

# 100 Years of Canadian Railway Recipes

All aboard for an historic dining experience!



**EXPORAIL**  
LE MUSÉE FERROVIAIRE CANADIEN  
THE CANADIAN RAILWAY MUSEUM

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Marie-Paule Partikian

Jean-Paul Viaud



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**Exporail, the Canadian Railway Museum**

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Cover: Filet mignon Mathews, Bordelaise sauce. Chef Lucien Schickele recipe. *During his regime of thirty years at the Royal Alexandra, Chef Schickele has schooled many students of his art who have since assumed posts of responsibility in other Company hotels. Menus of the Vancouver, the Saskatchewan, the Palliser, the Empress and Chateau Lake Louise reflect his influence. [...]. From his favourite recipes comes a "Filet Mignon Mathews," named for the general manager of Canadian Pacific Hotels, H. F. Mathews.* – Canadian Pacific Staff Bulletin, 1936.<sup>1</sup>

Nothing could be more enjoyable than discovering a new dish with congenial company. Sharing a chapter from our railway heritage in the form of recipes that made train travel a memorable experience, introduced local products and highlighted the talents of Canadian railway chefs is no less so. Our goal in producing this cookbook is to preserve the culinary history of railways. By purchasing it in support of Exporail's 2013–2014 fundraising campaign, you have contributed to conserving and showcasing Canadian railway heritage.

In addition to featuring 90 recipes drawn from CN, Canadian Pacific and VIA Rail Canada archives and tested by popular food stylist Josée Robitaille, the book presents anecdotes and historical information about life aboard the dining cars and the chefs working in their kitchens. The artistic concept for the culinary material was designed by Line Pomerleau and her team at Prima Vidéo, while Christian Desjardins' elegant photos lend a contemporary look to the recipes. Naturally, some of the recipes have been adapted for convenience and to suit modern tastes by substituting certain ingredients and adjusting quantities to yield portions appropriate for a single family. We are truly grateful for the contribution of the Prima Vidéo team.

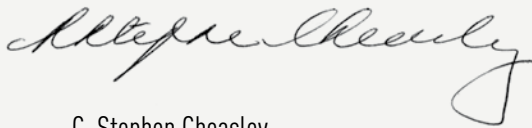
Without the support of VIA Rail Canada employees, particularly of chef and sommelier Martin Gemme, it would have been a daunting task to represent the more recent culinary heritage of railways. Their collaboration was an important part of the project's success. We would also like to acknowledge the ongoing support of CN and Canadian Pacific for Exporail's activities. This project would not have been possible without our principal financial partner for operations, the ministère de la Culture et des Communications du Québec, or the contributors to the recipe collection's funding campaign. We owe them a debt of gratitude.

Hats off (chefs and conductors one and all!) to the entire team at Exporail and especially to Christian Bougie, project originator, Jean-Paul Viaud, curator and author of the preface, Marie-Paule Partikian, in charge of historical research and iconography, and archivist Josée Vallerand, for her research assistance.

We hope you enjoy exploring these 90 delicious recipes. Use them to prepare a special meal with friends or let your children surprise you with a succulent snack. Bon appétit!



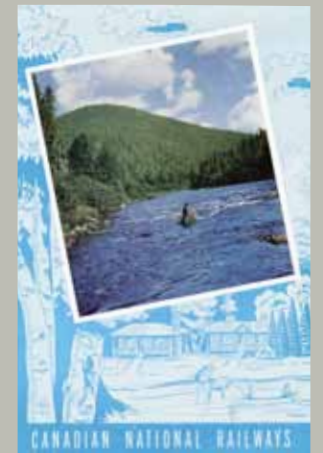
Marie-Claude Reid  
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Canadian Pacific Railway menu showcasing the coronation of Their Majesties King George VI and Queen Elizabeth on May 12th, 1937 at Westminster Abbey. <sup>2</sup>



Canadian National Railways menu featuring salmon fishing in New Brunswick, late 1950s. <sup>3</sup>



View inside a VIA Rail Canada dining car. <sup>4</sup>

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## Proposed first class interior (Canadian proposal).<sup>5</sup>

This superb watercolour is one of a series of studies prepared by designer Jacques Guillon in the late 1970s. It features the interior design of Bombardier's LRC (light, rapid, comfortable) cars, which the Canadian government was considering purchasing for Canadian National Railways / VIA Rail Canada.

