Looking back at the prospects for gourmet dining even in the midst of Prohibition, it is evident that gourmet advocates, though small in number, were not entirely bereft of resources. They exploited the ongoing conversation in print media about the pleasures of the table that originated in France after 1800. They also frequented big-city restaurants or clubs where European-trained chefs were preparing French dishes. And they benefited from the network of markets and specialty food shops that supplied the restaurants with the fish, game, farm products, and imported delicacies, such as foie gras and truffles, essential to preparing gourmet dishes. Following the repeal of Prohibition, those interested in fine dining could also count on a renewed supply of imported European wines, although the production of American wines was seriously compromised.

Less promising, however, were the prospects for gourmet dining in the American home. While some affluent families regularly dined on gourmet fare, the great majority of Americans lacked the resources to do so. For one thing, most middle-class housewives no longer had servants or the requisite skills to prepare gourmet meals for their families. Moreover, instruction through apprenticeships, cookbooks, and/or cooking classes designed to teach the essential cooking techniques was in short supply. Even if home cooks had been able to produce gourmet dishes, their families often lacked the knowledge to appreciate these dishes and to insist on high standards.

Even so, the record number of Americans who set sail for Europe in the 1920s dramatically improved the long-run prospects for gourmet dining. They followed in the wake of several thousand American writers and artists of the Lost Generation, who settled in and around Paris and used their pens and brushes to spread the word about the good life in that city. The services of travel agencies and the economic prosperity of the 1920s facilitated the planning and execution of transatlantic voyages that in 1927 alone brought up to three hundred thousand Americans to Paris. There, they could drink with impunity and test the offerings in French restaurants, while appreciating the continent’s historic monuments.
This record-setting European invasion reflected changes in the American class structure. The 1920s witnessed the first signs of the emergence of an upper-middle class, whose members were usually college educated and pursuing lucrative professional careers. Their educational and occupational status prepared them to embrace the more sophisticated lifestyle displayed in the new or revamped luxury lifestyle magazines, which now incorporated food columns with frequent attention to French cuisine. These articles, in turn, reinforced the work of Brillat-Savarin and his disciples.

In addition to social class, gender roles shaped the ideas of these potential recruits to gourmet dining. Upper-middle-class women found it difficult to choose between the pleasures of the table and recipes from the women’s magazines, many of them addressed to dieters, that inexperienced cooks could prepare quickly. Even so, class often trumped gender as a number of these women, persuaded by the gourmet ethos, joined male counterparts in the quest to satisfy their tastebuds.2

In the public realm, however, fine dining remained largely an upper-class male activity. Men populated the existing dining societies, based largely in men’s clubs, and dominated the ranks of chefs, wine dealers, and restaurant and gourmet food shop owners. Women’s participation, initially limited to occasional dinners in fine restaurants and reading accounts of gourmet dining in the lifestyle magazines, grew significantly as these periodicals turned to women to write their food columns.

A New Social Class and Its Periodicals

The key to the development of the gourmet movement in America was the rise of a new class, whose members sought to express individual taste preferences through the acquisition of stylish clothes, artistically decorated homes, and meals designed to entertain the palate. The upper-middle class came of age after World War II, but emerged gradually during the 1920s as men and women flocked to universities; the former sought higher education to take advantage of the increasing availability of managerial and professional positions, while their female classmates, a few of whom entered business or the professions, usually sought suitable marriages. By midcentury, the new class constituted 10 to 15 percent of the American workforce.3

The upper-middle-class lifestyle was affordable, largely because male graduates of universities earned a living sufficient to support a higher level of consumption. However, material factors, such as occupation and wealth, were less
important in defining the new class than its commitment to the values of intelligence, cosmopolitanism, and self-actualization that the universities and the example of upper-class practices helped to foster. Accordingly, many members of the new class spent heavily on travel, cultural events, and decorative items to create a more elegant and adventurous lifestyle. Wives especially played an important role in shaping the new culture. While members of the upper-middle class thus helped to popularize a more expressive culture, they could not match the level of spending of their upper-class counterparts. Even so, their allegiance to the cause of gourmet dining created a critical mass that, in turn, brought the movement to the attention of a larger public.

New periodicals, including the New Yorker, as well as the renovated House and Garden and Vogue, not only publicized gourmet dining but serviced the new class by clarifying opportunities to enhance the status of its members and introduce them to a more sophisticated culture. To be sure, gourmet advocates effectively communicated the gospel of good living, but potential converts required more than a conviction in the value of the good life. They needed continuous advice on how to implement that life, which was effectively presented in regular food columns instructing readers on where to find fresh ingredients and how to cook and serve them with wine and less subtly in the myriad advertisements for alcoholic beverages. In a timely way, the new or revamped luxury lifestyle magazines served as midwives to the gourmet dining movement by dispensing instruction on more tasteful ways to live, while at the same time profiting from their growing subscriber base. They reflected and supported the worldly standards of the upper-middle class while keeping readers abreast of cultural developments in Europe, this paving the way for the founding of Gourmet.4

The man most responsible for this change was Condé Nast, whose publishing company owned Vogue, Vanity Fair, and House and Garden, printed the New Yorker, and, long after Nast’s death, bought Gourmet. From the outset, Nast used his publications as a vehicle for coaching Americans in the ways of “high fashion” and “gracious living.” During his previous tenure at Colliers, he sought without success to promote “exclusivity, affordable luxury and the highest quality.” With his own magazine empire now in hand, he could devote himself to this end.5

Accordingly, he hired as the first editor of Vanity Fair Frank Crowninshield, who was raised in Paris and appreciated the good life. In the first issue of that magazine, the editor announced that “Americans are increasingly devoted to pleasure, to happiness, to dancing, to sport . . . to the delights of the country,” a trend the magazine would support. So did House and Garden and Vogue, which
Nast made over to accomplish this same goal. The former would have as its new editor Richardson Wright, who loved gardens and gourmet dining. Meanwhile, the new Vogue would continue to promote high fashion, but would do so with erotic photos and sketches. Established in 1925, the New Yorker focused, like Vanity Fair and, to a lesser extent, Vogue, on presenting the New York cultural scene to readers in and out of the city.

The Hearst Corporation reinforced this trend when it challenged Condé Nast by purchasing and revamping House Beautiful and Town and Country to compete with House and Garden. Meanwhile, on the fashion front, Harper’s Bazaar, founded in the nineteenth century, addressed the same female audience as Vogue, while Esquire sought to persuade the relatively affluent man that attention to style was appropriate for men as well as women.

The luxury lifestyle magazines propagated a hedonistic message in their articles that was reinforced by their advertisements. The eagerness among advertisers of luxury items to reach an affluent audience limited the circulation of the magazines and raised their prestige. Accordingly, they were advertisement-heavy and drew their advertisers disproportionately from the purveyors of luxury goods and services. In subscribing to these magazines, readers could prepare for a shopping spree by immersing themselves in the advertisements and articles devoted to achieving an elegant lifestyle. Products that were advertised ran the gamut from clothing and furniture to automobiles, travel, tobacco, and alcoholic beverages, although the proportions varied with the magazine’s theme.

