



2019

Pickles and Pastrami: The Core of the American Jew

Theo Satloff
Colby College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/honorstheses>



Part of the [Science and Technology Studies Commons](#), and the [Social History Commons](#)

Colby College theses are protected by copyright. They may be viewed or downloaded from this site for the purposes of research and scholarship. Reproduction or distribution for commercial purposes is prohibited without written permission of the author.

Recommended Citation

Satloff, Theo, "Pickles and Pastrami: The Core of the American Jew" (2019). *Honors Theses*. Paper 930.
<https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/honorstheses/930>

This Honors Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Colby.

Honors Thesis
Science, Technology and Society Program
Colby College

Pickles and Pastrami: The Core of the American Jew

By Theodore Satloff

Advisor: James Fleming
Second Reader: Lisa Noble

May 2019

Pickles and Pastrami

Copyright © 2019 by the Science, Technology and Society Program, Colby College.
All rights reserved.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Chapter 1 – A Background in Being Jewish</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Chapter 2 – Migration.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Chapter 3 – Who, What, When?</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Chapter 4 – The Origin of Deli.....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Chapter 5 – The Distinction of Jewish Food.....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Chapter 6 – What is Refrigeration All About?</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Chapter 7 – The Modern Day.....</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>Chapter 8 – What Does it All Mean?</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Appendix – Acknowledgements.....</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Appendix – Literature Review.....</i>	<i>58</i>
<i>Appendix – Bibliography</i>	<i>66</i>

Pickles and Pastrami

PREFACE

Dear Reader,

My overarching intent in researching and writing about the Jewish deli is to help preserve its legacy. The history of the Judaism within the United States, as well as the broader influence of the Jews on it, has been extraordinary... and deli is one small, often overlooked aspect of that history. My hope is that by reading this thesis, you too will understand the importance of deli in not only the lives of Jewish Americans, but also those of all Americans. This paper is designed to be read and understood by everyone, so I implore you to understand, share, and spread this knowledge.

Sincerely,

Theo

Pickles and Pastrami

CHAPTER 1 – A BACKGROUND IN BEING JEWISH

“After a good dinner one can forgive anybody, even one's own relations,” writes the anti-Semite Oscar Wilde in his work, *A Woman of No Importance*. For as long as humanity has existed, food has remained a vital and central part of the evolution of communities. Our bodies are designed to release hormones when we eat food, quite literally encouraging us to love food and to be happy when we eat. When one is the living exemplar of death after a tumultuous day, food resuscitates them; when one is sick with a cold or the flu, food revives them. For centuries, humankind has even held holidays, events, and ceremonies based entirely around food. But of course, food is not something new, nor is it something revolutionary. While new technologies have altered humans’ relationship with food, for eons, food and the amalgamation of processes that surrounds the act of eating had hardly changed over the course of homo sapiens’ existence. But what *has* changed is the manner in which we have existed beyond simply the food we eat. New dialects, cultures, races, and religions have all formed and evolved; some have survived the test of time, others have died out.

Dating back to my earliest memories, the food of New York City has played an extremely influential role in my life and development. Not until much later did I begin to understand this heritage as something distinctly Jewish; more so, distinctly *New York* Jewish. Walking into a corner bodega and finding a box of freshly baked rugelach (a bite sized rolled sweet baked good, often filled with chocolates or preserves), wandering into a smoke shop and finding bagels for sale, or buying chicken soup or potato latkes, proudly made with schmaltz (rendered chicken fat) from a generic super market were small and constant reminders that

Pickles and Pastrami

I was home. More than that, these are all reminders that this distinctly Jewish heritage is shared among an extremely diverse populace. This heritage is not unique to me. The attributes which are at the core of Judaism – charity, education, and family – that have been passed from Jewish generation to Jewish generation have become interwoven into the fabric of New York City. So too has the food.



Figure 1: Zabar's in NYC swamped with shoppers at the deli counter. *Source: Grubstreet*

If you go to a New York Knicks game at Madison Square Garden, you can buy a hamburger, popcorn... or a knish. If you walk through Central Park, you'll see dozens of

vendors selling hot dogs, pretzels... and knishes. A knish is just about as Jewish as it gets; an envelope of pastry filled with mashed potatoes and onions with its origins dating back to both Central and Eastern European Jews. Some even sell the more traditional kasha knishes (kasha is a dough made of buckwheat groats). Why is the knish still sold by some of the most generic fixtures of New York? For a long time, I was not able verbalize what it was about New York Jewish food that had been so influential in my life. It really wasn't until I began speaking with Jews of similar backgrounds to mine that I was able to understand the twists and folds that make up the intricacies of my own being.

The storied history of the Jew signifies an ongoing struggle between identity and acceptance. Perhaps through cultural dominance, or perhaps through assimilation, the American Jew has become an influential and necessary fixture of American society. The delicatessen, or simply 'deli,' is perhaps the most notable of these fixtures as it exudes a keen and unwavering respect for tradition, while valuing and understanding a need for continued, forward-looking progress. Deli represents the beautiful crossover between a society of years long ago with a rapidly-modernizing culture, rich with innovation. Deli serves as the bedrock, built on the mouths and gullets of generations of Jews, on which American life and politics have been inescapably altered. The survival of the deli, in a romantic sense, signifies the ongoing survival and perseverance of the Jew.

Growing up on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, I was constantly surrounded by and subjected to a unique and special culture that prided itself on good food, snarky banter, and backhanded kindness. Walking down Broadway, there is a never-ending stream of traffic, not from cars, but from wig-adorned, elderly Jewish women pushing well-used, folding

Pickles and Pastrami

grocery carts. 12:00pm on Broadway is no time to go for lunch; to go one measly block one must wade through a sea of these elderly women, all trying to gain entry to the same three supermarkets. Hundreds (who are so vocal, they may as well be thousands) push and shove to get to the same place, at the same time, to buy the same products. People who at one moment are gentle, kind, and courteous, at the next moment are scary and formidable. “Give me three bialys and a half-pound of lox!” one might demand from a counterworker; “No not that one! Not that one either!! Stop giving me the dreck, *farshteyst*¹!” These are mothers, grandmothers, and in some cases even great grandmothers; not now, and not ever will they be taken advantage of. This is a call back to Jews in America of years past; eastern European immigrants in the 1920s on the Lower East Side of Manhattan would have seen a similar sight to what I witness on the Upper West Side today (fig 2). Fairway Market’s open, street-side produce mimics the stalls upon stalls of the open-air vendors selling fish, apples, and bread in the 1920s Essex Street Market (fig 3). Nothing has changed; the elderly women who battle over smoked fish are the same elderly women who argued over the number of knots in their challah nearly a hundred years earlier. Watching this daily migration has been extremely formative for both my understanding of food, but also my understanding of the Jewish relationship with food.

¹ Literally, “do you understand?” in Yiddish



Figure 2: Fairway Market on the Upper West Side in 2019. *Source: Chain Store Age*



Figure 3: Lower East Side Jewish street market in 1926. Not too dissimilar from scene on Broadway today. *Source: Bettmann Archives*

Herein, I investigate a specific case study of a populace that has had a long and storied relationship with food; the Jews. Beyond that, this case study is magnified to inspect the modern incarnation of this group as they have endured some of the toughest tests on record within the collective human memory and recorded history. Beyond researching the millennia-old history of the Jews, and their relationship to food, I explore the more modern incarnation of Judaism within the United States, and how the transplanting of Judaism and Jews to a new land spawned the creation of a wholly new community based around food. By focusing on the present, I trace a specific incarnation of Jewish food, specifically that of Ashkenazi descent. The vast majority of Jewish immigrants into the United States during the late 19th, and early 20th century was of Eastern European descent; more specifically, they were descendants of a tribe of Judaism that formed in what is now Western Germany and Northern France during the middle ages². By investigating the remnants of times long ago, I review three themes. First, I propose that newfound prosperity within the Jewish community in America led to the countrywide acceptance of modern technologies and sanitation practices that were created by and for the new Jewish delicatessens and eateries of America. Second, I explore the role that moving to a new land had on the gastronomic side of Judaism and its influence on Gentile-American diets through mainstream popularization via theater and comedy. Third, I examine the social role that the Jewish eateries had on the overall Jewish community, as well as the surrounding communities with which Jewish eateries had a direct relationship.

