

## REFLECTIONS OF NAUTICAL ONOMASTICS

Ten years ago I retired, moved to Florida and brought along my kayak. Since then I have paddled through the maze of canals around Pompano Beach, Boca Raton and Fort Lauderdale, up and down the Intracoastal Waterway, and out on the Atlantic Ocean. In that world of yachts, cabin cruisers, chartered fishing boats and sailing vessels, my tiny craft is the slowest, so it follows that every boat passes me, affording me a good look at every stern with its name and home port. I kept a casual log of the names encountered, and when the list reached 1,000 I devised a rule-of-thumb division of 24 categories.

In alphabetical order, I began with Alcoholic and ended with Zoological and, as a result of many conversations with the boatmen, in marinas and boatyards and canalside, I offer the following findings:

Alcoholic—(43 in number) with B & B, DRY MARTINI and RHEINGOLD EXPRESS as a few examples.

Birds—(63) FLAMINGO, IBIS and PELICAN.

Children—(67) GEKIVEN, a combination of George, Kim and Steven; KA-DO-LA, a combination of Karl, Doris and Lawrence.

Dullest—(1) INVESTMENT BROKER.

Ethnic—(11) GOLDEN GREEK, IRISH ROVER and ITALIAN STALLION.

Fictitious—(44) DAVEY JONES, LORELEI and POSEIDON.

Fish—(22) GRUNT, POMPAÑO and SHARK. Although South Florida has a large Jewish population, I never logged a JEW FISH.

Foreign—(61) Italian names nosed out Spanish, 25 to 23. French six, German three, and Norwegian two. Dutch and Finnish, one each.

Geographical—(67) ARKANSAS TRAVELLER, PITTSBURGH DOM and SOUÏX CITY SUE.

Initials—(10) CAPT. B.J., C.C.'S DREAM and T.N.T.

Ladies—(17) FAST LADY, FRISKY LADY and SHADY LADY.

Man & Wife—(62) DOT-N-MIKE, JACK-LYNN and KARENLOU.

Men—(38) BARNACLE BILL, JOE'S DARLING and SNEAKY PETE.

Numbers—(10) THREE PALS, FOURS SONS and LUCKY SIX.

Picturesque—(114) MOONRAKER, SPINDRIFT and WINDCHIME.

Reversals—(18) RETLAW, ROLYAT and SNIKTAW.

Risqué—(11) MUFFDIVER, RAPER, RUT CRY, SKAROO and WET DREAM.

Sea-Going—(75) SEA ANGLER, SEA ROVER, SEA SCAMP and SEA WITCH.

Surnames—(27) BIXBY'S PLAYPEN, MURPHY'S LAW and SUSSMAN'S FOLLY.

Unexplained—(15) FAT CITY, RUMBLESEAT and SALTSHAKER. In most cases the owners claimed they had bought the boats with the names already painted on, and had no idea of their significance.

Whimsical—(50) MI-YOT, PADE IV, SUMP-N-TA-DOO and THIS-L-DU.

Wrong Assumption—(15) FULL HOUSE and THIRSTY LADY. The former had no connection with a poker game in which the boat was won: the owner just explained he had seven children! The THIRSTY LADY did not refer to the yachtman's wife (he said) but to the boat itself which was a gas-guzzler.

Zoological—(40) CRASHING BOAR, MANATEE and SLY FOX.

I thought my list was complete until one fateful windless morning when the water was glassy-calm, I came upon yet another fascinating facet to this study. I suddenly noticed that DIXIE BEE was exactly the same when reflected in the water! That night I went over my lists and found 14 “reflective” names I had logged without realizing their added dimension. This was the twenty-fifth category, and by far the most difficult to log.

I found BOBBE, BOBBIE O., BOBO II, BOOBIE, CEE-BEE, CHICO, DIXIE, HI-HO, BOBBE BOBBIE O. BOBO II BOOBIE CEE-BEE CHICO DIXIE HI-HO HI-DEE-HO, HI-KIX, HOBO, HOODOO, KIKI and KOO KOO II. Conversations with some HI-DEE-HO HI-KIX HOBO HOODOO KIKI KOO KOO II of the skippers disclosed they had no idea the names of their boats were duplicated below the water line, so it is safe to assume the other boatsmen may be equally unaware of this watery reflection.

As only the letters B, C, D, E, H, I, K, O, and X can be reflected in the water, it is a rare ship indeed that can fit in this category. So as I paddle along in my kayak I like to think that somewhere out on the briny there is a primitive skin boat called the OXHIDE, perhaps a refrigerator ship named ICEBOX, or even a sleek French cabin cruiser called CHIC BEBE.

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## STATE NAMES APPLIED TO FOODS

American cuisine has benefited from the names of states applied to various foods and recipes. Although the most elegant restaurants and kitchens may still describe their costly fares with European phrases and words, numerous American cooks entitle their creations using the names of one of our 50 states. Such a naming practice reflects both local patriotism and culinary pride.<sup>1</sup> I should be quick to point out, however, that every state has been used at one point or another to christen a certain dish. What follows is a review of some of the most significant examples and a brief survey of how some of these names are used. After consulting some 30 cookbooks, I believe that state names are applied to foods for a number of reasons: they pinpoint the area in which a food is produced or a recipe flourishes; they identify the home state of the creator of a recipe; and they call to mind how some foods physically resemble a state. These are not discrete categories, for there is some overlapping.