The new magazines devoted themselves, in principle, to raising the level of fashion, home decorating, and travel, while leaving the matter of dining for several years to women’s magazines. By the early 1930s, however, the advocates of upgrading clothing and house-decorating styles would seek to apply this idea to the dining scene as well. Existing magazine editors like Richardson Wright and Frank Crowninshield were well equipped to implement this change, while their counterparts at Vogue, House Beautiful, and the New Yorker were quick to follow suit, as if to insist that gourmet dining was now an essential counterpart to fashionable dress and well-decorated homes.

The introduction of food columns in the luxury lifestyle magazines followed on the heels of the legalization of alcohol in 1934 and emphasized from the outset a gourmet, as opposed to a nutritionist, approach to dining. Editors accordingly recruited journalists with different training and background from those who wrote for women’s magazines. Most had lived and traveled in Europe, especially France; all were focused on the taste of food rather than its chemistry; and they took for granted that wine was a central feature of the dining experience.
Sheila Hibbert, June Platt, Mary Grosvenor Ellsworth, Jeanne Owen, Mary Ma-on, and M. F. K. Fisher thus crafted a new genre of food writing to encourage
in their readers a new kind of dining experience. Ellsworth spoke for all of them
when she wrote, “I can’t and don’t pretend to domestic science. My ambition is
domestic art. If I can develop the cunning, the perception necessary to produce
a perfectly balanced sauce, I shall never care about its calories, vitamins, or min-
eral content.” Male writers like Frank Schoonmaker and Tom Marvel, whose
articles and books informed readers about the wide range of available wines,
joined their female colleagues in this enterprise.  

Vogue, which initially mentioned food only as an aside in articles about travel,
first reviewed New York restaurants in a column entitled “Vogue Covers the
Town” in its July 1, 1933, issue. “The Gourmet Guide,” listing New York restaur-
ants and smart clubs, became a regular feature in the December 15 issue of the
same year. To keep its readers well informed on the suddenly relevant matter of
consuming alcohol, the magazine also published Samuel Chamberlain’s “Wines
and Wherefores.” There, readers could learn which wines to drink and how to
drink them. More frequent articles on travel destinations with information
about restaurants appeared as well.  

House and Garden and House Beautiful outdid Vogue. House and Garden first
published a food column in the July 1932 issue. In November 1933, the magazine
featured an article by June Platt, who became the regular food writer for the maga-
zine, as well as Frank Schoonmaker’s “Prepare Your Cellars for Repeal.” Over the
next nine years, Platt wrote an average of eight articles about food per year. In ad-
dition, editor Wright supplied a number of his own food and wine articles, as did
his Wine and Food Society friends Crosby Gaige and Jeanne Owen.  

Even before its acquisition by Hearst, House Beautiful gave special attention
to food beginning in 1934 with regular articles by Sheila Hibben. Three years
later, Mary Grosvenor Ellsworth replaced Hibben and supplied the magazine for
the next two years with a monthly article featuring recipes. During the war and
early postwar years, M. F. K. Fisher succeeded Ellsworth.  

The annals of the New Yorker tell a similar tale. From 1925 to 1934, there were
no articles about food or restaurants aside from occasional comments in “Talk
of the Town” and “Tables for Two.” In 1930, the latter noted facetiously that some
speakeasies were beginning to serve outstanding meals. “If things continue to
progress in this alarming way, we are going to have a nation of gourmets on our
hands who never heard of drinking for the effect and not liking the taste.” In the
process “civilization is creeping into New York and meals are becoming more
sacred.”
Editor Harold Ross confirmed this new interest in food on the part of the New Yorker in a letter inviting Julian Street to “do an occasional column for us” on restaurants beginning in September 1930. Street, however, balked. After insisting that the magazine pay him a salary and meal expenses, he undermined the proposal by announcing that, even in New York’s ten best restaurants, it was impossible to eat a good meal so long as wine was unavailable. Street then proposed that he review the finest speakeasies, a plan that Ross rejected because it would put the New Yorker in the position of outing restaurant owners who broke the law.15

With the appearance of Sheila Hibben’s April 21, 1934, column entitled “Markets and Menus,” the New Yorker made food a regular feature of the magazine. Published eight or ten times a year through the 1930s, Hibben’s columns continued until her death in 1964. As compared to food columns in other lifestyle magazines, Hibben focused more on locating fresh ingredients in various Manhattan neighborhoods than on providing recipes. Her first column proposed chile rellenos requiring fresh tarragon and cheese, while two weeks later she advised readers on how to find mussels to put in a poulette sauce (white sauce with lemon juice and parsley).16

The New Yorker also took note of the end of Prohibition by publishing in October of 1934 the first of a series of Frank Schoonmaker articles on “Wine and Liquor” designed to educate its readers for the new era. In 1937, the magazine began a “Restaurants” column, for which Hibben wrote the first two reviews before this task was assigned to various writers. One of them, GCS, was bold enough to recommend in his or her first column honeycomb tripe fricassee with oysters and onions.17

Luxury lifestyle magazines had no monopoly on the treatment of food and alcohol, as is already clear from H. L. Mencken’s pioneering work in the American Mercury. When Scribner’s sales fell dramatically in the 1930s, the publisher appealed to new subscribers by introducing lifestyle features, among them a monthly article by G. Selmer Fougner on “Wines, Spirits, and Good Living.” Launched in September of 1937, it continued until the magazine folded after its May 1939 issue. More enduring was the response of the Atlantic, which introduced a series of food articles by M. F. K. Fisher beginning in 1937, followed over the next four years by André Simon’s and Charles Codman’s articles on wine. Codman was a wine buyer for S.S. Pierce.18

The opening of lifestyle and more traditional magazines to articles on food and drink was an important new development. It broadened the audience for this subject beyond the women’s magazines and also brought to American read-
ers a different point of view about food. In addition, it divided the profession of food journalism into two camps, although both featured women as the primary purveyors of recipes for the home.

Imported Wine, Wine Producers, and Food

A gourmet movement was unimaginable without the availability of good wine. In fact, there were already professional wine importers and dealers during Prohibition who were only too eager to satisfy the demand for their product. Some, in fact, had dealt illegally through speakeasies to bring wine of varying quality to such consumers. And following Prohibition, there were interested buyers as well, especially the owners of fine restaurants and the managers of men’s clubs, who would advise their customers on the appropriate beverages to consume.

What follows is a brief account of the wine industry as it transitioned from the Prohibition era. It is important to note that, even though my interest is largely in wine sales, importers and distributors of alcohol handled both wine and whisky, while the large firms, often located in New York, sold their products in other American cities.

Prohibition jolted the wine production and distribution system of the country. In the case of distribution, there was a struggle to determine which dealers would be granted licenses to sell the relatively small quantities of wine and whisky that religious and medical institutions might need or that could be used for cooking purposes as permitted under the Volstead Act. In this way, the distributors would generate a small income to tide them over during the lean years.