# Dining railway-style in North America

JEAN-PAUL VIAUD

## Travellers' growing expectations

Viewed from today's perspective, it is difficult to imagine the excitement that was bubbling over in the early years of the 19th century. The desire to embrace progress—embodied in the movement known as internal improvements—led to steam power being quickly adopted into the realm of transportation. The British, who already had a fast-paced, business-oriented lifestyle, would be the first to try out the new time-saving technologies.



**"The Log Village – Arrival of the Stagecoach." Engraving from *The backwoods of Canada*, 1838.**<sup>1</sup>

Before the era of railways, water transportation offered a certain level of comfort, but land travel was still more or less restricted to the stagecoach.<sup>2</sup> Since no one dared travel by night, stagecoach inns were located about every 90 kilometres so that travellers could stop to eat and rest. The food provided was often very expensive and its quality varied from place to place, but travellers had little choice. Occasionally, they would be in for a pleasant surprise, as was the case in 1840 for a woman from New York<sup>3</sup> who remarked on the food served in a stagecoach inn just a few days after enjoying an excellent steamboat meal: "I observe in all fashionable tours, what is eaten and drank seems to be a matter of immense importance (...). We had been warned our fare upon these 'lonesome prairies' would be poor, and of course we did not expect the tables of a New York Hotel. (...) They soon placed upon the table cloth, some fine smoking potatoes from their garden—nice Indian meal cakes, eggs, milk, cheese, cucumbers, butter, bread and 'chicken fixens.' Every thing, being native produce, was very nice (...)"<sup>4</sup>

Her account confirms that the reputation of the hotel industry in East Coast cities of the United States had already grown to the point of creating high expectations. The same could not be said of Canada, if we are to believe Charles Dickens' report of a trip from New York to Montreal in 1838: "The steamboats (...) are unsurpassed. (...) The

inns are usually bad; because the custom of boarding at hotels is not so general as in the States (...) but in every other respect, the traveller in Canada will find as good provision for his comfort as in any place I know."<sup>6</sup>

At that time in Canada, travellers often stayed in a private home (or with friends), with soldiers if in the service or with priests if a member of the clergy. Inns offering lodging and meals were few and far between and their quality unreliable. In fact, as one English traveller of the day noted, the hotels were operated like those in the United States but were greatly inferior in quality.<sup>7</sup>

Whatever the quality of the establishment, one thing always struck European visitors: the haste of North Americans, who—as in every endeavour—ate quickly. One traveller remarked the following in a New York hotel in 1841: "(...) The meals are served with amazing despatch. (...) only 15 minutes, by my watch, elapsed between our sitting down and rising up. Within that time, 150 persons had crammed down a breakfast."<sup>8</sup>

The cultural shock was mutual, however, as witnessed by the reaction of one local to the same traveller: "You Europeans (...) eat as if you actually enjoyed your food!"<sup>9</sup>

That says it all: North Americans admired speed and practicality while Europeans—and to some extent English Canadians—longed for quality and enjoyed taking the time to appreciate the finer things. Railways had to deal with these sometimes incompatible values as they set about slowly building a reputation for their service. At the outset of the heroic age of railways, however, the matter was hardly of concern. Routes were short and included no onboard services—quite unlike the situation with the period's leading form of transportation: the steamboat.



**"Table d'hôte, Catskill, New York, August 28 1838." Watercolour by Katherine Jane Ellice.**<sup>5</sup>

1 Exporail Archives.

2 The term "mail coach" was also used for stagecoach lines that transported mail in addition to passengers.

3 STEELE, Eliza R. *A Summer Journey in the West*, 1840, p. 78. "After an excellent dinner we ascended to the promenade deck (...) surrounded with seats (...)."

4 *Idem*, p. 127.

5 Library and Archives Canada, 1990.215.20R.

6 DICKENS, Charles. *American Notes*, 1838, p. 214–215. It is worth noting that during his vacation, Charles Dickens took the train between La Prairie and Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu during its very first years of operation.

7 In 1840, T.R. Preston (*Three Years' Residence in Canada, from 1837 to 1839*, Vol. 1, p. 42) described the restaurants and hotels as being managed like American establishments but of much lower quality.

8 "Combe's Notes on the United States," in *Waldie's Select Circulating Library*, Adam Waldie Ed., 1841, p. 307.

9 *Idem*.