² Ben-Sasson, Hillel Haim

CHAPTER 2 – MIGRATION

As a foundation for what will become the balance of this exploration, I uncover a brief history of the emigration of Jews from a land of persecution, to one of seeming prosperity. The United States experienced two great waves of Jewish immigration before the start of the 20th century. Fleeing terrible persecution in Eastern Europe and in Russia's satellite countries, over two million Jews came to the United States seeking both political freedom as well as economic freedom. Prior to 1840, the Jewish population in the US topped out at roughly 15,000. The year 1880 represented the pinnacle of Jewish immigration, with 300,000 refugees passing through American immigration centers. Diaspora communities within Eastern Europe were no longer hospitable to the Jews; lands that were once tolerable, were now infected with repeated pogroms.³ This not only represented an enormous change in the makeup of Jews in the US, but also began a dramatic shift in the cultural fabric of American life. Nearly a century earlier, a wave of German-Jewish immigrants came to the United States, and it was these less-religious immigrants who became the merchant pioneers, many of whom ventured west. Unlike the later wave of immigrants, these Jews were extremely open to adopting many of the cultures and identities that were quintessentially American. These two waves of immigration, however, are linked. As an unintended consequence, the tenacity and success of these early German-Jewish immigrants paved the way for the Eastern European Jews to come to America. This path was so solid that many

³ *Johnson, Paul*

Pickles and Pastrami

other cultures latched on and rode the wave of Jewish success. A Japanese couple, who emigrated to the United States from Japan during the peak of anti-Japanese sentiment, were able to beat adversity and open and operate a Jewish-style deli in Chicago. The opportunity and economic freedom that new Jewish migrants sought was indeed here, despite the real perils of anti-Semitism that not only predated their arrival but continues long past.



Figure 4: Two Japanese deli owners in Chicago slicing lox during the 1940s. *Source: Bettmann Archives*

The heightened rate of European Jewish immigration caused an enormous amount of fear within older American communities. Americans feared for their jobs, homes, and safety. During the early 1900s, the perceived terror of the Jews peaked, leading to the rise of the Immigration Restriction League (IRL) and Dillingham Commission, primarily out of nation's widespread the nativist sentiment. The IRL was founded out of pure, anti-Semitic thought;

the Jews were an inferior race.⁴ Founded by three formerly distinguished Harvard alumni from different fields, the goal was to bar the entry of hopeful, Jewish immigrants on the basis that with new Jewish immigrants would come poverty and an increased rate of unemployment. The Dillingham Commission, while less openly anti-Semitic, was even more frightening. The Dillingham Commission was a bipartisan special committee, formed by the US Congress, tasked with evaluating the consequences of Southern and Eastern European immigration. The hypothesis for this commission was that Southern and Eastern European immigrants were an enormous threat to American society; this analysis led to the *Immigration Reduction Act of 1920*, and the *Emergency Quota Act of 1921*. For the first time, Jews escaping real threats in their homelands were actively barred entry and deemed a threat to the country where they wished to resettle and to establish jobs and new lives – solely because of their culture. American trade unions feared the most, as these new settlers were willing to work for pennies on the dollar, compared with incumbent workers. Unions had such an influential and impactful voice that they were able to compel the government to institute a quota in 1921 that restricted the number of Jewish immigrants allowed through US borders. This policy was cemented for the following 40 years with the introduction of the Immigration Act of 1924. However, through hardships often come great results. As a means of preserving their identity, and surviving a threatening new land, the Jews of American congregated around a mutual shared identity; the Jewish American.

⁴ *Immigration Restriction League Constitution*

Scholars analyzing the academic achievements of Asian students have remarked that early education is the key to economic prosperity, even in the face of adversity.⁵ Jewish tradition requires that a boy be able to read the Torah before age 13; this imbues an educational tradition within Jewish households. As such, male literacy in the Jewish community had been established perhaps 1,700 years prior to any other group on Earth.⁶ When speaking about his experience with Jewish food, Jake Dell, owner of Katz' Deli, a New York City institution, took a pause to say, "it all comes back to an emphasis on scholarship." This teaching is as entrenched in religious Jewish households as are kosher dietary laws. Could it be that early numeracy and literacy made immigrant Jews better at the trading and commerce required to set up shop in the New World? Could it be that adherence to Talmudic teachings of cleanliness and ritual handwashing kept the Jews alive and prosperous during times of plague (while at the same time being named scapegoats for it)?⁷ Perhaps, but it is a certainty that scholarship is one of the key values that has managed to maintain its place within the descendants of Judaism, even when other traits have become underemphasized or totally lost.

Perhaps it was the religious guideline of fairness in trading, which among the Native Americans was a refreshing change from what they had experienced in their recent past with Americans⁸. Jews developed a reputation for fair-dealings with both the American and Native American populations. Maybe it was this openness or adaptability that allowed for these

⁵ *Lee, Jennifer*

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ *McNeil, Donald G.*

⁸ *Miller, Yvette Alt*

early Jewish immigrants to rise from a low and impoverished class to one of respect and success, not only in the ports of immigration, but throughout the westward expansion, of which the Jews took part in surprising numbers.

During the 1930s there were over 1,500 Jewish delis in New York City, whereas today there are fewer than 20 that remain.⁹ Sam Brummer, famed owner of Hobby's deli in Newark, New Jersey recounts his memory of seeing the Statue of Liberty for the first time during the 1930s and "knowing [he] was going to make it here."¹⁰ Brummer speaks joyfully and thankfully of his asylum in the US claiming that "those days in Poland... the anti-Semitism was unbearable,"¹¹ but here in US he was able to achieve success. The 1930s solidified New York as a home for the Jew. The tenements on Essex Street in New York's Lower East Side, while cramped, unsanitary, and in some cases inhumane, became the de facto home to Jewish migrants. Shops with merchandise spanning from pickles to Judaica lined the streets. Jewish life in New York during the '30s was at an all-time high; Yiddish theater was becoming a mainstay on 2nd Avenue, the demand for garments produced in the garment district was growing, and the perception of the deli moved from cheap to gourmet.

⁹ *Nathan, Joan*

¹⁰ *Mazzola, Jessica*

¹¹ *Deli-Man*

Pickles and Pastrami



Figure 5: 1940s Kosher deli on Essex street. *Source: Bettmann Archives*

CHAPTER 3 – WHO, WHAT, WHEN?

New York has long been the epicenter of American Jewish culture, but beyond that, New York gave rise to an incredible and indelible marketing machine that popularized the culture that surrounded Judaism. For the size of the population of Jewish residents in the United States, Deli has had an outsized impact on so many facets of American cultural life, perhaps the greatest early influence was that of entertainment. The American Jewish sensibility, which lends itself to a unique concoction of theatrics and self-deprecation¹², gave rise to a plethora of entertainment facets ranging early Yiddish theater to American comedy. The characters that make up each of these groups have had an outspoken and notable fondness for the food produced by deli, and the role that deli has played in their careers.

Dating back to the late 1880s, Yiddish theater became a staple of the New York entertainment world. An 1883 Russian ban on Yiddish theater drove performers from eastern and western Europe to New York, and with them came an appetite. In 1903, the Grand Theatre was built, becoming the first Yiddish theater in New York, and demarcating what became known as the Yiddish Theatre District.¹³ This district became known for more than just theater, hosting Jewish music stores, photography studios, flower shops, and community restaurants.¹⁴ The most well-known and frequented of these eateries was an establishment on Second Avenue and East 12th Street, known as Café Royal. Café Royal is a unique addition to this list of New York's Jewish eateries; having opened in 1908, it predates

¹² Davies, Christie

¹³ Wolfson, CK

¹⁴ Loeffler, James Benjamin

Pickles and Pastrami

the Jewish deli as we know it today. Instead, the café, “a former mecca for Jewish intellectuals and artists,”¹⁵ was a deli masquerading as a coffee shop¹⁶. Actors, singers, and artists would frequent the Café weekly, roaming from table to table to check in with friends, or to find new roles.¹⁷ Café Royal became the epicenter of the Jewish entertainment world, where “everybody who is anybody in the Jewish creative world” would go. For the first time in American Jewish history, an eatery became a unified “second home” for the community.¹⁸



Figure 6: Cafè Royal in 1938. *Source: Carl Van Vechten*

Those who frequented Café Royal gave birth to a wholly new theme of American entertainment: Jewish-American comedy. During the summers in the early-mid 20th century,

¹⁵ Simonson, Robert

¹⁶ Belarsky, Isabel

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Mapping Yiddish New York

the Catskill Mountains became a transplanted home for many of New York's Jewish elite, offering summer vacation camps. Regular evening performers of these camps were expatriates from Yiddish theater, Jewish comedians – this circuit of camps became affectionally known as the Borscht Belt (Borscht, an eastern European beet soup, became frequently associated with Jewish immigrants). A comedian who was a habitu  on the Borscht Belt was on the fast track to fame.¹⁹ Sid Caesar, Carl Reiner, Mel Brooks, Rodney Dangerfield, and Jerry Lewis are all among the Borscht Belt's alumni. As their popularity rose, so too did their venues; having a set on Broadway was a big step from a Catskills camp. New home turf meant a new home base was needed. Harpo Marx of the Marx Brothers, claimed that performing on "Broadway was a special thrill because, while in New York, he had 'two homes-away-from-home, Lindy's or Reuben's.'"²⁰ In a deli, Marx was home; he was "back with [his] own people, who spoke [his] language, with [his] accent."²¹ Lindy's, Stage, and Carnegie delis became the comedy alternates to Caf  Royal; they were homes away from home.

¹⁹ Epstein, Lawrence J.

²⁰ Robinson, Avery

²¹ Ibid.