More important was the question of how and how quickly the importation of wine and other alcoholic beverages would resume after repeal. In an October 1933 article on that subject, *Time* noted that “when the liquor trade ceases to agitate at the present tempo . . . most of the business will settle into the hands of more venerable importers who maintained their European connections through the dry years.” The evidence would seem to support *Time*’s claim, with this qualification: a number of bootleggers also established good connections with wine producers in Europe and were able to compete with the older firms in the post-repeal period.19

Among the leading prewar dealers was Bellows and Company, based in New York, which was purchased by Frederick Wildman and colleagues in 1933. In that same year, Wildman reestablished ties with Bellows’ former French partners during a European swing. At that point, Bellows was already a century-old company with excellent connections to many of the elite social clubs in large
cities across the country that sought to replenish their inventories. Wildman, who was listed in the *Social Register*, was especially well placed to renew contacts with the company’s former customers. He reported to Julian Street that “our New York and other club connections should be excellent. Most of the leading clubs of the entire country were clients of the old firm.” Among them, he mentioned the University and Metropolitan in New York, the Pacific Union and Bohemian in San Francisco, and the Somerset and Harvard in Boston.20

Another large importer was Julius Wile and Sons, founded in New York in 1877, which resumed business on both coasts following repeal. The fact that the company was advertising both Benedictine and Cointreau for cooking purposes in 1932 is evidence of its continuing contacts with European suppliers during Prohibition. Moreover, the company sent Julius Wile, grandson of the founder, to Europe in 1936 to learn the wine business from old family connections.21

The largest distributors of alcohol in the years following Prohibition also had long histories. Subsidiaries of the National Distillers Products Corporation made their initial contacts with alcohol suppliers and customers well before Prohibition. In the late 1920s, National Distillers acquired seven distilleries, which, taken together, were storing half the whisky inventory in the United States; and in 1933 the company took over Alex D. Shaw, a wine-importing firm that maintained a substantial inventory during Prohibition. Thus, when Prohibition ended, National Distillers was prepared to supply whisky and wine to interested American consumers.22

Louis Rosenstiel, who “hung on through the bleak days of Prohibition,” ran Schenley, National Distillers’ chief competitor. As repeal approached, Rosenstiel renewed his contacts with wine and whisky dealers. Indeed, by 1933, Schenley controlled 20 percent of the whisky available in the United States. Using introductions arranged by friends, Rosenstiel went to Europe in 1932 and bought a supply of Burgundy, Bordeaux, Rhine wines, and Champagne to sell following repeal.23

*Time* was thus correct in claiming that older firms were able to take advantage of superior contacts and inventories of wine and whisky to secure dominance in the importing and distribution of alcohol following repeal. And, clearly, they were ready to do business even before repeal.

Prohibition had a damaging effect on wine production in the United States, even though the total production of grapes, 80 percent of which came from California, doubled during this period, as did the production of wine. However, quality diminished as growers concentrated on producing table and raisin grapes that could withstand the long shipments to customers east of the Mississippi,
who converted the grapes into homemade wine. To make room for the new grapes, growers sacrificed varietals so that, by the end of Prohibition, there were “too many grapes of the wrong kind.”

To make matters worse, as repeal neared, many California winemakers salvaged these inferior grapes by making them into inferior wine. They did so even though they had to use aging processes that had never before been tested. The wineries did further damage by fermenting the wine at high temperatures and selling it before it was properly aged in order to increase income and cover expenses. Often growers shipped the wine in barrels that they had once used for pickles or molasses.

Vineyard owners also exacerbated long-standing problems of the California wine industry. Whereas before Prohibition wineries produced more table than fortified wines, after repeal the production of fortified wines rose dramatically, thus favoring the growers from the Central Valley who produced the sweet grapes with a higher alcohol content used for making sherry, port, and muscatel. Meanwhile, interest in the finer table wines of the Sonoma and Napa valleys declined substantially.

To correct these problems required years of work. Only gradually could California growers afford to uproot the raisin and table grape vines planted in the 1920s and reintroduce such varietals as cabernet sauvignon and pinot noir. Understandably, this slow process did not show significant results until the war years. Even so, there was some continuity in Napa Valley, where the four great wineries of the early twentieth century, Beaulieu, Inglenook, Berenger, and Larkmead, continued to produce the best wines.

From this brief survey, it is fair to conclude that American wine drinkers profited from the relative ease with which the leading wine importers made available fine imported wines. Many restaurants, clubs, wine retailers, and their customers replenished their European wine stocks soon after repeal. However, the supply of drinkable California wines was severely affected by wine growers’ destruction of varietal grapes and by the absence of an informed market. The preference for imported wines also reduced the demand for domestic wines.

Even as the food establishment was narrowing dining options by flooding the shelves of grocery stores with standardized, processed foods, the founders of the gourmet movement could count on the legendary bounty of North America to supply the raw materials for its dinners. For much of the nineteenth century, the proverbial table, groaning under the weight of platters laden with various meats, vegetables, and desserts, astonished European observers at hotels and inns across America. Even as late as the 1920s, Rudyard Kipling noted the remarkable
quality, quantity, and variety of edibles produced in North America, but worried that Americans were wasting this “bounty.” The remedy would be a *National Cookery Book for the U.S.A.* that would help Americans codify recipes for local and regional fare.\(^{28}\)

No doubt, Kipling’s cookbook would have enabled Americans to cook many of the dishes that Mark Twain hungered for in 1878. Nostalgic for the food of his country after a long European tour, he sent ahead a “bill of fare, which will go home in the steamer that precedes me and be hot when I arrive.” On the list were seventy-six items, not including fresh fruits that were enumerated in a separate postscript. The list ran the gamut from meat, fish, vegetables, and baked goods to wild game. It featured specialties from every region of the country but was notable as well for its insistence on items specifically designated as American: coffee, butter, broiled chicken, toast, mince pie, and pastry. Particularly impressive was the range of game, shell fish, and fish dishes that Twain hoped to sample: wild turkey, woodcock, prairie hen, Missouri partridge, and coon to satisfy his taste for game; as for shell fish, he ordered oysters fried, stewed, on the half shell, roasted in shell, and in soup, as well as clam soup and cherrystone clams, soft-shell crabs, and San Francisco mussels. In the fish category, Twain specified perch, shad, brook trout, lake trout, and black bass, each identified by locale. The list of red meat, by contrast, consisted solely of porterhouse steak and roast beef. As for vegetables, there were boiled onions, pumpkins, asparagus, butter beans, hominy, and five different potato dishes. For breads and desserts, Twain preferred southern-style dishes: apple puffs, peach cobbler, hot hoe-cake, and hot light bread. He ordered all of these foods to be served in the American way, that is, without adornment by sauces except for butter and cream.\(^{29}\)

As Americans migrated from farms to large cities, it became more difficult to access some of the foods that were once available to Twain and his contemporaries. Game and fish, then in close proximity to the farms where most Americans lived, now had to be shipped to cities; increasingly, meat from farm-raised animals including pigs, cattle, and chickens replaced them. And, with the mechanization of farm life, the increased production of wheat and corn brought about a larger consumption of these grains. In the process, the variety of available food products began to diminish, as some French chefs discovered. To remedy the scarcity of fresh greens for salads, for example, Louis Diat, chef at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in New York, paid an acquaintance to grow them for the hotel kitchen.\(^{30}\)

Even so, regional dishes and ingredients, often the product of America’s ethnic diversity, remained a part of the American diet. French chefs in Louisiana,
as well as cities such as New York and San Francisco where French immigrants settled in large numbers, wielded a disproportionate influence. The Pennsylvania Dutch were known for their sausage culture, excellent vegetable gardens featuring cabbages and potatoes, and a strong baking tradition. Among their most famous dishes were scrapple (pork scraps and corn meal) and pepper pot (a kind of tripe soup). In the Southwest, the influence was primarily Spanish. There corn, beans, and chili peppers were the principal ingredients of popular dishes such as beans and sausage mixed with chilies. Other favorites included tamales, *arroz con pollo*, and rice, beans, and chili peppers. The Spaniards also pioneered in barbecuing. Italian influence came only in the twentieth century when Americans outside of the Italian community adopted spaghetti with tomato sauce and pizza.

