



## What We Ate: Repasts of the Academy's Past

**T**HE ACADEMY OF NUTRITION and Dietetics\* upcoming centennial in 2017 heralds 100 years of annual conventions and countless other meetings since the very first assemblage in Cleveland, OH, in October 1917.<sup>1</sup> Through the symposia, educational sessions, and workshops presented at these meetings, one might be able to trace the story of the evolution of food, nutrition knowledge, and dietetics. However, a smaller, seldom-investigated component of these meetings—the food that was served at these meetings—can be in itself rich with story.

These meetings were once a celebration of the food, as important and as much as a celebration of the reason the meal was being served. The early annual meetings (now called the Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo, or FNCE) were relatively intimate events—while the 1917 meeting saw the convergence of close to 100 food and nutrition



**The 2,000-guest banquet for the Fifth International Congress of Dietetics in Washington, DC, in 1969. The International Congress was held in tandem with the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' Annual Meeting, with registrants from the United States and 41 countries, representing 27 dietetic associations.**

*\*Until 2012, the Academy was called the American Dietetic Association. Throughout this article, it will be called the Academy.*

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practitioners, the number of attendees hadn't broken into the thousands until 1932.<sup>1†</sup> Thus, menus full of creative and complicated dishes were easier to produce at earlier conventions.

Consider also that travel today is far easier than it once was. Air travel did not become affordable to the masses until Congress deregulated the industry in 1978,<sup>3</sup> and often times practitioners were visiting a state or region for the very first time,<sup>‡</sup> so there was likelihood that attendees at these meetings were getting their first taste of the food of the region that housed the meeting venue. For that reason, these menus often commemorated the foods of the region, or, as was

the case during World War II, a specific event. The Allies Dinner at the 1942 Annual Meeting in Detroit, MI, for example, boasted a spread of foods to represent the Allied Nations: Russian borscht, roast prime rib of beef with Yorkshire pudding, Roseapple with horseradish crème, Chinese vegetables, South American green salad, French rolls, Canadian maple bombe, Mexican wafer, and—representing the United States—red, white, and blue fruit supreme.<sup>1</sup>

The programs of these conventions were also much shorter—simultaneous major symposia were not part of annual meeting programming until 1940<sup>1</sup>—lending more time and budget to create fanciful meals with menus that were elaborate both in concept and print. Occasionally printed as detailed booklets, these menus sometimes had artistic covers and included a narrative about the cooking style of the region or musings on the state of dietetics.

*†The annual Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo today has a typical attendance of close to 10,000 food and nutrition practitioners.<sup>2</sup>*

*‡For example, for many members, the 1939 annual meeting in Los Angeles represented their first-ever in-person glimpse of California.<sup>1</sup>*

In the interpretation of scientific facts the American Dietetic Association as well as The Home Economics Association have had a large part. This has long been recognized by the public. Dietitians, however, have been accused of planning meals with only the thought of calories, vitamins and minerals in mind. Sarcasm and wit have been directed toward the so-called balanced meal, often indicted as lacking in esthetic value and psychological appeal. It was not until 1932 when the American Dietetic Association held its convention at the Hotel Pennsylvania in New York City that it was proved to the public that this group was as keenly interested in the flavor, texture and attractive service of food as in its physiological value. "The flavor luncheon", one of the events of the meeting, was given publicity in news stories, editorials, "columns" and cartoons in newspapers with a circulation of over fifty two million. The dietitian became a gourmet in the estimation of the public!

A page from the menu booklet of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' 1936 Annual Meeting in Boston, MA, notes the evolving perception of dietitians as being concerned with palatability. Cookbooks of the era did indeed promote taste consideration. The 11th edition of *The New Cookery*, co-authored by Lenna Frances Cooper, one of the Academy's founding members and President from 1936-1937, notes, "This taboo on health grounds of a large portion of the resources relied upon by the housewife for producing palate-stimulating dishes, has necessitated the creation of new methods for producing agreeable gustatory effects, and making dishes tasty and attractive while at the same time not doing violence to the strictest canons of the biologic regime,"<sup>4</sup> while the 1930 *My New Better Homes and Gardens Cook Book* advised, "While it is of first importance to select well-balanced food, it is also important to assemble food into well-planned, well-cooked, and attractively served meals."<sup>5</sup> Among the publicity for the flavor luncheon mentioned in this booklet page was a blurb in the November 18, 1932, edition of the New York newspaper *Geneva Daily Times*. It opened with the histrionic commentary that readers should not "shudder" that dietitians had a new campaign within their "propaganda" but concluded that "Nature was all wrong, and when she put flavors in foodstuffs, she put in the wrong ones. But scientists have been learning that nature really knew something, after all, and where you find a fine flavor, you are likely to find vitamins or mineral salts or something your system needs. When the dietitians go beyond that blessed discovery and undertake to do a little constructive flavoring themselves, more power to them!"<sup>6</sup>

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