

## From the Jewish Heartland: Two Centuries of Midwest Foodways

Ellen F. Steinberg and Jack H. Prost  
(Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011.  
207 p. Cloth, \$32.95.)



Studies of cuisine—with whom one eats, what one eats, how and where foods are prepared and served, and how recipes change due to geography and over time—have long been research staples in the fields of anthropology, religious studies, history, and folklore.

The authors of *From the Jewish Heartland* are well prepared to tell this tale. Ellen F. Steinberg is a Chicago-based cookbook author and anthropologist, and Jack Prost is an associate professor of anthropology at the University of Illinois, Chicago, whose area of interest encompasses cuisine and food taboos. Together they have written an easily accessible book on midwestern Jewish foodways.

Their goal was to “explore the state, shape, change, and evolution of Midwestern Jewish cuisine over time,” and they define the Heartland as Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Their modus operandi was to gather recipes, both published and handwritten, and interview not only Jewish women and men about home-kitchen cuisine but also bakery and delicatessen owners.

The book is clearly structured. Chapters one through four cover when and where in the Midwest Jews lived and cooked and, given midwestern produce, how cuisine changed over time. The general topics of immigration and settlement are interspersed with tales of specific men and women and what they ate.

Chapters five through seven explore related topics, such as the role of settlement houses in teaching immigrant women American ways of cooking, the persistence of traditional food preparation for holidays, and the role of Jewish bakeries and delicatessens in preparing and selling traditional foods and in satisfying newer tastes, such as chocolate-chip cheesecake.

They end with a chapter on trends in Jewish ethnic cooking. Here, they note that there is a culinary bifurcation, with traditional foods being cooked for Jewish holidays and “healthier” eating prevailing during daily life.

Using a cook’s analogy, the book can be compared to a stew. There are chunks of general information about mass immigration peppered with stories of individuals and further seasoned with an analysis of the recipes. The authors shine here because of their detailed knowledge of culinary

techniques. For example, they tie usage of particular spices to distinct European locations. They knowledgeably discuss what produce was grown in the local garden and what was bought, as well as how local produce effected changes in ethnic recipes. They also have a deep knowledge of American canning and cooking techniques. Their joy in playing culinary detective is transmitted to the reader.

A few quibbles: The authors do not mention the role of flour mills such as Pillsbury and Washburn-Crosby in reaching out to newly arrived Jews by printing recipe books in Yiddish, nor do they discuss how newer products such as hydrogenated vegetable oil (Spry and Crisco) lessened reliance on goose or chicken fat and opened up new recipe possibilities. Then, too, there is a fair amount of conjecture. “We imagine that” and “probably” are used frequently when hard evidence is lacking. Finally, the book would have benefited from closer proofreading.

The volume, nevertheless, is a joy to read. The authors are never stuffy. They have a charming way of incorporating recipes as a vital part of the larger story of immigration and acculturation. Their familiarity with bygone cooking techniques is impressive. Who knew, for example, that grape catsup was so popular in the 1890s?

Minnesota readers will find much of local interest because the authors spent considerable time gathering material in relevant archives. They also interviewed people such as master cook Etheldoris Grais, who grew up in Hibbing and learned culinary techniques from every ethnic group she encountered there and in her worldwide travels. Included also are many of her recipes as well as those of St. Paulite Esther Schechter.

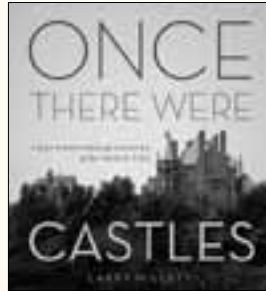
*Reviewed by Linda Mack Schloff, who holds a PhD in American history and is emeritus director of the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest. Her books, “And Prairie Dogs Weren’t Kosher”: Jewish Women in the Upper Midwest Since 1855 (1996) and Jews in Minnesota (2002), coauthored with Hyman Berman, were published by the Minnesota Historical Society Press.*