The abundance and quality of American food provided an essential foundation for the gourmet movement. Members could count on a steady supply of various foodstuffs and thus turn their attention to the preparation of dishes that were based on lesser-used ingredients such as herbs and spices and/or methods for preparing and cooking those ingredients, including the use of stocks, sauces, and marinades.

Home Cooks and Professional Chefs

In order to prepare gourmet meals in the home, housewives and their servants depended on recipe collections or cooking classes presenting gourmet recipes that were accessible to them. Sometimes, the family handed down those recipes. However, even though the first third of the twentieth century witnessed the publication of new cookbooks at a record pace, most of them did not fully suit the needs and interests of cooks who hoped to explore traditional American cuisine or ethnic cooking traditions, including French cuisine. Not until after 1934 did food articles in the luxury magazines partially fill this void, and it was somewhat later before their authors published these recipes in cookbooks.

The dominant trend in American cooking was the standardization of the diet based on the mass production of processed food and the modernization of kitchen appliances. Equally important was the reaction to mass immigration beginning in the late nineteenth century by cookbook writers, especially from the New England school, who attempted to create a uniform diet for all Americans. A product of this school, *The Fanny Farmer Cookbook*, published in 1896, sold over one and a half million copies in the next four decades. Reinforcing this trend was the strong inclination of American housewives to rely on cookbooks.
compiled by food processors such as General Mills and General Foods that supplied recipes to promote the purchase of their products. In these and other cookbooks, the infrequent recipes from foreign sources were mostly devoted to bland versions of Italian spaghetti and chop suey.

Short of cookbooks, American housewives might have found other ways to learn foreign recipes. However, the increasing difficulty in hiring foreign cooks after the passage of the Immigration Restriction Act of 1924 limited these possibilities. To be sure, *The Settlement Cookbook* and a few others incorporated ethnic recipes that encouraged middle-class housewives to deviate from mainstream foodways. It would have been difficult, however, for housewives in the 1900s to use such recent French cookbooks as Charles Ranhofer’s *The Epicurean* or the translated version of Escoffier’s *Guide Culinaire*, designed primarily for the restaurant chef. Not only did they assume knowledge of cooking techniques beyond the skills of most upper-middle-class housewives, but their size was intimidating. Meanwhile, cooking schools that had served housewives of different classes in the nineteenth century were in decline. For example, there was no replacement for Pierre Blot’s New York Cooking Academy of the late 1860s, which taught French cuisine to American housewives. Under these circumstances, French cooking was confined largely to the homes of the American elite, who could afford to hire professional chefs from France.

Among the culinary assets of the United States in 1934 were the several thousand foreign chefs, many of whom were at or near the top of the cooking hierarchy in the country’s leading hotels, clubs, and restaurants. They and their predecessors, trained by prestigious chefs, such as Escoffier, in some of the best European hotels and restaurants, first arrived on American shores in large numbers after the Civil War and were in great demand in the late nineteenth century, when America’s nouveaux riches dined lavishly. Most were French chefs, who were essentially staffing the colonial outposts of the French culinary empire that extended from Europe to the New World.

In the years immediately before the rise of the gourmet dining movement, however, circumstances had changed. The 1924 Immigration Restriction Act imperiled the future of immigrant chefs by making those who were already in America literally a dying breed. In addition, the demand for elegant meals had declined substantially as a trend toward informal dining swept the country in the early twentieth century. With the implementation of Prohibition in 1920, gourmet dining suffered a more serious blow. Suddenly, restaurants were unable to match their dishes with appropriate wines. In this situation, gourmet diners preferred to dine at home, where some had laid in ample wine supplies,
or to test some of the better speakeasies that had access to illegally imported wines. Then came the Depression, which diminished the resources of some Americans who had once frequented the best restaurants.\textsuperscript{35}

In this perilous setting, immigrant chefs took steps to stabilize their situation. Already, they had established three organizations designed to provide health and death benefits for members. French chefs dominated the oldest of these groups, the Société Culinaire Philanthropique, founded in 1868, as they did the Vatel, while Italians were the largest group in the Chefs de Cuisine Association of America. In 1929, as the market fell, the three groups established the American Culinary Federation (ACF), an umbrella organization through which they could collaborate more effectively in achieving their common interests. Among other things, they created the \textit{Culinary Review}, a monthly newsletter designed to advance the professional interests of the membership.\textsuperscript{36}

The highest priority for members of the ACF was establishing the status of chefs in a country that did not regard cooking as a serious enterprise. Too often, the public confused chefs with kitchen helpers, who hoped to address their problems by unionizing. The new ACF promoted the idea of the chef as a member of a prestigious, middle-class, professional association, who, like lawyers and doctors, engaged in a demanding endeavor requiring both intelligence and training. The chief goal of the ACF was thus to raise the bar to entering the profession through additional training.

To accomplish this goal, the ACF created a gourmet dining society of its own (see chap. 3) in which chefs dined side by side with community leaders at restaurants staffed by well-known colleagues. They also devoted attention in the \textit{Culinary Review} to educating future culinary professionals. Beginning in 1931, the president of the ACF, Charles Scotto, head chef at the Pierre Hotel in New York, promoted European-style apprenticeships, through which most of the immigrant chefs had received their training, as a solution to the problem.\textsuperscript{37}

In the fall of 1935, Lucius Boomer, manager of the Waldorf Astoria, launched an apprenticeship program along the lines of the ACF proposal. Among other things, it included a strong dose of identity medicine supplied by the Waldorf’s executive chef, Gabriel Lugot, who oversaw the program. He insisted that apprentices “be proud of the profession,” understand their heritage from Escoffier and Brillat-Savarin, and record new recipes, as well as their reflections on the cooking process, in personal diaries.\textsuperscript{38}

The ACF and hotel organizations also started a new training program in Culinary Arts at the Food Trades Vocational High School in New York in 1941. A four-year high school curriculum for students interested in becoming chefs,
it was intended to be more rigorous than the existing courses in “Cafeteria and Catering” for home economics students. Graduates would learn French “for menu preparation” and emerge with a “complete knowledge of food preparation” through study of the Escoffier and Ranhofer cookbooks.\textsuperscript{39}

Perhaps these groups would have established a European-style apprenticeship program in the United States, if World War II had not intervened; however, with the advent of the GI Bill, which subsidized tuition for higher education, the founders of a new postsecondary chef’s school, the New Haven Restaurant Institute, appealed to GIs interested in cooking as a profession to enter their training program. A one-year curriculum at the outset, it soon expanded to two and then four years, gradually enrolled a few women, and eventually became the Culinary Institute of America with a campus in Hyde Park, New York, in 1972. At least part of the training was an apprenticeship. Once again, the Escoffier cookbook became the principal text.\textsuperscript{40}

For the period under consideration here, it is clear that the most influential chefs in the most prestigious restaurants generally received their training as apprentices in Europe. Nonetheless, the immigrant chefs’ interest in creating an American training program is evidence that they saw such a program as a way to increase respect for the cooking profession in the United States.

