Digital Cookbooks: Library digital resources for English 125: Accounting for Taste

Welzenbach, Rebecca

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Rebecca Welzenbach, Text Creation Partnership Librarian
rwelzenb@umich.edu
734-615-0038
Who am I?

Rebecca Welzenbach

• Librarian based in Shapiro Library

• Work on digital projects, particularly to do with English Renaissance texts

• Get in touch with me:
  • rwelzenb@umich.edu
  • (734) 615-0038
  • Shapiro Library 4816
  • Twitter: @rwelzenb or @tcpstream
Assignment:

In a five-page essay, make an argument for the importance of a recipe’s history for understanding its cultural function today. For this paper, you will need to do some research, using the Clements Library, a digital archive, or a series of cookbooks to establish how a recipe came into being and how its passage through history has altered its form.

Today’s presentation focuses finding and using digitized historical cookbooks/recipes online, using library resources.
Library resources:

- Early English Books Online-Text Creation Partnership
- Eighteenth Century Collections Online-Text Creation Partnership
- New York Public Library Menus Project
- Michigan State University “Feeding America” Cookbook Project
- Hathi Trust Digital Library
- Google Books, Internet Archive, etc.
EEBO-TCP/ECCO-TCP

- EEBO-TCP contains thousands of books on all subjects published in English before 1700. ECCO-TCP is a smaller resource, but does the same thing for English books published 1700-1800.

- Start by trying to find cookbooks, or other books likely to contain recipes. One good approach: search for “cookery” in book titles or in subject terms. Other good terms: “recipe” and “receipt.”
Try browsing the table of contents to get an idea of the kinds of recipes in the book, and what kinds of keywords might be useful to you. Because spelling, word usage, and types of foods have changed so much, this might get you farther at first than searching. Once you’ve browsed a little bit, try crafting searches using the words and terms you encountered.

In this case:
- “Sallat” instead of salad
- “Hog” when we might say pork or pig
- WTF is a “quelquechose”?
When you’ve found some interesting books, you can hold onto them, and search them all at once:

In the upper right-hand corner, make sure you’re logged in to save items of interest to your bookbag.

Click “Add to bookbag”

You can search all the items in your bookbag at once.
Other EEBO/ECCO-TCP Tips:

- The search engine searches for a whole string by default. If you type in ‘beef pie,’ it will only find exactly that string—not ‘beef’ and ‘pie’ both (like Google does).

- You can use the * as a wild card to find different forms of a word. For example, cook* will find instances of cook, cooking, cooked, cookery, etc. This can give you lots of false positives, such as people named Cook or Cooke.

- This search engine does not know how to guess or look up spelling variants—so try different searches (such as ‘pudding’ and ‘puding’).
Other EEBO/ECCO-TCP Tips:

- When reading a text, click the “Page” links to see an image of the original book. What might you learn from this that the transcribed text doesn’t tell us?

- Look out for other kinds of recipes, for medicine, ink, and other things! Expect to find strange things, adjust your search based on what you learn, and try again.
If you want to learn more about the cultural/historical contexts were for certain kinds of foods, try a broader search and see what comes up. Be prepared to do some digging.

In Spring when Peggant Humours Encrease most,  
And Summer, when the Appetite is lost,  
In Autumn, when Raw Fruits Diseases Breed,  
And Winter time too cold to Purge or Bleed;  
Do this but Rare ARABIAN Cordial Use,  
And thou may’st all the Doctors Slops Refuse.  
Hush then, dull QUACKS, your Mountebanking cease,  
COFFEE’S a speedier Cure for each Disease
New York Public Library Menus Project

- They have scanned thousands of American restaurant menus (mostly 20th century) and are now asking volunteers to help transcribe them (this makes it possible to search).

- More than 13,000 menus are now searchable
Easiest to either do a search:

or click on the “Menus” tab to browse through all of them.
New York Public Library Menus Project

- Explore—I found the “dishes” tab hard to use, because it captures dishes exactly as they are described on a menu. Since no two menus are exactly alike, this doesn’t get you very far.
“Feeding America” Cookbooks project

- 76 American cookbooks from the late 18th-early 20th century
- Can view page images and search transcriptions
- Can browse alphabetically, by date, or by “interest” (e.g. regions, ethnic groups)
- There is also introductory information for each book to place it in context
Other digital book archives:

- Hathi Trust: http://www.hathitrust.org/
- Internet Archive: http://archive.org/index.php
What can the context of the cookbook tell us?

- How are foods organized?
  - Is an omelet for breakfast or for dinner?
  - Are eggs meat or vegetarian fare?
  - Do soups, salads, or appetizers come first?

- What else is in the book?
  - Health remedies?
  - Housekeeping tips?
  - Schedule or travelogue?

- Is there an introduction? Who is it for?
  - Women? Men? Children?
Can anyone tell me how to make a quelquechose?

There is a prize.

Try out some of these sites; let me know if you get stuck!

Feel free to get in touch with me later if you like.