“The James River and Kanawha Canal.” Harper’s Weekly, October 14, 1865.<sup>10</sup>

### Inspiration from the waterways

Introduced to Canada in the 1810s by John Molson—an ardent promoter of the railway—steamboat travel on the St. Lawrence River offered the comfort of a cabin, a large, well-decorated dining room and, especially, quality meals inspired by the best cuisine offered by the restaurants and hotels of New England. It was not unusual for the dining room to be built on the lower deck and extend some 200 feet or more along the full length of the boat! Seated under a high ceiling amidst elegant décor, diners were treated like the clients of New York’s finest hotels. Contemporaries rightly described these boats as floating palaces. The idea of serving food on trains came, however, not from these magnificent vessels, but from a more modest form of transportation navigating the many East Coast canals.

### Eat and sleep as you travel

Today, many have forgotten the important role canals played in transporting goods and people in bygone days. The few railways that had been built were simply adjuncts to canals, serving as portages from one waterway to the next. The canals were narrow and shallow, and so the boats travelling them were of modest proportions. Fortunately for travellers, however, they were comfortable and hospitable.

The fastest of these boats, designed for transporting passengers and mail, were a kind of barge known as packet boats (which gave rise to the French term *paquebot*).<sup>11</sup> Drawn by a team of three horses<sup>12</sup> along towpaths, they travelled the canals at about 6 km/h. Since certain trips took several days<sup>13</sup>, basic services had to be offered, which included stacked folding beds and hot meals of reasonable quality prepared by a cook

in the galley. Travellers could expect the same level of services as those offered by stagecoach inns.<sup>14</sup>

Often prepared by a former black slave, the food generally enjoyed a fine reputation. Supper cost just 37 cents, while breakfast or lunch could be had for 25 cents.<sup>16</sup>

### Time is money!

This maxim underscores the importance of speed in American culture. Before the 1850s, when train bridges and tunnels became commonplace, railways were limited to providing portage services in a complementary role to water navigation.<sup>17</sup> Waste no time, multitask, shrink the world and—first and foremost—eliminate stops so that travellers might continue to eat, sleep and enjoy the scenery in the comfort of a packet boat: this was the new reality an impatient travelling public had come to expect!

One such traveller took the time to express in writing his appreciation for the convenience and comfort of packet boat travel and his wish to see the routes expanded. This is precisely when Americans began to see the idea of eliminating stops to eat or sleep as a valuable way of saving precious time when travelling: “[...] We joined in a wish that the same kind of travelling were extended every where: no time was lost; kitchen and cellar



“Negro waiter on board the ‘British America’ steamer.” (Original title), Unknown artist.<sup>15</sup>

travelled with us.”<sup>18</sup> Jesse Chrisman personally experienced this type of travel in October 1834. A resident of New England, Chrisman decided to move his family west. He purchased a small packet boat called the Hit or Miss to transport his possessions with plenty of room left over for sleeping and cooking. He realized that when they reached the canal’s western limit, he would have to leave the boat behind to portage over the Allegheny Mountains by train, at which point he planned on selling his boat and making new travel arrangements. One of the owners of the Reliance Transportation Company—John Dougherty—noticed Chrisman’s unusual crew and had a stroke of genius: why leave a comfortable boat behind when it could be transported! He succeeded in convincing Jesse Chrisman to try his plan. Boat and crew were loaded without

<sup>10</sup> Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-133833.

<sup>11</sup> The term *paquebot* also designated oceangoing vessels carrying mail and its use in French came to be reserved exclusively for such larger ships. The word *cargo* is now used in French to describe a boat that transports only freight or raw materials.

<sup>12</sup> Dual-purpose barges were drawn by a team of two horses.

<sup>13</sup> At an average speed of 7 km/h, the Erie Canal route between Buffalo and New York took ten days to complete. The Lachine, Chambly and Rideau canals were all much shorter.

<sup>14</sup> In 1836, Thomas S. Woodcock, an Englishman from New York, reported during a trip to Niagara Falls: “these boats are about 70 feet in length and, except for the kitchen and bar, the entire space is used for cabins. Since the front section serves as a cabin for the women, it is set off by a curtain. At meal time, however, the curtain is drawn and a table set up along the full length of the boat. Meals are of a fine quality and include everything you might require and several luxuries as well.” Deoch Fulton, *New York to Niagara, 1836: The Journal of Thomas S. Woodcock*, 1938.

<sup>15</sup> Library and Archives Canada, Peter Winkworth Collection, R9266.282.

