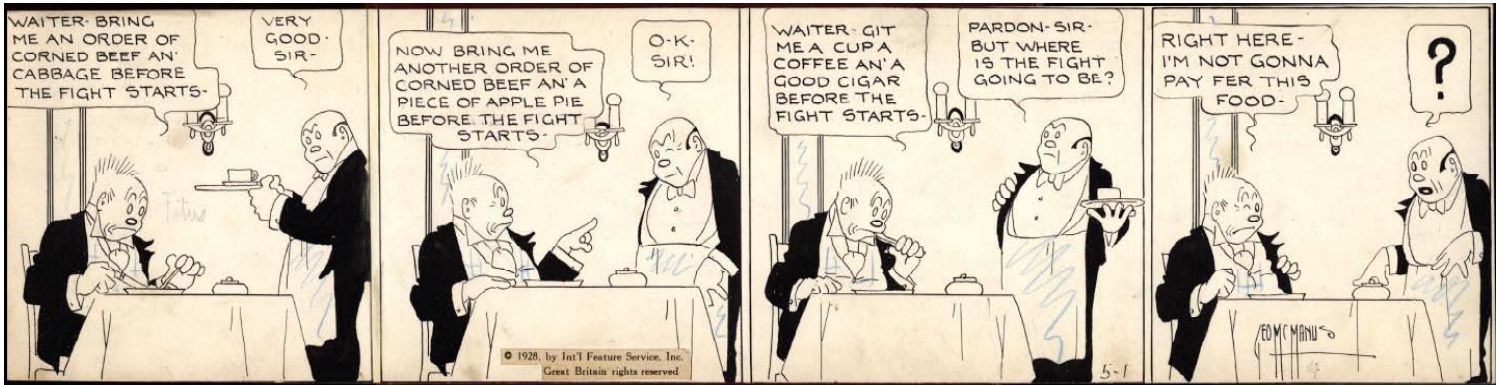




Corned Beef and Cabbage



Maggie & Jigg's, by George McManus, May 1, 1928

There is a popular misconception that Corned Beef and Cabbage is a traditional Irish dish. If it is well known in the old country, it is because it was transported there from America, such as Pizza for the Italians or Chop Suey for Chinese would have been. Corned Beef being associated with Irish cooking and St. Patrick's Day, is a truly American invention.

This dish was considered a traditional Sunday meal for the poor Irish immigrants in the US, because it was cheap and filling. The Jewish markets in their same neighborhoods gave them a viable alternative to the boiled salt pork that they would have had in Ireland. It was made hugely popular through a comic strip called "Bringing Up Father", also well known as "Maggie & Jiggs", The poor Irish bricklayer, Jigg's, and his wife Maggie, a former washerwoman, made it big through the Irish Sweepstakes. The snobbish Maggie and their beautiful daughter, Nora are always trying to "bring up" father to their new social position. Jiggs' culinary tastes remained pedestrian, much to the chagrin of Maggie, who wanted a more "lace curtain" life. Jiggs can think of nothing finer than sitting

down at Dinty Moore's tavern to finish off several dishes of corned beef and cabbage, followed by a night out with the boys from the old neighborhood.

The popularity of Corned Beef and Cabbage during the month of March is astounding. Jewish delis and Greek diners sell corned beef all year long, but the average restaurant has to revisit their recipes once a year. There are a few places in the area known for their corned beef, which will go through thousands of pounds a day as we get closer to the 17th.

Corned beef is a very old invention, known as bully beef or barrel beef and served to armies and navies for centuries. The word Corn in the title refers to the corn kernel sized pellets of salt which were originally used to cure the meat and preserve it in the days before refrigeration. Nitrates are used in the pickling process to impart a desirable reddish tint and avoid the gray color that would develop otherwise.

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The price of corned beef is a yearly question. It is necessary to note that finished, trimmed or cooked product is all about the same price no matter how much you pay for the original meat. A Chef may buy raw corned beef from well under \$2.00 per pound, to well over \$3.00 per pound. Cheaper corned beef is totally untrimmed and has a "pump" of over 40%. This means that water with salt, sugar, nitrates and spices have been injected into the meat for flavor and weight. This water is mostly expelled during the cooking process. There is a large amount of fat to be trimmed, as well. A more expensive raw corned beef brisket will have less fat, a pump of much less than 20% and will yield useable cooked product at about the same price as the cheaper alternative.

It is a good rule of thumb in planning menus this year, that the finished cooked product that you will put on a plate, no matter what you buy to begin with, will cost about \$3.50 a pound. The potatoes, cabbage, carrots and soda bread will cost a total of another 75 cents, perhaps. An average plate of 8 oz corned beef with all the trimmings will cost about \$2.50. You can sell this plate at \$7.00 for a 35% food cost or maybe you can figure out how to doll up the plate and make it worth \$12.00 for a great food cost %.

Most folks just boil the untrimmed corned beef and allow it to cool after it is done reserving the liquid to cook the vegetables. I like to keep a lot of fat on the

beef as it cooks for flavor. After cooling it should be well trimmed of fat and sliced in a way so that the two separate pieces of meat are cut against the grain.

Another well known manner of cooking is to use a corned beef "flat", which is totally trimmed and is only one single muscle. This can take a wet rub, using mustard, for instance and slowly braised covered in the oven. In this way you may add specific flavors or a signature dish. The easiest way to differentiate your corned beef and cabbage dinner, from the competition is with unique sauces, perhaps horseradish, mustard, honey spice sauces or whatever you come up with.

This is an example of a cheap cut of meat, which when cooked and marketed properly can be a very profitable menu item. If you use your imagination and cook it with an identifiable ingredient, it can be menued as a signature dish and enhance your reputation. Some examples would be whole grain mustard, black pepper rub, Irish Whiskey, Harp's Beer (Guinness turns bitter when cooked), red cabbage or other root vegetables. If you work with this product during the year and establish a popular profitable menu item you may find yourself with a lot of extra customers come March.



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