Restaurants, Wine Retailers, Specialty Food Shops, and Markets

To narrow the task of identifying gourmet restaurants and their food and wine purveyors in mid-1930s America, I have followed André Simon’s lead in focusing on New York, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New Orleans, the cities where he located Wine and Food Society chapters. Based on information Simon gathered over thirty years as a wine dealer, he clearly believed that these six cities were best equipped to support a WFS chapter. In my survey of each city, I have identified restaurants that served authentic French dishes along with one or two featuring other ethnic cuisines, as well as suppliers of gourmet food and wine. It is also useful to note that stores catering to the carriage trade often stocked both food and wine, while several of them provided mail-order service to Americans living outside of these metropolitan areas.

In choosing their venues, gourmet dining societies preferred large hotel restaurants to their smaller counterparts, because they could more easily feed groups of fifty to three hundred diners. In addition, prestigious immigrant chefs, who could prepare the \textit{haute cuisine} dinners anticipated by many dining society members,
often headed the kitchens in these hotels. For that reason, hotel restaurants figure prominently in this survey. To provide as accurate an assessment of the restaurants as possible, I have relied on guidebooks, as well as magazine and newspaper reviews primarily from the 1930s.

It will become clear, as well, that the six cities were not equally endowed with gourmet resources. The presence of a significant expatriate, immigrant, and Franco-American population, along with well-traveled Americans, who enjoyed French cuisine in New York, New Orleans, and San Francisco explains the relative abundance of French restaurants in these cities.

Indeed, New York had been and remained the preeminent dining city in the United States. Its restaurants provided a greater diversity of ethnic cuisines, and more of them succeeded in meeting a high culinary standard than counterparts in other cities. Even a century earlier, New York established its preeminence with the founding of Delmonico’s, generally recognized as the finest restaurant in the United States until its demise in 1923. One important turning point was the appointment of Louis Diat, an Escoffier disciple and creator of crème vichysoise, to head the kitchen of the new Ritz-Carlton Hotel in 1910. Until his retirement in 1951, the Ritz maintained its reputation for excellence. Another important milestone was the opening of the Hotel Pierre in 1930, which featured Charles Scotto, also an Escoffier disciple, as head chef. Meanwhile, the Waldorf-Astoria, whose executive chef, Gabriel Lugot, served from 1932 to 1950, was also highly regarded. All three chefs were masters of classic French cuisine.

But the vibrancy of the New York dining scene came as much from smaller restaurants as from the hotels. Most remarkable were two speakeasies that evolved in the 1920s into highly regarded restaurants: Jack and Charlie’s “21” Club and the Colony. Their patrons were as enamored of the fine food they ate there as of the publicity they received in the New York press. Specialties of the Colony included tournedos Mirabeau (filet mignon with anchovy fillets, olives, and tarragon leaves) and chicken diable Colony (coated in mustard, bread crumbs, and melted butter). As for the “21” Club, it featured duck à la press and “21” club chicken hash.

Among other fine French restaurants was the Café Chambord, whose onion soup and lobster in snail sauce were its most prized dishes. And, to illustrate the diversity of New York restaurants, there was Keen’s English chophouse, offering beefsteak and kidney pudding and English mutton chop, as well as Luchow’s, one of New York’s oldest German restaurants, known for its sauerbraten, venison, goose, ragout, pig knuckles, and sauerkraut. For seafood, Billy the Oysterman was popular among New Yorkers.
To serve these many fine restaurants and the homes of their patrons required superior sources of food, wine, and liquor. Among them were the Washington and Fulton Street markets, the former supplying meat and produce, the latter fish. Various New York department stores, including Macy’s, which had sold wines and liquor since the nineteenth century, supplied a variety of gourmet products. On the food side, customers could purchase boneless sardines, York house assorted biscuits for cheese, and French filets of mackerel in ravigote sauce (veal velouté with white wine, vinegar, shallots, and herbs). As for other department stores, Gimbel’s epicure shop and Wanamaker’s pantry shelf stocked such delicacies as a smorgasbord in cans and aquavit to wash it down.44

In addition, small specialty shops, usually located in upper-crust neighborhoods, offered various options. Founded in 1912, Vendome Table Delights sold imported items as well as gourmet dishes to go. There customers could buy duck à l’orange, cold borscht, escargots, chicken livers wrapped in bacon, petite marmite (beef and chicken soup with cabbage balls and vegetables), and frozen zabaglione. The adjacent Vendome liquor store sold alcoholic beverages. As worthy rivals in the carriage trade, Charles and Co., which also sold by mail-order catalogue, stocked green turtle soup, water-ground cornmeal, herbs of various kinds, Bel Paese and Brie, pâté de foie gras and a variety of terrines, Italian olive oil, imported Bass Ale, and Beck’s Pilsner. New Yorkers who were looking for fresh bakery goods could satisfy their needs at Duvernoy and Jean’s.45

One of the major liquor retailers, Sherry Wine and Spirits, had its roots in the bootlegging activity of founder Jack Aaron, who, with his brother Sam, opened the store shortly after Prohibition. Their competitor and eventual partner, Morris Lehmann, improved his inventory by consulting Henry Hollis, the former Vermont senator and Prohibitionist whose expertise was French wines. After 1965, the store was renamed Sherry-Lehmann.46

Among the six cities considered here, New Orleans sported the most stable culinary scene. All of its best restaurants and specialty food shops had been in place for at least a generation before the gourmet movement emerged, and they continued to serve or sell fine food and wine over the next quarter of a century. Most of these restaurants were famous for their Creole cuisine, defined as French cuisine modified by local ingredients as well as Spanish and African influences. In New Orleans, Antoine’s was considered the first among equals. Its proprietor, Roy Alciatore, had inherited the position from his father and grandfather, in time to celebrate the 1940 centennial with a new wine list. The restaurant was known for its oysters Rockefeller (with Worcestershire sauce, anchovy sauce, spinach, green onions, celery, parsley, lettuce, butter, bread crumbs, and absinthe), pom-
pano en papillote (oiled paper), and café brulot (with cognac, sugar, cloves, cinnamon, orange, and lemon peel).47