<sup>16</sup> The trip cost about 4¢ per mile including a cot. If packet boats represented first-class travel of their era, travellers also had the option of taking a line boat: vessels which were used to transport wheat and animals eastwards but which took on passengers for the return trip west. These were slower, offered Spartan living conditions and required that passengers prepare their own meals. As a result, their main clientele consisted of immigrants looking for inexpensive transportation, as would be provided—many years later!—by the colonist cars transporting settlers to the Canadian West.

<sup>17</sup> This was the case with the Champlain and St. Lawrence Rail Road, which was built in place of a planned canal. Canada’s first railway (incorporated in 1832 and opened for operation in 1836), it connected La Prairie on the St. Lawrence River with Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu. From Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, numerous steamboats navigated down to Lake Champlain and the Hudson River through the Erie Canal. Following the War of 1812, a furious debate had raged over whether to build a canal or a railway to connect La Prairie with Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu. Canals and their packet boats were a proven method of transportation, whereas railways were an unknown commodity whose technological capacity had yet to be tested. In the end, history tells us that the proponents of the railway won out over those advocating a canal because of the enormous cost of the latter.

<sup>18</sup> NICHOLAS, A.H. *Espriella’s letters*, in *Republic of Letters*, Vol. 6, New York, 1836, p. 77.

# Wild mushrooms cappuccino

VIA Rail Canada, Millennium celebrations 1999–2000 <sup>30</sup>

Serves 4

45 g (1 1/2 oz) dried wild mushrooms  
1 leek, white part only, diced small  
125 ml (1/2 cup) Inniskillin Pinot Blanc  
a few sprigs of fresh thyme  
800 ml (3 1/4 cups) vegetable stock  
30 ml (2 tbsp) butter  
salt and freshly ground pepper  
250 ml (1 cup) 10% cream  
whipped cream topping (see recipe)  
4 bread sticks

Soak the mushrooms in the wine to rehydrate. In a large pot, melt the butter and sweat the leeks until tender. Add the mushrooms and thyme. Add the vegetable stock and bring to a boil. Reduce and simmer 30 minutes. Let cool and purée with an electric mixer. Just before serving, finish cooking with 10% cream. Adjust seasoning.

Ladle the soup into a coffee cup. Garnish with a dollop of whipped cream topping and a bread stick.

# Whipped cream topping

Serves 4

80 ml (1/3 cup) 35% cream  
salt and freshly ground pepper

In a mixing bowl, add the cream, salt and pepper. Whip until stiff.



Selection of four fresh rolls offered in a VIA Rail Canada dining car. <sup>31</sup>





# Ramequins Genevois

Canadian National Railways Chef, 1923 <sup>24</sup>

Serves 8

45 ml (3 tbsp) butter  
60 ml (1/4 cup) flour  
10 ml (2 tsp) 35% cream  
375 ml (1 1/2 cups) Gruyère cheese, grated  
60 ml (1/4 cup) Roquefort cheese  
5 egg yolks  
pinch of nutmeg  
5 egg whites, beaten

Preheat the oven to 200 °C (400 °F)

Melt butter in a saucepan. Add the flour, stir and cook over medium heat for 2 minutes. Beat in cream. Add cheeses and melt. Remove from heat. Add the egg yolks and nutmeg and mix. Allow to cool to lukewarm. Beat egg whites and mix into béchamel with a spatula. Bake in oven in buttered ramekins 15 to 20 minutes.

Serve hot.



Grand Trunk Pacific Railway oval platter, used in the 1910s and 1920s. <sup>25</sup>





# Herb crusted pork tenderloin with mango and black currant sauce

VIA Rail Canada, 1997 <sup>70</sup>

Serves 4

600 g (21 oz) pork tenderloin  
60 ml (1/4 cup) mango purée  
4 drops black currant purée

## Mixed herbs

30 ml (2 tbsp) parsley, finely chopped  
5 ml (1 tsp) thyme, finely chopped  
30 ml (2 tbsp) basil, finely chopped  
white pepper

Preheat the oven to 175 °C (350 °F).

Sear pork loin in pan to seal the outside. Cook in the oven until done (when loin is cooked, it will be firm but still bouncy like a medium steak). It should still be pink inside. Take the whole tenderloin out of the oven and roll it in the mixed herbs.

Cut on the diagonal and place on a plate. Spoon one tablespoon of mango purée on plate and 4 drops of black currant purée. If desired, serve with broccoli and rice pilaf.