**Once There Were Castles: Lost Mansions and Estates of the Twin Cities**

**Larry Millett**

*(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011. 363 p. Cloth, \$39.95.)*

Twenty years ago, Larry Millett tapped into a deep vein of interest in vanished buildings and streetscapes with his enormously popular and critically acclaimed *Lost Twin Cities*. Its release came as the local historic preservation movement was hitting its stride, determined to slow the heedless destruction of the historic buildings, some grand, some modest, that make up the fabric of our cultural heritage. The book spawned Twin Cities Public Television’s most popular documentaries ever, *Lost Twin Cities I* and *II*. In December 2011 *Lost Twin Cities III* debuted.



Capitalizing on this demonstrated interest, Millett’s latest foray into lost Twin Cities’ buildings, *Once There Were Castles*, focuses on a single type: mansions and estates. If *LTC* was a full-course meal, *Castles* is dessert.

The artwork is the star in this coffee table-sized volume, which is arranged by neighborhoods within each city. A number of the 90-plus lost mansions and estates (of the 500 that can be accounted for in public records) were also covered in *LTC*. Photographs of mansion exteriors and interiors, befitting their stature, sprawl luxuriously across full-page and even double-page spreads. Aerial views of grounds and city blocks allow the reader to visualize the homes in comparison to their neighbors or see a forlorn survivor surrounded by downtown commercial expansion. Before public or automobile transportation were widespread, there were even a few estates—mansions surrounded by at least 100 acres—located within city limits, including William Washburn’s Fair Oaks, now the site of Fair Oaks Park across from the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and Oliver Crosby’s Stonebridge estate on East River Road in St. Paul.

Not only individual homes but entire mansion districts have disappeared. St. Paul’s Lowertown, now known for its railroads and warehouses, was once the abode of James J. Hill and Henry Sibley. Today’s State Capitol complex was once the gracious Capitol Heights neighborhood, centered on Central Park, now the site of a parking ramp. Foreclosures and teardowns, we learn, are nothing new. Some of today’s fine homes on Summit Avenue, the premiere intact mansion district in the Twin Cities, stand on the sites of earlier mansions.

“Mansions of exceptional size that evoke a highly personal dream often do not last long once their moving spirit dies,” Millett writes. It can be shocking to see how short were the lives of so many of the mansions after so much money and care was put into their construction. The premiere example, perhaps, was the four-story, Renaissance palace-inspired Charles G. Gates House on East Lake of the Isles Parkway. At 38,000 square feet, Millett says, “none was larger or in the end more spectacularly pointless.” While the house was still under construction in 1913, Gates suffered a fatal heart attack on his private rail car while hunting in Wyoming with the Prince of Monaco and Buffalo Bill Cody. His widow lived in the house for just a few years; it was torn down in 1933.

Stories of owners of mansions are especially fascinating, Millett writes, if only because they are “founded on twin American obsessions of money and status.” Millett is also author of six mystery novels, and the tales told here utilize his mastery of fiction and nonfiction writing to artfully tell the personal and architectural tales of lost mansions. The flowing narratives are leavened, perhaps too generously, with asides that leave the reader unsure as to whether they are fanciful prose flourishes or historical fact. An example is when the son-in-law of Amherst Wilder, Dr. T. E. W. Williers-Appleby, is described as “an elegant but dubious character whose name was perhaps more impressive than his medical credentials.” The text and notes do not elucidate further.

“Their likes will never be seen again,” Millett declares of these vanished French Second Empire, Richardson Romanesque, and Queen Anne monuments to wealth and status. Through the stunning photos and artful prose of *Once There Were Castles*, they live again, if only in two dimensions.

*Laura Weber, a writer and independent historian living in Minneapolis, is a board member of the Minnesota Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians and the winner of its David Gebhard award for “Wins and Losses: The National Register of Historic Places in Minnesota” (Minnesota History, Fall 1997).*



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