Food is produced everywhere in our country—from the Alaskan tundra to the Florida Keys. And oftentimes the same food is grown or sowed, harvested or hunted in more than one state. But one state’s supply of that particular food is held up as the best and most popular of its kind. Doubtless this specific variety is found on many menus. Idaho potatoes, Wisconsin cheese, Kansas wheat, Maine lobster, Georgia peaches, Colorado brook trout, California grapefruit, Iowa corn, Florida red snapper, or Vermont maple sugar are esteemed as the cream of their crop, even though, for example, Idaho trout, Texas grapefruit, Minnesota wheat, or Illinois beef are delectable and grandly served.<sup>2</sup>

In the preparation of certain foods, too, certain recipes bearing the state’s name claim pride of place. Kentucky fried chicken, perhaps thanks to Colonel Sanders, is incomparable to Maryland fried chicken, the latter made with cracker crumbs. Tennessee ham seems to pale by comparison with Virginia ham, a smoked and sugar cured treat. Louisiana shrimp and gumbo beat the New York or Carolina varieties. And a New York cut strip steak provides the ultimate in dining pleasure for a beef lover.

As these examples show, certain foods and their preparation are widely known; they can be appreciated coast to coast. Many lesser known foods, however, receive a state name because they contain a major ingredient associated with that one state or region or they are generally the culinary product of a certain regional or ethnic area. Hawaii, our last state, is famous for pineapple, and

cooks who use this fruit freely as an ingredient often title a dish “Hawaiian” simply because it contains pineapple. Hawaiian candy, meatballs, rice, frying pan cookies, chicken salad, or turkey salad are all on record. The Mexican love of hot and spicy foods has influenced such states as California or Texas which lend their names to dishes enlivened with chili powder, spices, and peppers. Old California rice, California pot roast, and California gravy are memorable; Texas chili, hash, or casserole also go heavy on the garlic and pepper.

Perhaps more than other regions of the country the South is known for food and savory ways of cooking it. Corn bread, and its many varieties, is a favorite Southern staple. Virginia spoon bread and skillet corn bread in addition to Alabama mush bread are some regional examples. Some slang expressions make use of a state name for foods: Georgia ice cream is used to describe grits, and in black parlance a Georgia ham is a watermelon. As famous for cuisine as for colonels, Kentucky boasts of a Kentucky toddy (made with bourbon whiskey and not rum or scotch), a Kentucky bourbon cake, mint julep, eggnog, burgoo, and there is even a rich Old Kentucky nut cake listed in *Favorite Eastern Star Recipes: Olde Family Favorites* (Montgomery, 1965). All of the above would be nicely complemented by a cup of Louisiana coffee, a distinctively Southern blend of dark rich coffee and bitter chicory.

In the North, there are such ethnic recipes as Pennsylvania Dutch scrapple, red cabbage (made with bacon, apple, and vinegar), and shoulder of pork. Rhode Island johnnycakes, originally an Indian food, are a remarkably thin variety preferred by the residents of our smallest state, according to *The American Heritage Cookbook* (New York, 1964). And South Dakota roast pheasant is a palatable dish from the plains of that state.

In addition to being named after a certain state or region from which the food comes, some dishes are christened in honor of the native state of the inventor of the recipe. Numerous cookbooks will list the name and address of the individual whose recipe they reprint. *Favorite Eastern Star Recipes*, for example, lists the following: Nebraska butterscotch crunchies, supplied by a woman from Nelson, Nebraska; the recipe for Chicken Washington is sent in by a lady from Spokane; and Maine chocolate cake comes from a homemaker in Princeton, Maine.

Certain other foods have intentionally been named after a given state because they visually resemble the physical features of that state. The most famous example is baked Alaska. This rather elegant dessert contains ice cream which is so well covered that it does not melt even after being placed in a hot oven and thus suggests the enduring cold of our forty-ninth state. There are, of course, numerous varieties of alaskas—melba alaska, ribbon alaska pie, or mint patti alaska. Until Alaska entered the Union, Texas held the honor of being the largest state, and anything Texan was synonymous with large measures. Accordingly, restaurants and cooks have borrowed that state’s name to characterize the size of their portions. Numerous steak houses offer Texas steaks, presumably bigger than customary ones served at other restaurants. Along with this gigantic piece of meat the patron will find Texas toast—a big and thick slice of fried bread. (One of my colleagues claims, though, that the toast was so named for the manner in which it was cooked over a camp fire used by cowpunchers on the open range rather than for the size of the state.) There are even Texas sandwiches—an open face sandwich spread with cheese and covered with plentiful and varied ingredients. Mississippi dirty rice, the recipe for which comes from a Laurel woman, according to *The Mississippi Cookbook* (Jackson, 1974), is made with cayenne pepper, giblets, and oysters, ingredients whose colors and texture resemble the Mississippi for which the state is named.

The name of a state can be applied to foods for a variety of reasons: to show where they originate or predominate; to honor the home state of the inventor; or to describe their physical appearance. If there is any one conclusion to be drawn from this naming practice it is, quite candidly, that we Americans are as patriotic about our food as we are about our federation.

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of another use of state names as an expression of local patriotism, see my “State Names Used as City and County Names,” *Mississippi Folklore Register*, 11 (Fall 1977).

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Nader’s investigators may very well hold restaurants and hotels to their own menus, making sure that when they list Idaho potatoes, they actually secure them from Idaho.