

Eating Out

Non-cooking brides in the early forties had to learn to balance food stamps as well as learn how to deal with their food budgets.

When Paul and I were married in June, 1943, my kitchen experience was limited to making soupy fudge, frying bacon and eggs, and opening cans. I didn't think fudge should be first in the order of healthy food for a young couple; not only that, there was the matter of ration stamps, of which there were not many for sugar. Bacon demanded meat stamps, and, while the stamps for canned vegetables were a bit more generous, I feared it would be difficult *and* boring to get all our vegetables from cans. At the same time, I found that the Pacific Northwest had bounteous supplies of fresh fish and seafoods, along with wonderful market sources of fresh vegetables especially carrots. I set about trying to learn more about the possibilities of marketing and cooking in my new home.

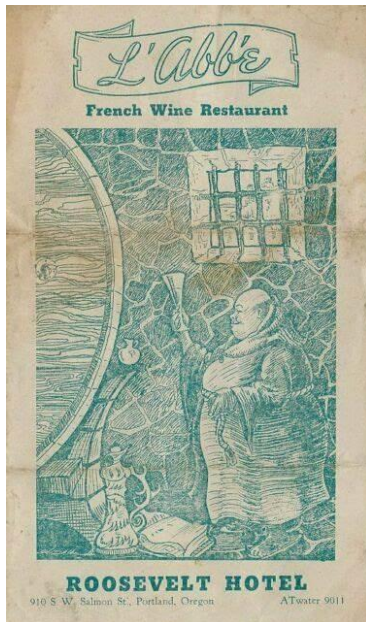
I talked to Paul's former landlady, an outgoing Scottish woman who had spent most of her growing-up days on a farm with a big family in eastern Oregon. She had adapted to a smaller family when she left home to be married and further had been able to think in somewhat smaller quantities now that her children had grown up and left home. She was a big help, but I soon found more compatible advice from the wives of Paul's colleagues. I also spent time in the public library in the cookbook section, reading avidly and copying many recipes that appeared to cater to small families in wartime.

At one time, I had a pack of 3" x 5" cards with about a hundred different ways to prepare carrots, and other vegetables and meats, too. Some I tried once before discarding the recipe; some I kept and still use occasionally. I learned how to deal with some fresh fish and seafood, notably blue crabs, shrimp, smelts, and, best of all, fresh salmon. Mostly I could find crabs and shrimp in the downtown market, already prepared. The salmon was rather expensive, even then, and I had to remind myself that I had a limited budget for the really good stuff. Mostly, we got along famously with my learning how to cook in the Pacific Northwest during the time of war. Occasionally we found that we could afford to dine out in some of the Portland restaurants.

One unforgettable seafood house was down on the Willamette River. When we reached it after dark (Portland had limited outside lighting because of its nearness to the Pacific Coast), I was not impressed at all with the makeshift appearance of the exterior. The *interior* was something else, and the food was memorable. We had a bowl of oyster stew made with tiny Olympia oysters, each smaller than my little fingernail. And they were so good. The shrimp we had in several guises were no larger than the oysters and tasted even sweeter and better than the oysters had. This evening was a true extravagance for our anniversary, and we never returned. But the memories of the tastes survive.

We found another restaurant to which we went several times, alone and with friends. It was L'Abbe', in the Roosevelt Hotel in downtown Portland. Its menu declared it to be a

"French Wine Restaurant." And, indeed, it had a modest list of wines by the glass, the small bottle, or the large bottle. For example, you could have a glass of California dry sherry for twenty cents, or a small bottle of Beaulieu Vineyard Chablis for eighty cents, or a large bottle for a dollar thirty-five. The wine list was followed by the usual wartime disclaimer that the prices did not exceed the highest prices from April 3, 1943, to April 18, 1943, reminding us of the Office of Price Administration regulations of the time.



The dinner menu started with your choice of a glass of vermouth, sauterne, or Hawaiian wine or grapefruit juice, as part of the price of the meal, with a seafood cocktail fifteen cents extra. A tureen of the soup du jour was included in the price of the meal. The entrees ranged from Lobster Thermidor for two dollars, to a Filet of Chinook Salmon with Parsley Butter for a dollar ten cents, with Roast Sirloin of Beef with Brown Gravy for a dollar thirty-five cents. The remainder of the dinner listed a chef's salad, potatoes, and vegetable, with ice cream, sherbet, or pie for dessert. Beverage choice included coffee, tea, milk, or buttermilk. Another disclaimer stated "Your favorite dish may not always be available. But c'est la Guerre."

Needless to say, L'Abbe' was the first thought when our food stamps were low, and the cost of the meal would generally fit within our modest budgets. It was a great place to spend an evening with friends. In addition, the French Maitre'd generally addressed Paul as Monsieur Man-Tonn'. That didn't hurt, either.