING KITCHEN JUDAISM

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In 1986, the Sisterhood of Temple de Hirsch-Sinai in Seattle published a cookbook called *Just Like Grandma Used to Make*. The cookbook is organized by holiday with sections on “Shabbot,” “Rosh Hashonah,” “Chanukah,” “Pesach,” and “Purim and Other Festive Occasions.” Most of the recipes are attached to a woman’s name or a woman’s familial role, and the book includes many of the recipes one might expect to find in a Jewish holiday cookbook: “Betty Jaffe’s Chopped Liver,” “Grandma Susan’s Mandelbrat,” “Phyllis’s Potato Latkes,” “G-G’s Matzoh Balls.” Spiral-bound with a bright yellow, dot-matrix cover, the cookbook looks very much like a product of the 1980s but is clear to acknowledge a deeper tradition—not only a broad Jewish tradition but also a local, women’s culture around cookbooks. This is the fourth cookbook that the Sisterhood published after *One Thousand Favorite Recipes* in 1908, *Famous Cook Book* in 1916, and *Famous Cook Book* in 1925. All were compiled by a few individuals but authored collectively by the Ladies Auxiliary to Temple de Hirsch.¹

The 1986 Sisterhood acknowledges their inheritances in a note at the beginning of the cookbook: “Most of the recipes have been handed down from friends and family, some are from our Temple Cookbook that was published in the early 1900’s [*sic*]. Others are fairly new but will be handed down to our next generation through this book.” Yet this cookbook bears no resemblance to its predecessors, neither materially nor spiritually. Despite the 1986 cookbook’s title, there’s little evidence that these recipes *are* what grandma used to make, at least if their grandmothers were editors and contributors to the earlier cookbooks. This is not the story the Ladies Auxiliary circulated about themselves in the first part of the 20th century. The discrepancies between the most recent cookbook and the earlier ones reveal how what it means to be Reform Jews in the Pacific Northwest varies over time. In this chapter, I focus on the early

1 Temple de Hirsch merged with Temple Sinai in 1971.

20th-century Temple de Hirsch cookbooks as a particular “site of writing” that illustrates the interplay between that era and trends in Reform Judaism as well as local, regional, and national cultural forces.

The four cookbooks published by the women’s groups of Temple de Hirsch fall squarely into the “extracurriculum” that Anne Ruggles Gere pivotally argues for in her ground-breaking article “Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms: The Extracurriculum of Composition.” Through their work of writing, publishing, and selling the cookbooks, the women of the Sisterhood use literacy, as Gere puts it, “adapted to their interests” (79) and “constructed by desire, by the aspirations and imaginations of its participants” (80) and with “social and economic consequences” (80) to negotiate, or re-form, what it means to be Jewish American women at that time and in that place. The genre of recipes and cookbooks allows the women to negotiate publicly their intersectional identities as individuals, members of a sisterhood and local Jewish community, and participants in ideological battles initially grounded in other places but that reach into their most intimate worlds. The women appropriate generic conventions in order to create a more elastic experience of Judaism and the Pacific Northwest, using writing in an everyday, familiar form to find their place.

HISTORY OF TEMPLE DE HIRSCH

Temple de Hirsch was founded in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Seattle in May 1899 by seventy Ashkenazi families with a mission to create a place where, according to Raphael H. Levine, who served as the rabbi at Temple de Hirsch from 1942 to 1969, “our Jewish faith and tradition could become the dynamic for effective and worthwhile living by being made responsive to the needs and experiences of American Jews” (Congregation). The notion of a living, responsive tradition helps indicate that Temple de Hirsch is a Reform synagogue, which separates itself from Orthodox Judaism and, later, Conservative Judaism, by re-forming, rather than perpetuating, the institution of Judaism through modification, abrogation, or addition. As Rabbi Samuel Koch, who led the congregation for the first half of the 20th century, explains in “Temple Tidings,” the synagogue’s monthly newsletter, “All changes whatsoever introduced by Reform have been in the direction of *ritualistic simpleness, of doctrinal adequacy, of intellectual satisfactoriness and of aesthetic intensity*; and have been made on the grounds of *present needs and present efficiency*” (vol. 1, no. 5, 1). Koch continues, “[E]very religion that is alive must evolve, develop, progress.” Food becomes an emblem and a material good on which the different branches of Judaism divide.