Figure 7: Lindy's Deli Postcard. *Source: Wikipedia*

The sense of community within the Jewish entertainment industry was ever increasing. In 1954, Abe Lebewohl, a holocaust survivor, opened Second Avenue Deli well after the golden-years of Yiddish theater, yet his deli thrived. Comedians and producers, along with Yiddish theater performers of years past congregated at the Second Avenue Deli. For a generation of Jewish entertainers, Deli was a safe and comfortable place conducive to friendship, fraternity, and business. In large part due to their popularity and fame, entertainers helped transform deli from a staple of fast food, to one of upscale relevance.

CHAPTER 4 – THE ORIGIN OF DELI

There are as many opinions about the origin of the word ‘delicatessen’ as there are styles of sandwiches available in a modern, Jewish deli. The unifying features of these opinions, however, are that the original loan word from both Italian and French was a derivation of the Latin *delicatus*, or pleasing.²² The German verb *essen* means to eat. Combine the two, and there you have it, ‘delicatessen.’ So what does ‘delicatessen’ have to do with the American deli anyway?

According to Ziggy Gruber, third generation deli-man, the connection is all in “the old country. You can taste the diaspora.”²³ Like many migrant groups, the ‘Old Country’ refers to a place of ancestral origin. To Ashkenazi American Jews, the Old Country is a connection to both love and laughter, and pain and suffering; from *shtetls*²⁴ to buggies and from sewing to farming, the Old Country is a unifying concept for many, if not most, American Jews. But the origin of the word is merely one small piece of the meaning of the Jewish deli (or solely, ‘deli’ as true aficionados would say). Deli is truly about the experience and function they play; the food of deli is undeniably rich and layered, while at the same time simple and plain. Foods such as chopped liver can be made delicious with as few as five ingredients yet can take on complex notes and flavors that would normally be reserved for ingredient intensive meals. Dishes perfume garlic, meat, fat, and rye; powerful flavors that on their own are enough to

²² American Heritage Dictionary

²³ *Lakshmanan, Indira*

²⁴ A small Eastern European Jewish town.

Pickles and Pastrami

overpower almost any dish, yet with deli, they form the basis for a sort of religious experience.²⁵²⁶

The phenomenon of Jewish delicatessens was not solely a feature of New York City, although as the main point of entry and settlement for waves of Jewish immigrants, the City became its epicenter. For a period of time, Jewish delis could not exist far from their sources of products, which were indeed located in and around New York City. However it was the innovation of refrigeration technology that made it possible for delis and Jews to migrate across the United States. Yes, it is the deli case and the technology therein that actually made it possible for the mass, western migration of the late 1800s and early 1900s. As curious as it sounds, the basis for such an assertion is fairly straightforward. Locales such as Dallas, Denver, Santa Fe, and even Las Vegas, were fairly inhospitable for those who wanted to eat only kosher foods. With their hot and arid climates, refrigeration would be a precondition for serving Jewish settlers. The demand for cooling was not for physical comfort, but to comply with meat-packing and food storage and handling rules that were mandated by *kashruth*²⁷. The earliest Jewish settlers in the American west were predominantly those who had arrived early in the 19th century from Germany and were not necessarily strict adherents to kosher laws. As a result, early settlers in the west that set up shop as drygoods merchants (ultimately founding a great many department stores) were able to survive and thrive. Large numbers of other Jewish immigrants who had arrived on American shores at the end of the 19th century could not practically live in these areas; these immigrants were far more

²⁶ Lakshmanan, Indira.

²⁷ The rules of keeping kosher

obedient to Jewish dietary laws and the technology to produce, transport, and store foods with the sanitary guidelines dictated by Jewish law, was in its infancy (and existed predominantly on the East Coast).

Deli represented the intersection of centuries-old technologies and modern innovations, and the meeting of centuries-old cultures and new communities, which formed the basis for a force that would have an outsized impact on American life and politics thereafter. Socially, Jewish eateries in both cities and on the plains, became centers of social and commercial life. Centers of population and activity likewise required places to eat, and many with still-strong memories of Germany or Prussia longed for tastes of the homes they left behind. For the first time in American history, the Jews were making a home. The new arrival of Jews was making its mark; new types of prepared foods, breads, culture, comedy, and theater were all now permanent staples of New York culture.

CHAPTER 5 – THE DISTINCTION OF JEWISH FOOD

The number of different cuisines around the world is surely uncountable, however there are many factors that are in common with each. Perhaps most notable and compelling are the histories of each culture's cuisine, which is in turn a history of that culture. The basis of Jewish food's distinction has some fairly specific origins, all of which have contributed to the cuisine's development. Understanding this distinction is essential to appreciate the delicatessen's influence on technology and society. Three main influences have had the largest impact on Jewish cultural and food life: the Bible and Talmud, Shabbat and Passover, and Jewish migration.

What is likely the most prescriptive set of food guidelines ever articulated prior to modern times, is Leviticus, chapter 11. It is this chapter of the Old Testament that lays out what foods may and may not be eaten (for Jews/Israelites).

“The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Say to the Israelites: ‘Of all the animals that live on land, these are the ones you may eat: You may eat any animal that has a divided hoof and that chews the cud.’ ”

“ ‘There are some that only chew the cud or only have a divided hoof, but you must not eat them. The camel, though it chews the cud, does not have a divided hoof; it is ceremonially unclean for you. The hyrax, though it chews the cud, does not have a divided hoof; it is unclean for

you. The rabbit, though it chews the cud, does not have a divided hoof; it is unclean for you. And the pig, though it has a divided hoof, does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you. You must not eat their meat or touch their carcasses; they are unclean for you.' ”

After looking up the curiosity of the hyrax, a small herbivorous mammal, and then returning to the biblical text, it is abundantly clear that the theme of these restrictions is to prevent someone from becoming 'unclean.' Many more verses continue after this one, addressing which fish, birds, and even insects are off-limits. Again, all of the restrictions end with the conclusion that eating them, or even touching their carcasses, will make one unclean. So profound is this warning that if a pot or utensil is used to cook a prohibited item, that pot or utensil can now not be used even to prepare even a permitted foodstuff. For some cooking vessels, they can be made clean, or *kashered* (or koshered) through *toveling*, or dipping goods into a boiling cauldron, saying a blessing, and waiting. Pots too large to be submerged can be koshered by placing a heated rock into the pot, causing the boiling water to spill out and over its sides. For other vessels, there is no salvaging. Typically, this level of sanitation or cleaning is reserved for Passover, although strictly kosher households will kosher their cookware with some regularity.

A streamlined version of what foods are permitted in Leviticus 11 is presented later, in Deuteronomy 14 (the Old Testament has a number of sections that are repeated in the later books; perhaps this is reserved for the most important tenets that the reader is supposed to remember). However, this compressed set of restrictions adds one more

Pickles and Pastrami

restriction, which is that Jews should not “cook a young goat in its mother’s milk.” It is this dictum that forms the basis for separating meat and milk in both consumption and in food preparation.



Figure 8: Kashering dishes for Passover. *Source: Flickr - Avital Pinnick*

This overall concept of cleanliness is said to have had its roots in the early Jewish community’s knowledge of health and the value of maintaining a healthy population. Lack of refrigeration and unsanitary food storage made pork and shellfish particularly dangerous. Jewish sensibilities about what was healthy and what was not, combined with the ritual of hand-washing for many religious services, often conferred the benefit of health from animal-borne or contact-transmitted illnesses. The concept of cleanliness was more than about being clean, it was about survival. My own great-grandfather was born in Coney Island, New

York, in 1899. According to family lore, from when he was a boy, all the way through my own father's childhood, my great-grandfather insisted on eating at only kosher delicatessens in New York City. What was curious is that he did not keep a kosher home with his wife. When asked by my father why he insisted on kosher delicatessens, forsaking all others, the reason he gave was simply that kosher did not only mean abiding by certain religious, food content rules, it also meant that the establishment was sanitary. This expectation of a sanitary environment drove and continues to drive the technologies used in Jewish delicatessens (although such influence has moved beyond solely the kosher establishments).

CHAPTER 6 – WHAT IS REFRIGERATION ALL ABOUT?

Benjamin Franklin is often quoted as saying that beer is proof that God wants us to be happy²⁸. It was not only happiness that beer brought to the United States; Americans' love for beer drove a great number of innovations as well, notably, and in concert with the rise of the delicatessen, was refrigeration. "Brewing was the first activity in the United States to use mechanical refrigeration extensively, beginning with an absorption machine used by S. Liebmann's Sons Brewing Company in Brooklyn, New York in 1870,"²⁹ and was joined almost immediately by the meat-packing and deli industries.

For brewers and deli-owners, the use of natural ice as a refrigerant became increasingly problematic. First, affordable sources of ice blocks were becoming scarce, but more important (especially for the sanitation-conscious delicatessen industry, with its kosher-based food handling and storage rules) was that ice available for sale was becoming increasingly dirty. "Good sources were harder and harder to find. By the late 1800s, natural ice became a problem because of pollution and sewage dumping."³⁰ Dry ice technology as well as pressurized carbon dioxide would not be widely available for the next twenty years, and was expensive.

²⁸ In fact, Franklin never said this. His letter to the Abbe André Morellet (translated from French) says that it is *wine* that is proof that God loves us. Why Franklin is misquoted as ascribing such proof to beer is unknown.