Antoine’s two chief competitors in the 1930s were Arnaud’s, established in 1918 by the “Count” Arnaud, who in real life was Léon Bertrand Arnaud Cazenave, and Galatoire’s, opened by Jean Galatoire in 1905. Arnaud presided over his restaurant until 1948, when his daughter Germaine succeeded him, while Galatoire logged only eleven years before three nephews arrived from France to take over the business. The former was well known for its shrimp Arnaud, oysters Bienville, and watercress soup à la Germaine, while the latter’s trout Marguery (cooked in white wine and fish stock thickened with eggs and butter) and oyster patties were customer favorites.48

Two other restaurants deserve mention. Although Broussard’s was founded only in 1920, its proprietor, Joseph Broussard, began his career at Antoine’s, from which he borrowed the poulet en papillote that Jules Alciatore invented; the restaurant was also known for its crab-meat Broussard. In addition to the predominantly French restaurants of New Orleans, there was Kolb’s, established in 1899, which served such German dishes as sauerbraten, Wiener schnitzel, and pigs’ knuckles, along with Creole specialties.49

By far the most reputable retail purveyor of gourmet food and wine in New Orleans was Solari’s, which opened in 1868 and survived until 1965. It was a grocery store, charcuterie, patisserie, and wine and liquor store rolled into one. During much of the twentieth century, Omar Cheer ran the business and maintained an inventory of excellent wines. Among the items listed in the 1930 catalogue, which supplemented sales in the store, were such imported cheeses as Roquefort, port de salut, four kinds of Camembert, and English stilton; other delicacies included truffles, tripe, goose liver, shad roe, and herring. Clementine Paddleford, the food journalist, considered Solari’s “one of America’s finest grocery stores.”50

The dining scene in San Francisco reflected the presence of the city’s substantial Italian, French, and Chinese populations. In the 1930s and early 1940s the Palace Hotel hired in succession Philip Roemer, Albert Bohn, and Lucien Heyraud to head a kitchen that featured both French and American dishes. Heyraud, trained under Escoffier at the Savoy Hotel in London, was admired for his coquille St. Jacques, filet de boeuf Grand Veneur (beef fillet with venison sauce), and petite marmite Henry IV. Almost as popular as the Palace, the St. Francis Hotel could boast the cooking of Joseph Delon and Pierre Coste, who had been trained at the École Hotelière in Grenoble. Delon was known for such dishes as canard rouennaise (duck liver with a Bordelaise sauce) and Rex sole bonne femme (shallots, parsley, and mushrooms in white wine and fish stock). Meanwhile,
French chefs Victor Laborie and Adrien Jouan presided over the kitchen of the Cercle de l’Union, whose membership had broadened from the descendants of French-speaking immigrants to San Franciscans interested in French culture. Laborie was known for his gigot roti Bretonne (roast lamb with white beans).51

San Francisco was particularly well populated with small restaurants serving authentic French cuisine, many of which had an excellent survival record. Among them was Jack’s, which opened before the great fire of 1906 and recovered quickly in the aftermath. Its intimate atmosphere and genial hosts, the Blanquie family, made the restaurant an attractive venue. Among other specialties, Jack’s served poulet sauté aux fonds d’artichauds (sauteed chicken with artichoke hearts) and filet de sole Marguery. A few blocks from Jack’s was the Blue Fox with Chef Fred Soulage presiding in the kitchen, where he prepared lamb sweetbreads poulette (white sauce with lemon and parsley) and frog legs. To provide an Italian finish to the meal, diners could order zabaglione. Among San Francisco’s many excellent Italian restaurants, Vanessi’s was highly regarded for its Italian risotto and chicken à la Vanessi, spicy lasagna, and veal cutlet Milanese (dipped in egg with breadcrumbs and parmesan cheese, then fried in butter).52

For meat and produce, restaurateurs could supply themselves at shops on Market Street, while those who sought gourmet food and drink found it at Goldberg-Bowen, a “famous purveyor of gustatory delights.” In addition to alcoholic beverages, the store stocked cold cuts, cheese, and three-bean salads and, from its “all-time best sandwich shop,” served egg salad, roast beef, and other fillings on fresh sourdough bread. As evidenced by an advertisement for Matthieu’s Importers in Los Angeles, the store’s reputation was statewide: “Mr. Mattieu’s fifteen years experience . . . with Goldberg-Bowen of San Francisco is at your disposal.”53

With a relatively small French population that translated into a scarcity of French restaurants, Chicago had a far less stable and reputable restaurant scene than either New Orleans or San Francisco. German eateries were, of course, more numerous, but few seem to have been both durable and appealing to gourment diners. Intellectuals and writers frequented Schlogel’s, a German-American restaurant, whose chef, Paul Weber, prepared Wiener schnitzel, hassenpfeffer, and stewed chicken à la Schlogel. Meanwhile, the Red Star Inn became a rough approximation of Luchow’s in New York. It served hassenpfeffer along with a fine German lentil soup, to a clientele that included Prince Henry of Prussia. And for a rough parallel to Keen’s in New York, Chicago could offer the clublike St. Hubert’s Old English Grill, which admitted only men to the first floor and served beef, lamb, kidneys, and English mutton chops.54
Among the best French restaurants, and well known for its Creole dishes, was Teddy’s l’Aiglon managed by Theodore Majerus. Its specialties included *moules marinières*, *poulet belle meunière* (in butter), and *pompano en papillote*, while the wine list drew praise from its Gold Coast clients. On the Near North Side was Julien’s, Chicago’s oldest French restaurant, which was prized for its “home-like atmosphere” as well as scallops, lettuce salads, and frog legs cooked by Ma Julien.55

Not until the Byfield brothers opened the Pump Room at the Ambassador East Hotel in the late 1930s was there a notable hotel restaurant. To be sure, the brothers had earlier run the College Inn at the Sherman Hotel, reputed for Chef Jean Gazabat’s chicken shortcake, lobster Newburg, and creamed finnan haddie. Chicagoans regarded the College Inn as the “most interesting and unique restaurant” in Chicago—words that would also describe the Pump Room.56

As for gourmet food shops, markets, and wine dealers, the Fulton and South Water Street markets offered not only fresh produce but also meat and fish to retailers. Two venerable Chicago stores sold both food specialties and wines. Already in 1934, Hillman’s had several stores in the Chicago area, while Stop and Shop was well located on Washington Avenue in the loop; later Hillman’s bought out Stop and Shop, but neither store survived the twentieth century.57

The dining scene in Boston was relatively stable but offered fewer restaurant options than other large cities. Accordingly, Bostonians relied heavily on their hotels and clubs. Among the former was the Vendome and the Ritz-Carlton (opened in 1927). Both served French specialties, particularly the Ritz, where Charles Bonino presided in the kitchen and was acclaimed for *noisettes d’agneau favorite* (morsels of lamb garnished with truffles and foie gras, potatoes, and asparagus). Also well known for its French dishes was the Somerset Club, not to be confused with the hotel by the same name. Among smaller Boston restaurants Locke Ober, which first opened in the late nineteenth century, offered French cuisine as well as traditional American fare, although the main floor was off limits to women until the 1970s; owned by Locke Ober, Joseph’s was also well known for the quality of its French menu.58