Temple de Hirsch not only is a Reform synagogue but also is a Seattle synagogue. From its beginning, the synagogue has been proud of its secular ties and

connections to place. It has woven its history to that of Seattle. In a publication celebrating its 50th anniversary, the synagogue notes:

Fifty years ago our city was a small outpost of America's western frontier. Today it is a great metropolis, the Queen City of the Pacific Northwest. The first years of our congregation's life span this tremendous expansion, and in no small measure aided it through the labors of the men and women who drew their inspiration from the spiritual fountains of the Judaism which it embodied and cherished. (Congregation)

In this same publication, the synagogue boasts that the first person to win the Seattle citizenship award was a member of its congregation, and it celebrates the work Rabbi Koch did in Seattle social services, including helping to create a children's hospital. In the synagogue's 75th Anniversary publication, it further emphasizes Koch's work outside the Jewish community, and it notes that Koch's successor, Rabbi Levine, went on to create the long-running TV show *Challenge*, bringing together Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish clergy to discuss pressing matters of the day. In its 50th Anniversary celebration material, Rabbi Levine claims, "Among the finest achievements of our congregation was the leadership it gave to the movements working for better understanding between Jews and their neighbors and for a deeper appreciation of the meaning of the American dream."

Also noted in the 50th anniversary publication, the organization of a Ladies Auxiliary was one of the first acts of the new synagogue. By September 1899, four months after the synagogue's founding, the Ladies Auxiliary had elected its first set of officers. One of three women's groups drawing on synagogue membership—the other two being the Council of Jewish Women and the Hebrew Benevolent Society—the work of the Auxiliary centered on 1) the education of children; 2) the decoration of the synagogue for the Sabbath; 3) the identification and welcoming of immigrants, who are sometimes referred to as "strangers in our midst"; 4) the building of a Jewish library and creation of a Jewish reading community; and 5) the expansion of the building space (Koch, "Tidings" vol. 2, no. 2, 1). In "Temple Tidings," Rabbi Koch claimed that the Auxiliary was second only to the synagogue itself in terms of importance to the Jewish community, writing, "To be officially identified with the Auxiliary is to be identified with the most gratifying communal effort" (vol. 2, no. 2, 4).

Repeatedly in Koch's newsletters, the Auxiliary is noted as being consistently productive, often ambitious. The women are highlighted for decorating the sanctuary, buying presents for the Sunday School teachers' weddings, encouraging better attendance at services, hosting services, and building a library. Many

of their synagogue-based efforts are shown as taking them out of the synagogue and into the city: they host dance after dance, dinner after dinner, in Seattle hotels and the Knights of Columbus hall, with proceeds going largely to the library. They entertain Jewish students at the University of Washington and Jewish soldiers on leave; they send holiday packages to Jewish soldiers serving abroad; they sell Red Cross seals and volunteer for the Anti-Tuberculosis League.

FAMOUS COOK BOOK

Arguably what took the women of the Auxiliary most out into the world was their cookbooks. The cookbooks put them in a network of Seattle businesses and Jewish women's groups. The resulting network was mostly regional, but the cookbooks made their way to individuals and organizations (including the Auxiliary's parent group, the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods) in the East, too. The cookbooks enmeshed them in local, regional, and national networks that value business and culinary acumen.

First published in 1908 as *One Thousand Favorite Recipes*, according to the minutes of the Ladies Auxiliary the cookbook had a print run of 1500 and, after years of plodding away, sold out by December 1912. The Auxiliary continued to field requests for cookbooks, including from two Seattle booksellers, and considered an additional printing of 100 copies, but ultimately referred the requestors to a new cookbook, *The Neighborhood Cookbook* (1912), from the Portland Council of Jewish Women.

Yet by May 1914, the women began to consider revising their own cookbook. At the June 7, 1915, meeting, they decided to put a new book out. The minutes offer no reason for the delay in publishing a new edition, but based on the success of the first venture, the lack of recorded conversation (let alone enthusiasm) around the suggestion of a new edition, and the work involved with the 1916 edition, the labor was likely daunting. But in 1916, the women began again. Assembling advertising, business, and compilation committees, the Ladies Auxiliary took advantage of their previous success by naming this cookbook *Famous Cook Book*.

In March 1916, the cookbook committee mailed postcards requesting recipes. By June 1916, the women secured advertising and awarded the printing contract to Lowman and Hanford (Minutes, June 5, 1916), and they got their *Famous Cook Book* out in December 1916 with a print run of 2500 and an option of more copies if the initial run was successful (Minutes, August 16, 1916). The cookbooks were initially sold for \$1 in the city and \$1.25 out of town (Minutes, November 6, 1916), but they increased the prices to \$1.25 in the city and \$1.50 out of town by July 1, 1920 (Minutes, June 7, 1920). The

women decided that the proceeds of the sales would go to the Temple Annex. According to available minutes, the 1916 edition was a success. The November 29, 1920, letter to the membership that criticizes the Auxiliary for an unremarkable year nevertheless celebrates the cookbook: “The steady growth of the sum to the credit of the Cook Book Committee shows what a wonderful success this book has been and may its supply be unlimited” (letter pasted into December 6, 1920 Minutes). Clearly the venture was successful enough to merit a third cookbook (another *Famous Cook Book*) in 1925.