²⁹ *Krasner-Khait, Barbara*

³⁰ *Donaldson, Barry*

Liebmann, the founder of Rheingold beer³¹, recognized that his beer could not only be served fresh through refrigeration, but that its freshness would comply with food sanitation rules. Quickly, Rheingold beer could be found in a great many Jewish delis, the proprietors of which marveled at the ability for the beer to arrive cold. Liebmann also later pioneered the refrigerated rail car which made transporting beer longer distances a reality. Liebmann quickly realized that the automated refrigeration technology that they employed (in this case it was an absorption technology) could be equally if not more useful in the world of delicatessens, which had struggled to keep meats and other produce in sanitary conditions for their customers.

Absorption as a technological means for cooling, comprises three distinct phases: evaporation, absorption, and regeneration. In short, a liquid with a low boiling point would evaporate, which was then absorbed by another liquid, which was then heated, causing the trapped gas to condense, cooling an element that acted as a refrigerant. In a very simplistic example, think of how perspiration on one's skin has a cooling effect as it evaporates. Liebmann's technology employed this on an intentional, industrial scale. Later refrigeration models used an electrical compressor, but Liebmann's evaporative technology could operate on its own, without the need for electric motors. His low boiling point liquid was ammonia, which could vaporize at a relatively low temperature, naturally cooling the element that contained it. The benefit of this to Jewish delis was that they could operate this 'passive' refrigeration technology without running afoul of the prohibition against work on the

³¹ It should be noted that Samuel Baer Liebmann is the great x5 – grandfather of this thesis' writer – a revelation exposed through this research

Pickles and Pastrami

Sabbath. When the deli owners returned to their shops on Sunday mornings, their cases were cool, and their food remained fresh.

Liebmann did not invent evaporative cooling, as it is a natural phenomenon that has existed in nature forever. In 1858, French inventor Ferdinand Carré patented a closed system which used sulphuric acid as its evaporative agent.³² Liebmann's versions used a combination of ammonia and water to create the evaporant, which while far safer than sulphuric acid, was still a safety concern. To understand refrigeration, one need only review Boyle's and Charles' now simple formula, PV is proportional to T , or pressure times volume rises or falls in proportion to temperature's rise or fall. If one can have a closed system, such as an airtight tank, and decrease the pressure therein, temperature would drop, because we have kept the volume constant. By removing the evaporated gas from the system in Liebmann's evaporator, we have essentially done just that, keeping volume static while dropping pressure.

One might accurately observe that delicatessens existed prior to mechanical refrigeration, so why was this such an important innovation? The advent of mechanical refrigeration made it possible for delis (and other food purveyors) to preserve food that would have otherwise spoiled, thereby dropping prices in a time when prices seemed only to rise. It also allowed for butchering in all seasons as well as rail transport, even when the weather was not cold. By limiting the amount of food that would have to be discarded, the deli (and the New York deli specifically) was able to offer what seemed to be an impossible combination. These establishments offered what were for some, the foods of home, to others

³² *Granryd, Eric*

exotic treats, all at very affordable prices. The attraction soon thrust delis into the social center of immigrant life in New York.

The advent of mechanical (and portable) refrigeration was a boon to the development and adoption of delis outside of New York, predominantly in the western states and territories of America. The reason for this is clear – without refrigeration, the deli could not migrate. With the western migration of the late 1800s, which included Jews in significant numbers, along came the delis, thanks to the deli case, powered by the innovation of portable refrigeration.

The Jewish sabbath requires observant Jews to satisfy a number of obligations and avoid many prohibited activities, such as working or carrying metal or money. The principal reason for this is so that one's full focus can be on the reading of the Torah for that day, without the possibility of other activities or distractions getting in the way. This also means that food must not be cooked on Shabbat – yet people have to eat. Not only that, but it is a *mitzvah* or a blessing to eat hot food on Shabbat. How could one eat hot food if cooking is prohibited? This is the foundation of technologies needed in order to not only preserve food, but to preserve the food's heat as well. From the mid-1800s through the early 1900s, Jewish delis were generally closed on Shabbat (certainly those that were kosher were closed). The day before Shabbat, however, which would be Friday until sundown, was by far the delis' busiest day. Selling cooked foods that would remain hot or warm overnight, for use at the next day's meals was a challenge. This necessity was achieved with the modern re-invention of the double-walled container. For millennia, man had stored foods in clay pots, some of

Pickles and Pastrami

which were so durable that they still exist. But the innovation that was required here was not only airtight storage, but insulation as well. The device became a precursor to the Thermos bottle and even to double-hulled ships and spacecraft, yet was a simple concept that had begun with a pot in a pot.

The technology here is fairly simple. Consider a metal container with a lid, placed inside of a similar, larger container. The layers would ordinarily be heat conductive but enameling of both the inside and outside of each surface provided very effective insulation, with a non-circulating air barrier between them. An enameled lid, with ridges to prevent airflow between the food storage section and the barrier around it was the final element. Then-modern metalsmithing and industrialization was required, along with the enameling technologies of the day. This new device fit the bill for allowing observant Jews to eat hot food on Shabbat without cooking or reheating. Today, a great number of insulated kitchen and food storage devices exist, made of a variety of materials (one that even is Alexa-enabled), yet their commercial use began in the delicatessen.

Indeed, the notion of eating items familiar and comforting foods, especially after having been transplanted to a new land, was an essential connection to the Jewish immigrants' new homelands and shared culture. However, without the technology to replicate and evolve the gastronomic offerings of old Europe, only foods grown locally (and recently) could be for sale.



Figure 9: Woman in front of a refrigerator case in a Brooklyn Deli in 1948.
Source: Rae Russel

Depending on the source, two different groups can rightly claim credit for being the first to ‘harness’ refrigeration technology: the ancient Chinese and the Jews. Before written records, lore recounts that both cultures collected and covered snow and hail, and thereby preserved these natural cooling elements.³³ By collecting and covering snow and ice, the cooling effect could be maintained for much longer than snow might otherwise last. The

³³ *Rees, Jonathan*

Pickles and Pastrami

concept of rooms designed specifically to store and preserve snow and coldness is reported in the book of Job: "...have you entered the storehouses of the snow or seen the storehouses of the hail..." (Job 38:22, *New International Version*). Later incarnations of such storehouses spread across other cultures, who also saw the value of preserving the precious resource. Even today, remnants of the Persian *yakchals*, which were domed, snow storage buildings, remain³⁴. It seems that an understanding of the impact of cooling was quite widespread, and not necessarily reserved for the elites. In Proverbs, an apt comparison is made: "...like a snow-cooled drink at harvest time is a trustworthy messenger to the one who sends him; he refreshes the spirit of his master." (Proverbs 25:13, *New International Version*) From prehistoric times until relatively recently, the use of natural cooling seemed, from most accounts, to be limited to chilling and refreshing drinks, and not predominantly the preservation of food.³⁵ Fast forward to the mid 19th century, and refrigeration was not only available for food preservation, it was cooling's most significant use. While ice harvesting and shipping (via both maritime routes as well as by rail) were becoming a significant industry in industrial America, its expense and sanitation issues stopped it from becoming the predominant cooling technology for delis. Although homes and indeed delis held ice boxes for convenience, it would be unimaginable to expect that harvested lake ice could remain frozen and transported by rail to such locales as Santa Fe in the 1870s, to where both Jewish populations and delis migrated.

³⁴ *ibid*

³⁵ Author's note: curing and brining tended to be the predominant antecedents to the deli's refrigerated offering of meats

The delicatessen became the focal point for daily provisions for the American Jewish community, however the demand created by deli owners may have been necessary, but it was insufficient to maintain the technological innovation required by them. It was the industry that grew up alongside the deli that added urgency and force to the development of commercial refrigeration. The early waves of Jewish immigrants to the United States came predominantly from Germany, and along with them came a love for and the skill to create lager beer. "Brewing was the first activity in the northern states to use mechanical refrigeration extensively, beginning with an absorption machine used by S. Liebmann's Sons Brewing Company in Brooklyn, New York in 1870. Commercial refrigeration was primarily directed at breweries in the 1870s and by 1891, nearly every brewery was equipped with refrigerating machines."³⁶³⁷ Brooklyn, New York was also the center of the world for Jewish delis in the 1870s. Taking immediate notice of the success that their brewing brethren had with commercial refrigeration, innovative manufacturers (not necessarily Jewish) took note and produced commercial refrigeration products created specifically for the Jewish delicatessen. Soon thereafter Jewish delis were equipped with gleaming, refrigerated cases. These glass-front cases allowed more efficient and effective rabbinic supervision and ensured an environment of (relative) cleanliness, and a level of sanitation far higher than other food purveyors of the time. The fact that with regularity, a member of the rabbinate with a specific mission to ensure compliance with the strict rules of *kashruth* (or kosher food preparation) would enter these establishments, meant that deli customers felt comfortable

³⁶ Krasner-Khait, Barbara

Pickles and Pastrami

with the level of cleanliness. The concept that kosher meant 'clean' or 'safe' was not lost on the non-Jewish community. With the advent of refrigeration technology, food could be prepared and kept hygienically, and in accordance with dietary laws that some Jews required, and the associated sanitary conditions that others appreciated.