For fresh produce, meat, and fish, Boston restaurateurs made their purchases at Quincy market, while S.S. Pierce, the granddaddy of all purveyors of specialty foods and wines in the United States, was located nearby. Shopping at this store, which was founded in 1831, became a habit of the Boston upper class as Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., explained: “I was brought up on S.S. Pierce groceries and I wouldn’t dare change.” From the outset Pierce stocked wines and spirits as well as such delicacies as terrapin stew and Singapore pineapple. After
repeal, Charles and Russell Codman served as Pierce’s wine buyers and kept up its inventory of imported wines; in addition, the store stocked Stilton cheese, smoked whale meat, fancy soups, Bombay duck, and rattlesnake meat. By 1930, the original store had added five suburban branches, which employed one thousand people, and attracted a more diverse clientele.59

Compared to the five other cities, the Los Angeles scene was clearly the most chaotic. Restaurants came and went, while their success rested as much on the personality of the owner and the glamour of Hollywood stars in attendance as on the quality of the menu. Epitomizing this genre were the restaurants of colorful entrepreneurs Billy Wilkerson, Dave Chasen, and Mike Romanoff. In 1933, Wilkerson launched the Vendome Café, which served French and Italian food, and then opened La Rue’s, specializing in French food, in 1945. Dave Chasen’s Southern Pit Barbecue, with six tables and fourteen counter stools, was such a hit that two years after its opening in 1936, Chasen replaced it with Chasen’s, a full-scale restaurant serving American and Continental specialties, which remained a Hollywood legend until its recent demise. Equally legendary was Mike Romanoff’s, which opened in 1941 and also mixed Continental with American dishes. Unfortunately, none of these restaurants were part of an infrastructure that could support gourmet dining in 1935, when the Los Angeles Wine and Food Society formed its chapter.60

Among restaurants whose fame rested more on their cooking than their glamour was Perino’s, highly regarded for its French and Italian specialties from 1932, when it first opened, until the late twentieth century. Beginning in 1932, Angelenos enjoyed the smorgasbord at Bit of Sweden, where Chef Kenneth Hansen presided over the kitchen. After it closed, Hansen opened the Scandia in 1946, which also featured smorgasbord. He was selected by the Los Angeles Wine and Food Society in 1937, 1949, and again in 1954 to receive its Cordon Bleu, awarded annually to the chef who prepared the best meal for the Society during that year.61

More impressive was the number of fine wine and food shops in the Los Angeles area, such as Young’s Market, founded in 1888 as a full-scale grocery store and bakery that sold fresh meat, prawns, Columbia River smelts, scallops, crab meat, green ripe olives, and Danish blue cheese. In addition, Young’s had a catering and delivery service and a bakery and, on special occasions, offered cooking lessons to its customers. Indeed, in 1937, “Alphonse of La Touraine” taught customers how to make canapés and appetizers. Immediately following the Beer Act of 1933, the market stocked Bass Ale, Pilsner XXX, and Scotch Ale.62
Founded by J. S. Foto and Frank Vitale in 1923, the Bohemian Distributing Company was a wholesale outfit that specialized in fine food, wines, and liquor. After Prohibition, the company also brewed and promoted Acme beer, while maintaining a large inventory of fine wines and whisky.63

In 1934, Fred Beck, an advertising man, joined with other entrepreneurs to found the Farmer’s Market, which provided a venue for farmers to sell their fresh produce. The market benefited from Beck’s daily column in the *Los Angeles Times* promoting its wares; however, over time, shops and restaurants replaced many stands where farmers once sold their produce.64

Two other important venues for the carriage trade were Balzer’s market and Jurgensen’s Grocery. Founded by Albert Balzer in early 1923, the market supplied cheeses and high-quality canned goods to upscale Angelenos, but it could not compete with Jurgensen’s. The latter, established in 1935 in Pasadena and expanded to other sections of Los Angeles, bought out Balzer’s markets in 1959.65

**Gourmet Dining Societies**

The growth of large city clubs in the mid-nineteenth century that provided the business and professional elite with facilities for dining, reading, and entertaining friends also created a supportive environment for gourmet dining societies. After 1880, newly formed country clubs offered comparable facilities for upper-class recreation. The impact of these clubs—urban and country—on gourmet dining was substantial. Many hired European-trained chefs, created wine cellars, and built large dining rooms that eventually accommodated the entire membership of the new gourmet dining societies formed after repeal.66

In addition, there were a number of smaller clubs in each of these cities that appealed to individuals with special interests. The Odd Volume Club in Boston, the Zamarano in Los Angeles, and the Roxburghe in San Francisco brought together individuals who collected old books; those interested in the arts could join the Tavern Club in Chicago and its counterpart in Boston, while the Sunset Club in Los Angeles offered opportunities to discuss contemporary political issues. Meanwhile, San Franciscans interested in French culture and cuisine could join the Cercle de l’Union. These clubs either maintained dining facilities or found appropriate ones for their meetings.

Before and after the founding of elite city clubs, businessmen in large cities formed small dining societies to satisfy a need for socializing that led over time to improving the quality of their meals. Members of these dining societies—all males—almost always had overlapping memberships in the larger city clubs.
where they also held their dinners. Among the best known of these societies were WEDA (Wyckoff Economical Dining Association, named after its founder, Alexander Wyckoff) and the Zodiac Club, so named because the club identified each of the members with a zodiac sign. These clubs were founded in 1838 and 1868, respectively, in New York, while Bostonians, who in 1881 were planning a world’s fair for the city, launched the Beacon Society. Even though the proposed fair never came to pass, the fare at the Algonquin Club, where the society met, was apparently more than palatable. The common features of these societies were a small membership (twelve in the New York clubs, ten in the Beacon Society) and monthly meetings for six months of the year. In addition, the societies rotated responsibilities for planning the meals among club members and collectively critiqued them at their completion.

While Le Club des Arts Gastronomiques resembled its New York and Boston predecessors in many ways, the harsh realities of Prohibition left their mark on club practices. In the absence of alcoholic beverages in public venues, members met in each others’ homes and shared the contents of their wine cellars. In so doing these Boston Brahmins intended to “preserve the culinary arts” and promote “standards of drinking compatible with the spirit of New England conservatism” that would also “glorify the aesthetic and hygienic properties of wines and liquors.” Russell Sturgis Codman and Sohier Welch, a dedicated amateur gourmet, founded Le Club, which was limited to twelve members, all male. Among its contributions to the larger gourmet movement were the wine manuals written by two distinguished members, Charles Codman and Philip Dexter, an attorney. The brothers Codman and Dexter were sufficiently knowledgeable to educate their colleagues in gastronomic matters. In this sense, Le Club was a kind of bridge between the old dining societies and the new gourmet movement that featured a mingling of amateurs and professionals.

Given the remarkable expertise of its members, it is not surprising that Le Club planned meals and selected members with great care. Among the stringent qualifications for membership were an interest in wine, the possession of a wine cellar, and a willingness to host a dinner once every two years. Applicants had to be unanimously approved by their fellow diners.