The three cookbooks published by the Ladies Auxiliary to Temple de Hirsch in 1908, 1916, and 1925 differ most obviously in length: 194, 349, and 446 pages respectively. All three books are hardbound with cloth covers that look like they are meant to withstand the rigors of the kitchen. *One Thousand Favorite Recipes* is green with gold lettering, and both *Famous Cook Books* are cream with black lettering. In highlighting authorship by the Ladies Auxiliary, all three covers reinforce connections across the volumes. *One Thousand Favorite Recipes* also includes a mention of Seattle, Washington, on its cover, while the other two note its birthplace on the title page. And all three are printed locally: Merchants Printing Company for 1908, and Lowman and Hanford in 1916 and 1925. The 1916 and 1925 editions include a note of thanks to the success of the early cookbook. All three use the title page to single out the chief compilers of the cookbook: Mrs. Sigismund Aronson and Mrs. William Gottstein in 1908; Mrs. William Gottstein, Mrs. Sigismund Aronson, and Mrs. Salmon G. Spring in 1916; and Mrs. Sigismund Aronson and Mrs. Samuel Brown in 1925.

Even with a few aesthetic changes and additions and subtractions, the three cookbooks are very much alike in spirit. All three are divided into typical cookbook sections, including soups, fish, entrees, salads, vegetables, cakes, bread, and beverages, as well as having sections called “Home Remedies” (or “Household Hints” in 1925) and “For the Sick.” The recipes are laid out in paragraph form, one right after another, separated only by title. Ingredients, sometimes with measurements, sometimes without, are embedded into the paragraphs, not separated out the way we see them in contemporary cookbooks. Most of the individual recipes are authored by women who use the Mrs. title and their husband’s first name or initial and last name. All three have advertisements for mostly local businesses.

“Ethnic” moments are balanced out with other ethnicities or with overall genericness, recipes that are or have become generally American, like “Cream of Cauliflower Soup,” “Chicken Salad,” “Deviled Eggs,” “Rhubarb and Strawberry Pie,” and “Ice Box Cake.” The later editions include a “Dictionary of Cooking Terms” full of French phrases and French cooking techniques, suggesting an aspirational class affiliation more than an ethnic tradition. The later editions also

include a section called “Kuchen,” a German/Yiddish word for “cake,” perhaps reflecting the synagogue’s German American membership, and all three editions include recipes with central and eastern European roots: “Liver Kloese for Soup,” “Krepchen,” “Mandel Torte.” Here, too, we see the only recipes that are or may be tied to a particular Jewish holiday: a handful of matzo recipes, including one that is titled “Potato Flour Cake for Easter.” At the same time, all three cookbooks include recipes for dishes such as “Italian Sauce for Tongue,” “Sauce Bearnaise for Delmonico,” “Genuine Mexican Tamale Loaf,” “Puget Sound Clam Chowder for Ten Persons,” “Olympia Pan Roast,” and “Tacoma Layer Cake.”

Most notably, none of the cookbooks is kosher, a choice that could be read as a mark of ongoing assimilation among community members. The lack of adherence to kashruth, or Jewish dietary law, is demonstrated in inclusions and exclusions: on the one hand, the absence of a “how to keep kosher” section, which is included in *Jewish Cookery Book*, the earliest known Jewish cookbook in America (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 78) or even acknowledgement of what is trefa,² and, on the other hand, the presence of recipes that call for shellfish and ham and that mix meat and dairy. None of the cookbooks includes a separate section on ham or pork, but there is a stand-alone section on shellfish, with recipes that highlight clams, crabs, oysters, lobster, and shrimp. The 1925 edition contains no fewer than 26 recipes for oysters—including “Oysters Baked on Ham” and another one called “Little Pigs in Blanket,” in which an oyster, rather than the traditional sausage, is snug in its blanket of bacon. Although overall the recipes are short on the way of instruction, the absence of notes on how to prepare meat to be kosher is also telling.