Figure 10: Deli counter in 1946. *Source: Nina Leen*

CHAPTER 7 – THE MODERN DAY

The desire to preserve deli is alive and well, and while deli clearly has fallen in popularity from its heyday in the '30s and '40s, there is something compelling to be said about its survival. Speaking with Jake Dell, the current, 31 year-old owner of Katz's Deli in New York (which dates back to 1888), was the first time I could truly begin to understand my own heritage. Dell and I have never met, our parents and grandparents have never met either, yet our backgrounds and identities are about as similar as they come. I didn't grow up working behind the counter at a deli, and he didn't grow up working with jewelers and financiers, yet I was able to see so much of myself in Dell. We both attended rigorous private schools in NYC, grew up eating challah on the weekends, and celebrated the high holidays with our families. He has the same fondness and cultural connection to New York that I discovered in myself. He has a very similar relationship with Judaism to mine. Speaking with Dell was an extremely formative experience; without him knowing it, he was helping me understand the depths of my heritage.

When discussing higher education, he only had one comment which was "it all comes back to emphasis on scholarship... why else did I go to Tufts and you to Colby?" Those words resonated with me because I've heard the exact same words two times before, from my grandfather and my father: "We're here because we place such an emphasis on scholarship," my father would tell me when I was younger. While there is a script for being a Jew, which is the Torah, there are no two Jews with exactly the same path (although it is said that the path

Pickles and Pastrami

to a Jew's heart travels through his stomach); Dell had clearly been taught from the same book that I had, and perhaps trod part of the same path.

Dell runs what is arguably the most famous Deli in the world. He has seen everything from a Hasidic family scolding him for not running a true, kosher establishment, to Hollywood executive assistants flying platters of sandwiches cross-country. He's seen the same traits and characteristics of the New York Jew, but at a granular level. The depth of knowledge he has shared about deli, its inner workings, and its patrons has been invaluable for my understanding. After meeting with Dell, I patronized Katz's a few times to see if I could recognize the traits and oddities of which he spoke so fondly. Dell proudly stated that "even if it's from a Dominican guy at a Jewish deli," it's still the same culture and food; people are receiving the same knowledge. For the purposes of my work, that statement couldn't be more poignant. The New York Jew is, truly, no longer about being Jewish.

In my eyes, Katz's is more of an establishment of preservation than it is a mere restaurant. There is no doubting that the food is top notch, but that's not why I go. Katz's is a view into old New York; the building that houses Katz's has hardly changed since it was first erected in 1946 (it's even on the same plot lot that the original Katz' was on). Nothing changes at Katz's, and that's not always by choice: "anytime we change anything there is a lot of thought. Like we changed the bathrooms... some people said thank you... but it was fraught with skepticism and fear. You know?" The community that frequents Katz's has a strong voice that can't always be overpowered. Sandwich lovers that have been patronizing Katz's since long before Dell was born had a visceral reaction to the news that Katz's was updating its bathrooms. Some stopped coming to the restaurant as some sort of protest.

Nothing changes at Katz's, and nothing is supposed to change, without a lot of thought and introspection.

My conversation with Jeffery Yoskowitz had a slightly less familiar context, but was likewise extremely informative. Like Dell, the importance of education had clearly been instilled in Yoskowitz, having attended Brown University. Higher education has given Yoskowitz the tools he needs to pursue what is seemingly his life's work: revamping public perception on what Ashkenazi food truly is. The term Ashkenazi is in this case being used to describe the Jews originating specifically from Eastern Europe³⁸. Yoskowitz is the co-founder of a group called *Gefilteria* whose aim is to educate the public about culturally Jewish foods by increasing their perceived beauty and appeal. Unlike Dell, Yoskowitz interprets Jewish food from a much more religious viewpoint. In some sense, Yoskowitz views Deli as hurting the image and progress of Jewish food: "It was important for me to tell the true story of Ashkenazi cuisine," rather than what everyone assumes is Ashkenazi food. Over time, New York Jewish food has seemingly become more and more fattening, increasingly drab looking, and somewhat unappetizing to the eye. Yoskowitz sees that "there is this preconceived notion that Ashkenazi food is grey and brown," and wants to change it. Having grown up around so many diverse foods of Eastern European origin, I hadn't fully comprehended how the public was viewing the generic category of Jewish food.

Yoskowitz opened my eyes to the importance of public perception. The public views Ashkenazi food as unhealthy and unclean, but that's not at all the case: "Blueberries with

³⁸ Ashkenazi's counterpart is 'Sephardic,' meaning Jews generally from Southern Europe and the Iberian Peninsula.

Pickles and Pastrami

cream is as Ashkenazi as it gets,” but nobody knows that. Yoskowitz recounts his first time going to Poland as a sort of revelation: “Poland during the summer isn’t as grey as we all think it is. Seeing people eat colorful produce during the summer... We’ve seen black and white photos from the 40s and assume it’s all like that.” When I asked him what was most important in his eyes about propelling forward the future of Jewish food, he responded simply: “making things looks attractive.” Yoskowitz is attempting to propel forward a sort of food revolution, bringing Jewish food into new light by making it attractive to the public’s palate. Yoskowitz spoke extensively about the industrialization of kosher foods, technological innovations, and family, yet he became most elated when talking about creating food for kids. “Adding egg yolks into chopped liver makes food much more appealing. It looked so appealing that I got children to eat this!” he said three or four times.



Figure 11: Typical Gefilte Fish. *source: Epicurious*



Figure 12: Yaskowitz' gourmet Gefilte Fish. *source: Gefilteria*

American Jews have been criticized for assimilating to the culture surrounding them, and that is exactly what Yaskowitz is afraid of. Heavy, brown, and drab food is certainly not the food that Eastern European Jews grew up eating, but rather it is food that was developed from a distant and foggy memory. Alan Richman, a leading writer on modern Jewish food, has his own analysis on why American Jewish food is so drab: “Most ethnic cuisines come from a place, and everybody knew what it tasted like back in that place. The Jews never had a place. Mostly, they were chased from places.”³⁹ As new cohorts of Jews emigrated to New York, there was no longer a shared identity of food or cuisine. Jewish women, who would have been tasked with maintaining the flavors of generations before, were now laborers with

³⁹ *Ozersky, Josh*

Pickles and Pastrami

no time (or space) to cook. The Jewish experience is not dissimilar from that of other minority groups; the difference is that many Jews were so tired of persecution that they felt it was safer and easier to weaken their identities to become more familiar and acceptable to those around them. In addition, Jews who emigrated to the United States during the 20th century were often assigned new, anglicized names, enforcing a form of assimilation. Jewish names were unknown, hard to spell, and viewed by many as ugly, so they were changed; Schitter became Schiller, Sandelawsky became Sands, and Lishniwesky became Lish. Yoskowitz wants to restore the clouded history of the Eastern European Jew by bringing light to what Ashkenazi food was originally.

Dell is preserving the past beautifully, maintaining a culture that is long gone. Yoskowitz is envisioning the future for a misunderstood and at-risk food culture. Whether they know it or not, they both need each other. Jewish food depends on tradition, which Dell is maintaining through Katz', but Jewish food also needs to adapt to a changing climate so as to become more palatable by the masses, which Yazkowitz is attempting through his work. Talking to the both of these men offered me such a rich and personal understanding of Jewish food, much deeper than I would have ever been able to achieve on my own. Having the opportunity to speak with them has and will continue to influence my perception and appreciation for my culture and heritage.

I was fortunate to not only interview these deli owners, but to patronize a number of additional delis. At Sable's in New York City, a cramped Jewish deli, one might be surprised to hear Mandarin and Cantonese coming from behind the counter, but there is a good reason for this. Deli owners and brothers, Danny and Kenny Sze, are from Hong Kong, but have

worked in the appetizing world for years. The term ‘appetizing’ for a food purveyor had originally meant a ‘dairy’ restaurant rather than a kosher deli. Recall the prohibition of mixing meat and milk; the strictest kosher markets would not even sell meat and milk in the same store. As a result, for years, one could not buy butter in a deli, nor cream or cheese. The ‘dairy’ market, which could sell fish, and many other forms of produce along with true dairy products flourished. These markets garnered the term ‘appetizing,’ not as an adjective, but as a noun. Today, a non-kosher ‘appetizing’ is likely to sell both dairy and meat. Even today one can walk into Sables and see the Sze brothers slicing fish and wise-cracking with customers in many languages.