A chef and his crew working in the kitchen of a VIA Rail Canada train. <sup>71</sup>

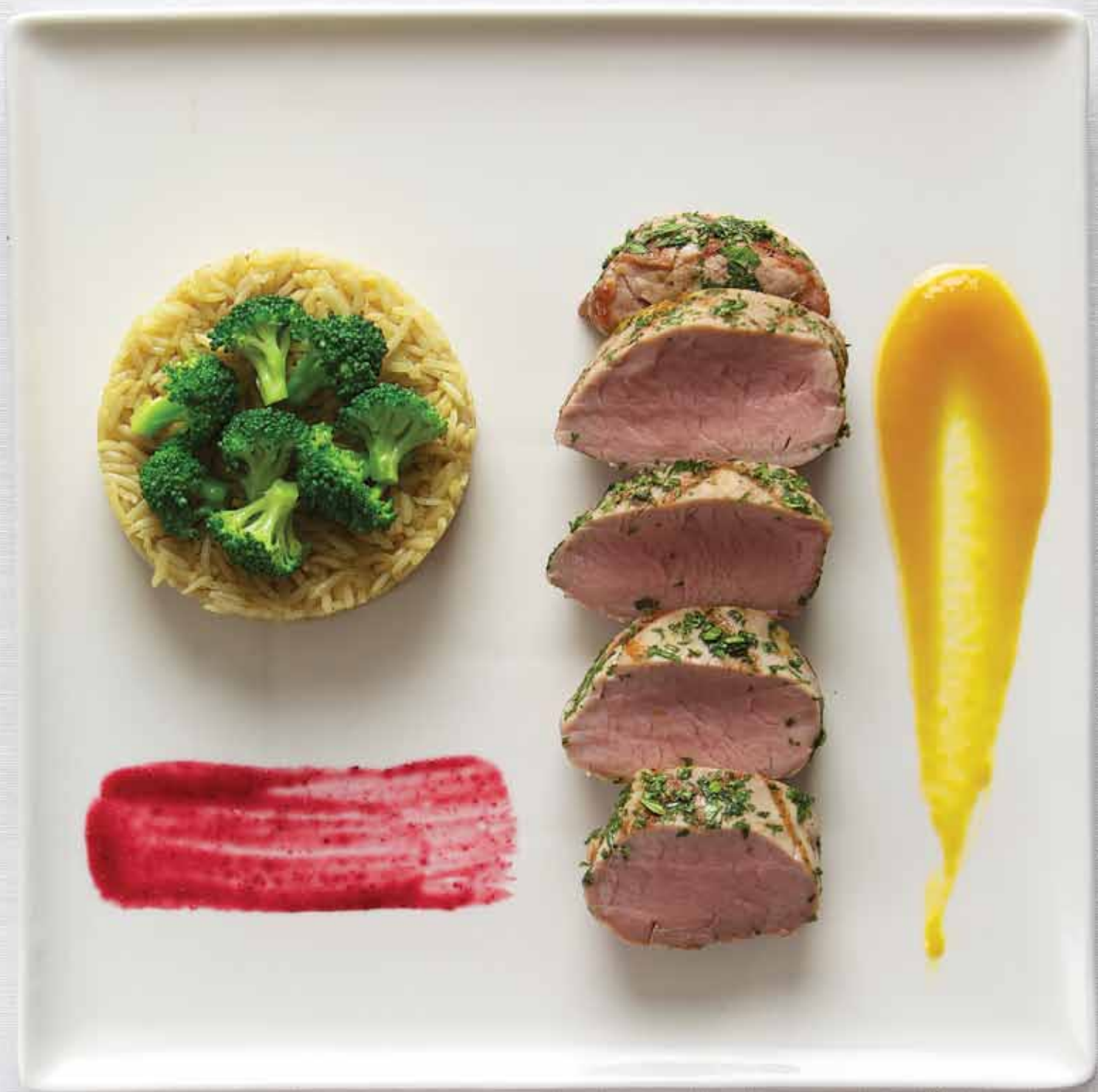
## Rice pilaf

Serves 4

250 ml (1 cup) basmati rice  
125 ml (1/2 cup) Bermuda onion  
5 ml (1 tsp) oil  
500 ml (2 cups) chicken stock  
1 bay leaf

Preheat the oven to 175 °C (350 °F).

