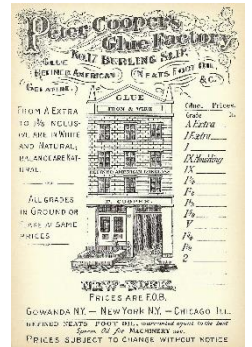


Peter Cooper & Jell-O

Written by: Sue Shutte



One of the owners of Ringwood Manor, Peter Cooper (1791-1883), is known for his many contributions to history during his lifetime. While he referred to himself as a “mechanic,” his contributions to chemical engineering, the iron industry, and mechanical engineering are quite impressive. But did you know that Peter Cooper also contributed to creating a food dish that can still be found on tables and in lunchboxes to this day? He created the first edible gelatin, today referred to as “Jell-O.”



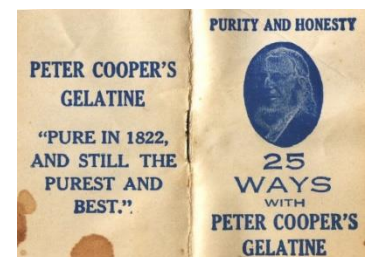
In 1822, Peter Cooper purchased a small glue factory in New York City. The factory was tasked with taking animal by-products and turning them into glues, gelatins, isinglass, neat’s-foot oil, and prepared chalk. During this time, Peter’s natural inquisitiveness led him to experiment with the gelatins the factory was producing. In the early part of the 19th century, food manufacturers had been experimenting with gelatin, but none were able to come up with an appealing and usable product. Although the exact history of how Peter Cooper created the product is unknown to us today, we do know that in 1845 he secured a patent (US Patent 4084) for a gelatin dessert powder called “portable gelatin.” His invention was a basic edible gelatin that had no flavoring to it. But the product allowed sweetness and flavoring to be added to it by using fruit juices and



sugar. Thus, it was mostly utilized as a dessert food. Boxes and advertisements for Peter Cooper’s Gelatin still exist today, along with recipe booklets that were tucked inside of the packages to give home cooks ideas of how to utilize the product. The gelatinous product was also made to look more appealing by using decorative copper molds to set the product into various shapes and forms.

In 1895, Peter Cooper’s estate sold the patent to Pearl Wait, a cough syrup manufacturer. Mr. Wait’s wife eventually changed the name of the product to “Jell-O.”

Interested in using one of Peter Cooper’s original recipes to make your own edible gelatin? Read the recipe below, which was contained in a booklet entitled “Purity and Honesty: 25 Ways with Peter Cooper’s Gelatin.” This booklet is tucked in to an original Hewitt family cookbook that was loaned to Ringwood Manor by descendants of the Cooper & Hewitt families.



Orange Jelly

Soak two tablespoons of Peter Cooper's gelatin in one-half cup cold water for three minutes

Dissolve in two cups boiling water

Add one cup sugar, one cup orange juice, and juice of one lemon.

Strain into cold, wet moulds.

Set in cool place to harden. Serve plain or with whipped cream. Enjoy!