Russ & Daughters is a mainstay on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, and has been since 1914. Joel Russ came to the US from the shtetl of Strzyzow (present day Poland) in 1907 and opened up his appetizing shop to cater to the new influx of Eastern European Jews migrating to the United States. Third generation owner of Russ & Daughters, Mark Russ Federman, describes his grandfather as “a typical Eastern European immigrant: short on patience, long on drive.” By 1933, he had a full storefront called “J Russ International Appetizers” which he renamed to “Russ and Daughters” after making each of his three daughters a partner in business, which at the time was unheard of (the standard appendix used at the time was ‘& Sons’). Having fathered no sons, Russ required that his three daughters work in his shop, learning a trade that he was pioneering. His love for his family, and early actions of gender equality garnered him the name, “The World’s Greatest Feminist Fishmonger” 80 years later.⁴⁰ *The Sturgeon Queens* as they later became known, pumped out

⁴⁰ Traister, Rebecca

Pickles and Pastrami

some of the finest Jewish appetizing offering in New York. Even Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg, (born the same year that the daughters became partners) who grew up frequenting Russ & Daughters, claims that “it was *the* place... there was no equal.” Russ & Daughters prevailed and became one of the most important destinations for Jewish food in America.⁴¹

Sable’s is noticeably younger than many of the other appetizing shops in New York; where Zabar’s and Barney Greengrass on the City’s Upper West Side have been staples for nearly a hundred years, Sable’s is only in her mid-twenties. Even with such a young age, Sable’s shows the authenticity, patina, and use that comes only with a well-loved and well-operated establishment. While the Sze brother are certainly not Jewish, celebrating Chinese New Year by hanging decorations around their shop, they have gained a wealth of knowledge about Ashkenazi cuisine that comes only with years of admiration and experience. In the early 90s, Kenny ran the appetizing counter at Zabar’s, a gourmet Jewish grocery known for its smoked fish and prepared foods. Having Zabar’s on the resume has certainly helped the Sze brothers, bringing with them a horde of loyal and knowledgeable customers. Barry Tucker, a 78-year-old who followed Kenny from Zabar’s, says that “the press has played up Zabar’s... and Russ & Daughters must be a hundred years old.”⁴² Only a particular type of person, one who truly loves the dying art of appetizing, can carry on the tradition of preparing and selling Ashkenazi food. More so, it takes an incredibly unique person to be of non-Jewish descent and to introduce appetizing into his family. The Szes are a perfect

⁴¹ *History — Russ & Daughters Cafe*

⁴² *Vadukul, Alex*

Satloff

example of a family that has learned from and become influenced by the history of deli in New York.



Figure 13: Morty's Deli in Hong Kong.

Of course, the love of deli does not stay fixed in one place. The original Jewish delicatessens were designed in some part to be reminders of food from home. So too, perhaps, is Heidi's Brooklyn Deli located not in Brooklyn, but in Gypsum, Colorado. This small town is named after the stone mined from its earth, and a small, regional airport is the largest

Pickles and Pastrami

employer – yet there is a Jewish deli here. One might assume that the patrons would be transplanted New Yorkers, but the diners were a mix of Hispanic locals, cowboy-hat-wearing Colorado natives, and yes, a few flight attendants waiting for their next leg.

As I imagine back in time to the initial delicatessens of America, and their proprietors' struggles with refrigeration, sanitation, and other food preparation technologies, it amazes me that not only does this style of food and culture still exist, but that it is thriving and has been adopted by so many different cultures.

For me, deli is home, and of course I am not the only one for whom this is true. A recent visit to Hong Kong revealed a Jewish deli with recipes passed down from the proprietor's grandfather. Morty's Jewish deli on Hong Kong Island is a taste of home for expats and visitors alike. It is quite amazing to think back to the arrival of Jewish immigrants to the United States in the mid-1800s and then to the present, where the deli itself has become an emigr ; not from Eastern Europe, but from New York City. Morty's of Hong Kong represents not a local, Chinese version of an Eastern European style of cooking or culture, but an interpretation of New York's version. This second derivative could easily be overlooked as a novelty (and to a degree it is a novelty to see such an incredible deli only a few miles from the Mainland Chinese border), but it represents survival; survival of deli and survival of the Jews.



Figure 14 (left): Katz' at 3am on a Tuesday

Figure 15 (right): Caribbean worker at Katz' Deli



Figure 16 (left): 'Brooklyn Deli' in snowy Colorado

Figure 17 (right): 'Born in Brooklyn. Raised in Colorado.'



Figure 6: Zabar's fish counter. *Source: Zabar's*



Figure 7: Sable's fish counter. *Source: The New York Times*

Pickles and Pastrami



Figure 20: Russ & Daughters appetizing counter. *Source: Walks of New York*

CHAPTER 8 – WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

Deli is at a pivotal point in its history; the community around which deli was designed has dispersed and changed. Deli has changed from a figure of necessity to one of luxury – a reminder of what times once were, and a presage of what times may become. Yiddish theater on Second Avenue has died, tenements that once supported hundreds of thousands of Jews, are now home to young hipsters, and the delis that remain do not abide by kosher laws strict enough for the Hasidic Jews of Brooklyn. The role of the deli has changed.

Speaking with Jake Dell, I learned that even the motivation behind running deli has changed. With rising food costs, Katz' can no longer cater to its original, working class audience, and instead must cater towards those who have the money to spend. While Dell certainly faced a moral dilemma when contemplating bathroom renovations, the choice was clear; he had to adapt to wants and needs of his new customers. Katz' may be doing a remarkable job maintaining its history, but it's clear that Dell is running a deli and not a museum. Katz' is still a business, and in order to survive, must adapt to the climate. The same sentiment is seen at Russ & Daughters, where Niki Russ Federman, the establishment's fourth generation owner, states that "We have to figure out what it means to grow and change, while also grappling with a sense of continuity."⁴³

The past 200 years have been an extraordinarily tumultuous one for world Jewry, filled of course with hardship, terror, and injustice, but also filled with success and survival.

⁴³ *Cohen, Julie* (Cohen)

Pickles and Pastrami

The arc of Jewish life has been reflected in the arc of the deli's story. The establishment of delis in a new world, its expansion across the country to the plains, its assimilation, but not totally, into American society, and its export to and adoption by other countries and cultures mirrors that of the Jews.

Plus ça change, begins the French expression which might be overheard at Jo Goldenberg's in Paris' Marais district, which very much describes the state of deli. There has been a world of change in delicatessens (and in Jewish life), but the more things change, the more they indeed stay the same. A deli in Gypsum, Colorado feels different from, yet similar to the deli on Hong Kong Island, both of which in turn have their roots through New York City. It was technology and determination, driven by an indomitable spirit of survival that drove the Jews and the origins of deli from 19th century Europe to the United States and then across the world. Deli is not dying, and nor is Judaism; it is changing. Whether it is changing for the better is a matter of personal opinion. What is not opinion, however, is the conclusion that had deli *not* changed and adapted over the years, it would surely have seen its demise. All agree that tastes change over time, and the buggy-whip business isn't coming back – some industries do die out, never to be resurrected. Dead industries tend to have been killed off by newer technologies, as we have seen throughout the curricular study of Science, Technology, and Society. Deli, however, seems to be at the same time an adopter of technology, yet a preserver of tradition; in fact the deli does indeed represent an intersection of science, technology, and society. While this intersecting trio does not guarantee its longevity, it has surely been one of the predominant reasons for deli's continued existence and success.

From a personal standpoint, this research was not only highly rewarding, but touching as well. Not only did undertaking this work cement my love for deli, it cemented my respect for Jewish traditions and my own heritage. Perhaps even more personally, to discover that it was my own five-times-great-grandfather that in part made it possible for delicatessens and therefore Jewish populations to form across the country, was humbling. When I walk into a deli today, I am joyously overwhelmed by my senses, while intellectually, I consider science, technology, and society in a multitude of contexts, all with a personal connection. And I do all of this before my number is called and the counterperson hurriedly demands to know, “fatty or lean?!”

Pickles and Pastrami

APPENDIX – ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Interviewees/Reference Figures:

Jake Dell: Third generation owner of Katz's Deli.

Niki Russ Federman: Fourth general owner of Russ & Daughters.

Jeffrey Yoskowitz: Food educator, specializing on the intersection of food and culture.

Heidi and Steve Naples: Founders of Heidi's Brooklyn Deli.

Danny and Kenny Sze: Founders of Sable's

Gerald Li and Brian Tock: Founders of Morty's Delicatessen (in Hong Kong)

Ziggy Gruber: Founder of Kenny & Ziggy's New York Deli (in Houston)

Other Acknowledgements:

Jim Fleming: Professor of Science, Technology and Society at Colby College

Lisa Noble: Director of Employer Engagement. Colby College's Resident Deli Aficionado.

APPENDIX – LITERATURE REVIEW

Ted Merwin, author of a number of notable books on the history of Jews in the United States, such as *In Their Own Image: New York Jews in Jazz Age Popular Culture* and *Beyond Chicken Soup: Jews and Medicine in America*, is a professor of Religion and Judaic studies at Dickinson College with a concentration on Jewish food. He is also a published contributor to *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Moment*, among other publications. Perhaps his most notable work, entitled *Pastrami on Rye*, documents the poorly-covered and oft-ignored Jewish delicatessen. His chronicling of the history of the Jewish population in America is rather unique, as no other work details the gastronomic and cultural institution as thoroughly. While Merwin makes the occasional quip, or lets his personal taste influence his writing from time to time, the work makes very few overly-opinionated claims, acting more as a work of reference than a pointed essay.