Carol Gold notes that cookbooks often don’t reflect how people actually eat: the preparation of everyday foods is so well known as to be superfluous in a cookbook. Instead, she argues, cookbooks tend to be prescriptive, suggesting to readers “what they ought to be eating and how they ought to eat, if not necessarily what they do eat” (qtd. in Allen 12). Anne L. Bower makes a similar point:

Whether the group authors of a particular fund-raising cookbook actually cooked from the recipes in their book, pursuing the depicted heritage, lifestyle, and values, we cannot actually say. All we can say is that they participated in constructing these texts, usually appending their names to their recipes, so that the recipes and names remain to us as a form of self-representation. (31)

² Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes in “Kitchen Judaism” that another early Jewish cookbook, *Aunt Babette’s Cook Book* (1889), is not kosher but includes a note on trefa, or nonkosher food, and acknowledges kosher-keeping readers (80).

Yet we do have reason to believe that at least some of the members of the synagogue ate the food in their cookbooks. First, we have record of the menus from the many dinners that the Ladies Auxiliary hosted as fundraisers and/or as ways of welcoming or celebrating the Jews in the community. The 1919 Chanukah dinner menu, for example, includes turkey, cranberry sauce, potato salad, sausage, rolls, and coffee cake (Minutes, December 2, 1919). Notably, this very American Thanksgiving-sounding Chanukah dinner was conceived at the same time that the women supported Rabbi Koch's push for a more "Jewish" Chanukah, one that "do[es] away with the usual xmas trees and xmas gifts in the homes," includes a drive for a Community Menorah with tapers "no less radiant than the Xmas candles," and ensures that each religious school child receives a present "given at Chanukah instead of at Xmas" (Minutes, October 6, 1919). In addition, we have Mary McCarthy's memoirs, which include descriptions of two of her great aunts: Eva Aronson and Rosie Gottstein. Aunt Eva is Mrs. Sigismund Aronson, the only compiler of all three cookbooks, and Aunt Rosie is Mrs. Moses A. Gottstein, who contributed many recipes. McCarthy writes in *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* that her aunts' contributions represented their different culinary tastes and their different degrees of wealth.³

Significantly, the three editions of the Temple de Hirsch cookbook didn't become more or less kosher over time. There isn't a linear narrative of a cookbook initially honoring the laws of kashruth and then becoming more lax. Likewise, we don't have a cookbook that perhaps read as secular and became "more Jewish"—a phrase I'll dismantle later—as it became more known. It's fair to say that there are more recipes containing trefa ingredients in the 1925 edition than there are in the 1908, but there is a lot more of everything in the 1925 edition: the cookbook more than doubles its size. Given its lack of explicit interest in Jewish dietary law, given its lack of explicit support of observation and celebration, it's fair to ask if this is a Jewish cookbook at all.

Undoubtedly, some would read the Seattle cookbooks as a public story of assimilation. Writing about *Our Sisters' Recipes*, a cookbook composed by Jewish women in a Pittsburgh synagogue in 1909 and that bears a resemblance to *One Thousand Favorite Recipes* and *Famous Cook Book* in some key ways, not least in its lack of adherence to kosher dietary law, Anne L. Bower argues that "the book

3 McCarthy writes, "Aunt Rosie was poor, compared to her sisters. ... She was active in the temple as well as in the musical world. The cookbook of the Ladies' Auxiliary of the Temple de Hirsch, a volume got up for charity and much used in our family—I still own a copy—has many recipes contributed by Mrs. M.A. Gottstein. Her chicken stewed with noodles, hamburger in tomatoes, and rhubarb pie are quite unlike the recipes contributed by Mrs. S.A. Aronson, my other great-aunt, which begin with directions like this: 'Take a nice pair of sweetbreads, add a cup of butter, a glass of good cream, sherry, and some *foie gras*'" (206).

includes foods no religious Jew would eat, such as dishes mixing meat and milk and those using shellfish. Thus, the ‘Sisters’ downplay their Jewishness, recounting thereby a story of assimilation into the middle-class urban community” (38). Such a position, however, rests on a limited understanding of what it means to be a religious Jew. These *are* Jewish cookbooks. They perform life as Reform Jews at that particular moment in time.

THE TREFA AFFAIR

Food is no small matter in Judaism. Scholars identify a public argument about kashruth to be one of the main events that led to the fissure between Reform and Conservative Judaism. Known as the Trefa Affair or the Highland House Affair, the banquet was held in Cincinnati on July 11, 1883. It celebrated the first ordination class, the first ordination of rabbis on American soil, and the tenth anniversary of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, inviting more than 100 Jewish and lay leaders from Cincinnati and elsewhere. According to Jonathan Sarna, “The broadly inclusive ceremony marked ‘the high point of Jewish religious unity in America’ and symbolized [Rabbi Isaac Mayer] Wise’s long-standing goal: to lead a broad ideologically diverse coalition committed to strengthening American Judaism” (145). To almost everyone’s surprise, the menu included four forbidden foods—clams, crabs, shrimp, and frogs’ legs—and mixed meat and dairy. Some guests left in protest.