In a sauce pan, sauté onion until translucent. Add rice and sauté until rice starts to brown. Add chicken stock and bay leaf and cover. Finish cooking in the oven.





# Stuffed tomato Canadienne

Chef Henri Odiou, Banff Springs Hotel  
Canadian Pacific Railway, 1930 <sup>84</sup>

Serves 4

4 large tomatoes  
Meat from 4 Italian sausages, mild or spicy  
1 onion, finely chopped  
60 ml (1/4 cup) chopped parsley  
125 ml (1/2 cup) cooked rice  
30 ml (2 tbsp) ketchup  
30 ml (2 tbsp) breadcrumbs  
10 ml (2 tsp) melted butter  
tomato sauce (optional)  
lettuce of your choice  
salt and freshly ground pepper

Preheat the oven to 180 °C (350 °F).

Remove the tops of the tomatoes, core them and season inside. Mix the sausage meat, onion, parsley, rice and ketchup in a bowl.

Stuff the tomatoes with the sausage mixture then set them on a baking sheet covered with parchment paper. In a small bowl, mix the butter and breadcrumbs then spoon on top of the tomatoes.

Bake for 25 to 35 minutes or until the stuffing is cooked. If desired, serve with tomato sauce or a salad.



Cover of the Canadian Pacific Railway  
Mountie menu, 1947. <sup>85</sup>

*Dear Sir: This is an unusual request but I am trusting that you can assist me. Have been a hospital patient for the past 10 months and in that time have managed to help quite a few other patients with different forms of handicraft; one thing that was a great favourite was the picture of a Mountie that used to grace one of the Menus on your trains (may still be doing so yet, for all that I know). Can you please forward me a few copies of this, if available (also any others that you may have to spare)? Thanking you for this courtesy, Yours very truly, A. E. Farthing (March 2nd, 1945). <sup>86</sup>*

*Dear sir: I have your letter of March 2nd, and take pleasure in forwarding you a few copies of our menus featuring the "Mountie," "Mountie and Air Force Girls," and also "On the Bow River." Yours truly, (March 9th, 1945). <sup>87</sup>*



# Saumon de Gaspé poché

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Chef Bernie Desanlis

Canadian National Railways, 1964 <sup>126</sup>

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Serves 4

1 litre (4 cups) water  
1 onion, sliced  
1 carrot, sliced  
15 ml (1 tbsp) white wine vinegar or lemon juice  
5 ml (1 tsp) peppercorns  
5 ml (1 tsp) salt  
4 skinless salmon steaks  
Hollandaise sauce  
fresh asparagus  
hash brown potatoes  
chives

Bring the water, onion, carrot, wine vinegar, pepper and salt to a boil in a large pot. Cover and simmer for 15 minutes. Add the salmon steaks and simmer on low heat for 12 minutes or longer depending on the thickness of the steaks. Serve with Hollandaise sauce and, if desired, asparagus and hash brown potatoes. Sprinkle with parsley and serve.

## Hollandaise sauce

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Canadian Pacific Railway recipe, 1920 <sup>127</sup>

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Serves 4

22 ml (1 1/2 tbsp) white wine vinegar  
22 ml (1 1/2 tbsp) water  
3 egg yolks  
175 ml (3/4 cup) clarified butter  
salt and freshly ground pepper

Set a medium-sized bowl over simmering water. Whisk the wine vinegar, water and egg yolks in the bowl until thick and creamy.

Remove from the heat and add the butter in a thin stream whisking constantly. Keep at room temperature, reheating as needed by returning the bowl to the bain-marie and whisking gently. Adjust the seasoning and serve with the salmon.



Cut-glass oil cruet used by Canadian National Railways. <sup>128</sup>

# 100 Years of Canadian Railway Recipes

All aboard for an historic dining experience!



Imagine travelling by train while seated at an elegant dining car table savouring dishes prepared by a world-famous chef! Exporail, the Canadian Railway Museum, invites you to discover the kind of cuisine CN, CP and VIA Rail Canada have been serving passengers for the last hundred years.

These pages contain 90 carefully selected and magnificently illustrated recipes, including appetizers, soups, salads, main dishes of meat, poultry and fish, and—of course!—desserts. An additional section offers a menu designed to introduce children to fine food. The book also explores the origins of railway food services in North America and brings this history to life through several archive documents and photos from the Exporail collection of tableware.

Every purchase of this volume helps to preserve and promote Canadian railway heritage.

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