Pastrami on Rye is admittedly quite narrowly scoped; the aim of the book is simply to document as much about the history of the Jewish deli as can fit into 250 pages. The role of the deli culturally, as well as its place in the Jewish community is adequately covered. That said, there is a surprising lack of detail on the role of the deli on the greater United States. Merwin's coverage is also lacking in the technological progress that the Jewish deli commanded in terms of food science and food safety.

The work is exceptionally well organized, flowing from the delicatessen's origin in Eastern Europe all the way to the resurgence of the deli over the last few years. Because the work follows an understood chronology, it is extremely easy to follow. In addition, Merwin makes ample use of footnotes to help add some color to otherwise confusing or uninteresting

sections of the book. The work is thoroughly cited which makes following sources for context extremely simple.

Merwin's *Pastrami on Rye* is perhaps the single most valuable source I have read for a variety of reasons, but perhaps most important is that he provides a compelling and comprehensive history of the Jewish deli in America. For my thesis research, using this work as a baseline reference has been instrumental in my pursuit of this topic.

Jessa Joselit, author of books such as *Our Gang : Jewish Crime and the New York Jewish Community, 1900-1940*, *Set in Stone: America's Embrace of the Ten Commandments* and *A Perfect Fit: Clothes, Character, and the Promise of America*, is a notable professor of history, Judaic studies, and Jewish cultural arts at George Washington University. She is perhaps best known for her work, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture 1880-1950*, for which she won the National Jewish Book Award in History. Beyond her role as professor, she sits on a number of boards and councils, such as Princeton University's Advisory Council on American Religion, Yale's Center for Art and Material Culture, and the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Judaic Studies. Beyond her distinguishing academic accomplishments, she also actively maintains a blog through which she documents various elements of the life of an American Jew.

The Wonders of America is an extremely engaging and unique approach to discussing history. By compiling what is essentially an anthology of newspapers, memoirs, synagogue leaflets, and other artifacts from the 1880s-1950s, Joselit is able to write colorfully and clearly about the rise, fall, triumph, and pain of the American Jew. Her thesis, however, is rather undefined, opting instead to provide a voice of the Jews of the 1880s-1950s, rather

Pickles and Pastrami

than to use them as a clear, analytical tool. The overarching theme is simply that American Jews reinvented Judaism by adapting the religion to its new environment. Jews of this era were quieted, muted, or ignored, yet they lived vibrant lives in the shadows. The work is very easy to follow as it progresses logically through different time periods and themes. When reading the book, it is hard not to feel a sense of nostalgia, which Joselit elicits without compromising the integrity of the work. One reviewer of her book commented that she should be “commended for capturing the essence of the people.” Much of her analysis is based on embedded pictures, advertisements, or cartoons, allowing for the reader to assess if Joselit is making supported or unfounded claims. I particularly enjoyed reading this work as it illuminated an often misunderstood or unknown history. Many of the practices and customs discussed throughout the text are still commonplace today. This book will serve very well for reference, and for citing the Jewish emphasis on health and sanitation.

Mark Kurlansky is a prized and well-regarded author of general interest non-fiction books. He is best known for his work, *Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World* (1997), in which he delves deep into the fishing industry, environmental impacts, and the tragedy of the fisherman. His works are approachable, fun, and informative. While his writing style is not particularly complex, he conveys a wide array of information that is often interesting. In his work, *Salt: A World History*, Kurlansky discusses the important role that salt has played in the evolution and existence of the humanity. He takes an in depth look at the role salt played early on as a monetary unit, the importance salt plays in our health, and the part salt plays in our love of food. Among the most engaging elements of this work is his extended analysis of the Avery Island salt mine, where the Tabasco factory is based. By

choosing a common element that would be familiar to most readers, Kurlansky is able to discuss what would otherwise be a (literally) dry topic in a fresh and appealing way.

Kurlansky's *Salt* covers a great deal of history and caters to an STS-minded audience. The author discusses the technological elements of mining and using salt, the scientific aspects of the creation of salt deposits, and the societal impact and influence of using salt as both currency and as seasoning. Kurlansky doesn't appear to have any particular bias towards salt, other than that he (as we all do) relies on it to survive. His bibliography is quite comprehensive, relying on a mix of works from historical perspectives, scientific journals, and advertisements. While the overall book is quite interesting, a chapter entitled "The Hapsburg Pickle" was of most value to this thesis. In this chapter, Kurlansky discusses the use of salt in pickling, curing, and salting of meats. He even refers to the Jewish delicatessen as a "citadel of salt-preserved foods."

David Sax is a journalist based in Toronto, who has written for notable publications such as *The New York Times*, *Bloomberg*, *GQ*, and *NPR*. He has authored several books, including *The Tastemakers: Why We're Crazy for Cronuts but Fed Up with Fondue*, and *The Revenge of Analog: Real Things and Why They Matter*. Sax's background is in major trend analysis, business, and culture, writing many of his articles about the future of technology, food, or food technology. His first book, *Save the Deli* won the James Beard Award in 2010. While Sax's home of Toronto, Canada might not share the same love for the delicatessen that Montreal does, through travel and exposure, Sax has indeed grown to love and appreciate the Jewish deli. *Save the Deli* is a chronicle of Sax's journey across the United States, Eastern Europe, and Britain, in search of the storied and vibrant history of the Jewish deli. Alarmed

Pickles and Pastrami

by the rapid rate of the deli's disappearance, Sax made it his personal mission to document the deli's life, history, and future for generations to come. While his work is neither particularly scientific nor technological, it does offer an interesting perspective on the cultural component of the Jewish deli. Sax strongly emphasizes the importance of the deli as a meeting place or cultural center, referring to the deli as a melting pot of sorts, and that as the deli disappears, this common ground between religions and cultures fades away with it.

In her book, *Kosher Nation*, Sue Fishkoff unpacks the unknown and hooded industry that is kosher food. Traveling across the globe, from the United States to China, Fishkoff attempts to uncover the mysterious, multi-billion dollar industry. Based in Northern California, Fishkoff spent her career regularly contributing to Jewish blogs, magazines, and newspapers. Fishkoff reveals that the vast majority of kosher food consumers are not Jewish at all, but rather vegetarians, Muslims, health conscious individuals, and environmentalists. Fishkoff argues that even though a custom can be tied to a specific religion, members of other groups are not disqualified from partaking. *Kosher Nation* eloquently describes the impact that a uniquely Jewish custom can have on its greater community. Fishkoff is largely unbiased in that she also breaks down the alarming corruption, price-fixing, and strong arming used in early kosher meat production.

Matthew Wills is a self-proclaimed "urban natural historian," meaning that he documents and writes on cultures and oddities that take place within an urban setting. He has a master's degree in film studies, as well as a master's degree in library science, both of which have served him well in his ability to dissect and digest pertinent information relating to urban history. One of his articles, published in the JSTOR Daily, *The Genealogy of the Jewish*

Deli, breaks down the origin of the Jewish deli, as well as its place in society. Wills dives deeply into the content of the deli, citing that the spice blend used to create pastrami stems back to the time in which the Turks had rule over southeastern Europe. While his article is short, it is dense and littered with information untouched by many other authors. His work is thoroughly cited, amply commenting on the sources from which he derives his information. Wills offers unique insight into many tangentially related STS topics, but primarily his role is that of social scientist, commenting on the evolution of the deli from foreign Jewish and gentile origin, to one of Americanism.

Avery Robinson, master's candidate of Judaic studies at the University of Michigan, writes on the history and importance of kugel. While not yet quite as decorated or documented as some of the other authors in this review, Robinson does an excellent job of creating a compelling body of work focused around a unique and unexposed element of Jewish-American life. Although the work is largely focused on the food, kugel, many peripheral conclusions are drawn about Jewish culture (with specific regard to food) throughout. Robinson's work is very easy to follow as it traces the history of kugel in American chronologically, beginning with its transplant, and ending with its ultimate secularization. Robinson clearly has an attachment to this subject matter, having spent months compiling kugel recipes from, and interviewing dozens of Jewish American families. The writing style was overly complex for the subject being covered, but not alarmingly so. The work was also impeccably well cited, and contained ample commentary where needed. Overall, Robinson has created a piece of work that is not only interesting, but also a valuable addition to the sparse, but increasing collection of Jewish American food writings.

Pickles and Pastrami

Lance Sussman, a professor of American Jewish history, and a senior rabbi of a reform congregation, authors a piece for the *American Jewish Archives Journal* on the little-known Jewish American banquet known as “trefa.” While normally a work written on such a specific and unique topic can be pigeonholing, Sussman maintains relevant examples that apply far beyond the specifics of his article. It is unclear who Sussman’s target audience was for this article as he over analyzes and explains simple concepts, such as the idea of eating kosher, but glosses over more complex concepts, such as the history of reform-Judaic food policy. The writing is clear, but could easily have been made more concise; some analyses seemed to never end. The work, however, is well cited, providing commentary where needed. Even though Sussman writes on such a narrow topic, he somehow maintains relevance for other themes. This work served as a useful resource for documenting the history of Jewish American food during the 1880s and 1890s.