It’s unclear whether the inclusion of unkosher dishes was accidental or intentional—an unastute, but Jewish, caterer? a passive-aggressive rabbi?—but its effects were divisive. Lance Sussman calls the Trefa Banquet “Reform Judaism’s most widely known faux pas” (29) and dubs it “a cautionary tale and an object lesson for Judaism’s most liberal religious movement” (29). Sarna writes, “Symbolically, the trefa banquet separated American Jews into two opposing camps that could no longer even break bread together. The incident both anticipated and stimulated further divisions” (145). For Sussman, that the menu was pork-free is not incidental: not only did it reflect the actual eating practices of many American Jews, but “[i]t also represented a midpoint between the general compliance with traditional kashruth at public events that characterized American Reform Judaism until the 1870s and a radical break with kashruth that increasingly characterized mainstream Reform beginning in the early 1880s” (29). Sarna writes that while Reform Jews often didn’t observe kashruth, even as they continued to avoid pork,

[t]raditionalists . . . viewed the banquet as a “public insult,” particularly since [Rabbi Isaac Meyer] Wise, instead of apologizing for the gaffe, took the offensive against what he called “kitchen

Judaism” and insisted that the dietary laws had lost their validity. In so doing, he appeared to undermine the “union” which the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and Hebrew Union College had earlier pledged to uphold, and to cast his lot decisively with proponents of an exclusive strategy for Reform Judaism, concerned less with compromise for the sake of unity than with firmness for the sake of principle. (145)

On his part, Wise, then president of Hebrew Union College, would later argue that Judaism is not a “‘kitchen and stomach’ religion” (qtd. in Sussman 35).

Two years after the Trefa Affair, a group of rabbis would write what’s known as the Pittsburgh Platform, laying out the primary principles of Reform Judaism, including the rejection of all laws that they describe as “not adapted to the view and habits of modern civilization” (Sarna 149). Michael A. Meyer explains Reform Judaism’s minimization of symbol and ritual, including the consumption of nonkosher food, like this: “The prevalent view was that ceremonialism amounted to Orientalism and that casting off ceremonies better revealed the purer Judaism of faith in God and love of man that lay beneath it” (280). Disregarding kosher dietary law is something Reform Jews would have done *as* Jews, not in spite of being Jews. And those ideas would have moved west and settled into a Jewish cookbook that takes stock of the region’s bounty, draws on its contributors’ intersectional identities, and embraces a particular and considered understanding of what it means to be Jewish.

COMPOSING KITCHEN JUDAISM

In tracing the history of charitable cookbooks, Janice Bluestein Longone writes that charitable cookbooks are not limited to any particular region or faith or class but are almost always tied to women. Longone highlights that the “popularity and rapid spread of the community cookbook phenomenon might be considered a prime example of female bonding and collective civic virtue” (20). She posits, “At a time when American women were without full political civic rights and representation, they found the community cookbook one very effective way to participate in the public life of the nation” (20). They also found a way to tell their stories in print—“print culture serving as a vital and complex intermediary connecting the two domains” of domesticity and the public sphere, as Elizabeth Long puts it (xvi)—and tell a story they would likely not feel authorized to tell in more literary ways.

As Anne Ruggles Gere notes, “History or what we say about the past has to do with the present more than with what happened at another time. The

ways we think about the cultural work of women's clubs reveal more about us than about the thousands of women who inscribed themselves" within these gendered organizations (*Intimate Practices* 269). The early 20th-century Seattle cookbooks look like a story of assimilation, of choosing the secular and regional over deeper traditions of faith. But as Gere notes, that line of thinking reflects our own contemporary views about loss and assimilation and about a linearity of history. In exploring the historical, cultural, and religious "sites of writing" of these cookbooks, we gain a much richer story of the relationship between the local, regional, and national that shows how women choose, not merely lose, ways of participating in their multiple communities through food.

In the three cookbook volumes crafted by Temple de Hirsch's Auxiliary in the early 20th century, we see women contribute recipes, sign their names, make their Jewishness public, and allow their particular kind of Jewishness to circulate. The cookbooks perform daily life of Reform Jews at a specific place and time, and they do so in a way that is not only financially successful but also leaves a material and cultural legacy.

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