Nicola Twilley is an author and podcaster best known for her works published in *The Atlantic*, and *The New Yorker* on data, technological systems, and refrigeration. Her podcast, *Gastropod*, has won accolades commending its unique look at food through the lens of science and history. She is also author of the notable blog, *Edible Geography*, through which she writes about how food and humanity interact within topics as diverse as Tariffs on shipping vessels to the Chinese cryosphere. She is also the director of Studio-X New York, part of the Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation’s laboratory network for exploring the future of cities. In 2015, she spoke at Colby College about the future of the artificial cryosphere. During her talk, she discussed the use of artificial

refrigeration, and its prevalence in our modern world. Her works on the histories of food, as well as her in depth analysis on refrigeration provided much-needed resources for my thesis.

Peter Carroll, an author and a professor of U.S. History at Stanford University, is best known for his collection of books spanning topics from the Spanish Civil War, to the history of memory. His work, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: America in the 1970s*, takes a unique approach in exploring the history of the 1970s, journeying through notable events such as Nixon's trip to China, the Camp David accords, and the Iranian hostage crisis. Throughout the work, he describes the state of American religion, life, and family life. He discusses food trends and preferences, along with new inventions such as the personal computer and email. Carroll's work acted as an excellent reference work for exploring how the metropolitan dependence on eateries in the '50s and '60s began to dwindle during the 1970s.

APPENDIX – BIBLIOGRAPHY

(28) *TEDxBigApple - Nicola Twilley - To Understand Refrigeration Is to Understand the World*

- *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aqvc5RWuSh0>. Accessed 16 Dec.

2018.

American Heritage Dictionary Entry: Delicatessen.

<https://ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=delicatessen>. Accessed 13 May 2019.

Belarsky, Isabel. "Cafe Royal." *Yiddish Book Center*, 2012,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=96&v=9hpMBJ6uinI.

Ben-Sasson, Hillel Haim. "Germany." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 518–46.

"Cafe Royal." *Mapping Yiddish New York*, 2014,

<https://myny.ctl.columbia.edu/content/cafe-royal-0>.

Carroll, Peter N. *It Seemed like Nothing Happened : America in the 1970s*. Rutgers University Press, 1990.

Closed by the Meat Shortage, the Kosher Delicatessen at 37 Essex... News Photo | Getty Images.

<https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/closed-by-the-meat-shortage-the-kosher-delicatessen-at-37-news-photo/515185840>. Accessed 19 Mar. 2019.

Cohen, Julie. *The Sturgeon Queens*. 2014,

https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3198262/fullcredits?ref_=tt_cl_sm#cast.

Crowds Surround Pushcarts Selling Shoes, Pans and Produce. Street... News Photo | Getty

Images. <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/crowds-surround-pushcarts-selling-shoes-pans-and-produce-news-photo/515177828>. Accessed 19 Mar. 2019.

DAVIES, CHRISTIE. "Exploring the Thesis of the Self-Deprecating Jewish Sense of Humor."

Humor - International Journal of Humor Research, vol. 4, no. 2, 1991,

doi:10.1515/humr.1991.4.2.189.

Donaldson, Barry., et al. *Heat & Cold : Mastering the Great Indoors : A Selective History of Heating, Ventilation, Air-Conditioning and Refrigeration from the Ancients to the 1930s*. American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers, 1994.

Epstein, Lawrence J. *The Haunted Smile : The Story of Jewish Comedians in America*. Public Affairs, 2001, <https://books.google.com/books?id=AsQU3X5iP68C>.

Finkelkraut, Alain. *The Imaginary Jew = Le Juif Imaginaire*. University of Nebraska Press, 1994, <http://cbbcat.net/record=b1249918>.

Fishkoff, Sue. *Kosher Nation*. Schocken Books, 2010.

Granryd, Eric. *Refrigerating Engineering*. Royal Institute of Technology KTH Department of Energy Technology Division of Applied Thermodynamics and Refrigeration, 2005, <https://www.worldcat.org/title/refrigerating-engineering/oclc/611716327>.

Greenberg Anjou, Erik. *Deli Man*. 2014.

---. *Deli Man*. 2014, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4239548/>.

History — Russ & Daughters Cafe. <http://www.russanddaughterscafe.com/history>.

Immigration Restriction League Constitution. Harvard Mirador Viewer, [iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:5233215\\$1i](http://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:5233215$1i).

Johnson, Paul. *A History of the Jews*. Harper & Row, 1987.

Joselit, Jenna Weissman. *The Wonders of America : Reinventing Jewish Culture 1880-1950*. Hill and Wang, 1994.

Pickles and Pastrami

Klinghoffer, David. *Commentary: The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880-1950*. 1995,

http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A17338365/ITOF?u=colby_main&sid=ITOF&xid=df53a904.

Krasner-Khait, Barbara. "No Title." *The Impact of Refrigeration*.

Kurlansky, Mark. *Salt : A World History*. Walker and Co, 2002.

Lakshmanan, Indira. "Tracing The Path Of The 'Deli Man' Across North America." *NPR, Weekend Edition Sunday*.

Loeffler, James Benjamin. "A Gilgul Fun a Nigun: Jewish Musicians in New York, 1881-1945." *Harvard College Library*, 1997.

Mazzola, Jessica. "Newark Icon, Owner of Hobby's Deli, Sam Brummer Dies at 93." *New Jersey Dot Com*, 2015.

McNeil, Donald G. "Finding a Scapegoat When Epidemics Strike." *The New York Times*, 31 Aug. 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/01/health/01plague.html>.

Merwin, Ted. *Pastrami [on] Rye : An Overstuffed History of the Jewish Deli*. 2016.

---. "Tasty Bits from the History of the Jewish Deli." *The New York Post*, 2015, <https://nypost.com/2015/10/04/tasty-bits-from-the-history-of-the-jewish-deli/>.

Miller, Yvette Alt. *Jews and Native Americans: 7 Fascinating Facts*.

www.aish.com/jw/s/Jews-and-Native-Americans-7-Fascinating-Facts.html.

Nathan, Joan. "At Jewish Delis, Times Are as Lean as Good Corned Beef." *The New York Times*, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/07/dining/07deli.html>.

Ozersky, Josh. *The Kugel Conundrum* - *TIME*.

<http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2067923,00.html?xid=tweetbut>.

Accessed 16 Apr. 2019.

Rees, Jonathan. *Refrigeration Nation : A History of Ice, Appliances, and Enterprise in America*.

Robinson, Avery. *Kugel and Pudding: Tasting Jewish American Foodways*. 2014,

https://www.academia.edu/7980509/Kugel_and_Pudding_Tasting_Jewish_American_Foodways.

Sax, David. *Save the Deli : In Search of Perfect Pastrami, Crusty Rye, and the Heart of Jewish Delicatessen*. Mariner Books, 2010.

Simonson, Robert. "Where Have You Gone, Molly Picon?" *The New York Times*, 2006,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/19/theater/newsandfeatures/where-have-you-gone-molly-picon.html?mtrref=undefined&mtrref=www.nytimes.com&mtrref=www.nytimes.com>.

Sussman, Lance J. *The Myth of the Trefa Banquet* • 29. 2005,

http://americanjewisharchives.org/publications/journal/PDF/2005_57_01_02_sussman.pdf.

The Terao Family Arrived from Ogden, Utah, on June 6th, 1945. While... News Photo | Getty

Images. <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/the-terao-family-arrived-from-ogden-utah-on-june-6th-1945-news-photo/515942984>. Accessed 19 Mar. 2019.

Traister, Rebecca. "The Sturgeon Queens' Russ & Daughters: Unlikely Feminism, Great

Fish." *The New Republic*, 2014, <https://newrepublic.com/article/116978/sturgeon-queens-russ-daughters-unlikely-feminism-great-fish>.

Two Men Enjoy Chinese Cuisine Prepared by Chinese Chefs within the... News Photo | Getty

Images. <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/two-men-enjoy-chinese-cuisine-prepared-by-chinese-chefs-news-photo/514694012>. Accessed 19 Mar. 2019.

Pickles and Pastrami

Two Men Stand behind the Counter at a Deli circa 1930's. News Photo | Getty Images.

<https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/two-men-stand-behind-the-counter-at-a-deli-circa-1930s-news-photo/108433121>. Accessed 19 Mar. 2019.

Vadukul, Alex. "A 25-Year-Old Nova in the Smoked Fish Universe." *The New York Times*, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/03/nyregion/a-25-year-old-nova-in-the-smoked-fish-universe.html>.

Wills, Matthew. "The Genealogy of the Jewish Deli | JSTOR Daily." *JSTOR Daily*, 2016, <https://daily.jstor.org/the-genealogy-of-the-jewish-deli/>.

Wolfson, CK. "Robert Brustein on the Tradition of Yiddish Theater." *The Martha's Vineyard Times*, 2010, <https://www.mvtimes.com/2010/09/02/robert-brustein-tradition-yiddish-theater-2380/>.

Young Husband Leaning over Counter While Clerk Adds up Mass of Things... News Photo | Getty Images. <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/young-husband-leaning-over-counter-while-clerk-adds-up-mass-news-photo/50628284>. Accessed 19 Mar. 2019.

Zhou, Min, and Jennifer Lee. "The Asian American Achievement Paradox." *Russell Sage Foundation*, 2015.