The dinners were ceremonial and ritualistic; members wore burgundy waist coats with gilt buttons, “ornamented with a bunch of grapes in relief,” and a tricolor ribbon. In addition, the club plates and the matching club banner with family crest were set at each diner’s place, while members awarded medals to meritorious cooks and wives who promoted the club’s activities. According to club rules, late arrival to dinners and smoking were forbidden. Following the
meal, it was customary to toast the cook and evaluate the wines. In adopting these practices, Le Club set a precedent for future gourmet societies.  

On the culinary side, Le Club des Arts Gastronomiques often deviated from standard French menus. Indeed, members sometimes incorporated American dishes into their meals and accompanied those dishes with wines from two or more European countries. As Russell Codman explained, serious French wine drinkers usually stocked their cellars with the best wines from their own part of France and/or from the rest of the country. By contrast, the Bostonians’ wine and whisky stock was comprehensive, including selections from all over Europe,
although Codman remarked that “Claret is my forte.” After drinking great German and French wines as well as cognac, Armagnac, and rum from Sohier Welch’s cellar, André Simon, visiting Boston to recruit members for a chapter of the Wine and Food Society, remarked, “It is highly improbable, but it is just possible, to imagine another more or less similar collection of fine wines being assembled again. What is absolutely beyond anything in the nature of a second edition is the sequence of spirits which followed.”

The Bostonians took pride in the American dishes they served, including meat, potatoes, and vegetables, sometimes unadorned by sauces. In such instances, it was the wines and cheese that added a European flavor as, for example, the “memorable meal” served on December 17, 1936, at Sohier Welch’s home. He noted that “the altar upon which this gastronomical feast was offered was raised upon two main pillars, both as distinctly American as they were excellent, the oyster crabs and the mongrel goose.” The latter was, in fact, prepared by his mother in a cream and Madeira sauce. There followed the European wines; Champagne was “an admirable wine to sing to those dainty little crabs a cheery lullaby.” However, “the wine of the evening,” five different Burgundies from the commune of Vosne-Romanée with vintages ranging from 1923 to 1934, honored the goose and the cheeses.

Simon also gave high praise to Le Club cuisine after attending the November 17, 1937, dinner at Charles Codman’s home. He enjoyed a special breed of guinea chick paired with a Volnay Clos des Ducs (1926). It was followed by a whole Brie—the first time he had ever seen such a thing in a private house—and two Burgundies. The meal ended with “the best of all caramel custards I have ever tasted.” Despite the rule that women were not admitted to the dinners, the members made an exception for Theodora Codman, who was invited to receive their compliments.

Le Club spawned a new dining society in 1936, while continuing its activities into the postwar era. Organized by Frederic Celler and Henry Lewis at the Locke Ober Café, where all dinners were held, the Cellar Club limited its membership to eighteen individuals, among them Felix Pereira and Frederic Celler, who also joined Le Club. Rejecting the “undue formality” and “ostentation” of Le Club, the founders of the Cellar Club limited expenses to $5.50 per person for dinner, wine, and service by planning simpler meals. One such dinner consisted of bouillon, soft-shell crabs, Locke-Ober steak and fries, and Roquefort cheese. The Cellar Club had its own wine cellar that was surely more modest than those of Le Club’s members.

Le Club des Arts Gastronomiques embodied perfectly the existing ideal of a gourmet dining society. It was small, composed of carefully selected members
of the social elite, and insisted on high standards of dining. However, it deviated in one important respect, which was not intended to be a precedent. The location of all dinners shifted from clubs or restaurants to members’ homes in order to assure an adequate supply of wine. Even so, the practices of Le Club and its predecessors provided a model for subsequent gourmet societies, all of which, however, had a much larger membership.

Despite Prohibition and the rise of nutritionism, the prospects for gourmet dining in 1934 were better than they had been in 1920. For one thing, the expanding cadre of upper-middle-class gourmet diners promised over time to create a critical mass of Americans who would be interested in joining the small and isolated upper-class practitioners of fine dining.

The vast majority of Americans, however, were moving in the opposite direction. The increasing standardization of the diet, accompanied by a focus on nutritionism, put a damper on the prospects for cultivating fine dining even of a more modest kind in the American home. While ethnic groups continued to prepare dishes from the home country, the Immigration Restriction Act slowed their growth and the infusion of culinary ideas from new immigrants. Meanwhile, advocates of Americanization pressured the immigrants to conform to mainstream foodways. In this way, the gap between gourmet diners and the rest of the country widened.

Those Americans who were interested in enjoying a French meal were thus more likely to dine in restaurants than at home. However, the effects of the Depression on the customer base were significant. Furthermore, for those individuals who hoped to find their French dinners in Paris, the cost of travel was a serious impediment. While chefs struggled to maintain their jobs as the restaurant business declined, the newly established American Culinary Federation enabled them to more effectively explain the special status of highly trained professional chefs and their role in creating the good life in America.

One important factor in the resurrection of gourmet dining after 1934 was the rapid recovery of wine importing, engineered by firms that laid careful plans during the last years of Prohibition. On the food side of the equation, large American cities could still rely on local markets and/or specialty food stores to supply stocks of fresh and imported ingredients. However, the trend toward processed foods reduced demand at these venues.

Balancing the strengths and weaknesses of the resources available for gourmet dining in the mid-1930s gives only a partial picture of the long-run prospects for incorporating French cuisine into the American diet. It is important to
complete this picture by considering the receptivity of the larger American population to the values that were inherent in the concept of gourmet dining. After all, the success of the enterprise in France was clearly based on the compatibility of the values of early French promoters of the new restaurants with those of a significant segment of the French population. While only a minority could afford to eat regularly in fine restaurants, others could enjoy some of the new dishes in a more modest way in their own homes. They could also take pride in the fact that their country had become the great gastronomic center of the Western world.74

Bourgeois promoters of gourmet dining like Brillat-Savarin viewed it as a way of transcending for a time the everyday task of making a living through hard work. There was, of course, an element of necessity in all forms of dining. However, as he argued, food and drink could not only satisfy bodily needs but also lift the spirit and please the senses. By valuing the dining experience for its sensuality, beauty, and leisurely flow, as well as its intellectual and social functions, gastronomers endowed it with a significance far beyond the material function it also served. Embracing leisure and beauty, they appealed not only to aristocrats, from whom they borrowed these values, but also to the rising bourgeoisie that hoped to secure a higher station in life. For a few hours each day or each week, bourgeois diners could, in effect, behave as if they were aristocrats.75

While the aristocratic ethos was widely accepted in France, the prevailing value system in America was, and remained, essentially middle class. Many Americans regarded sensuality, leisure, beauty, and intellect with suspicion. This tension between mainstream French and American culture, which was, in reality, a tension between upper- and middle-class values, weakened the appeal of gourmet dining in America.

Indeed, the widespread acceptance of nutritionism and Prohibition reflected Americans’ preference for middle-class values. In responding to both of these issues, they considered dining as an activity that sustained and improved the health of the diner through the consumption of the proper nutrients, but regarded with indifference or fear its effect on thoughts, feelings, and social relations. Nutritionism was appealing precisely because it provided scientific evidence that diners were fueling their bodies efficiently. In turn, time saved at the table and in the kitchen would enable diners to do more and better work at the office or in the factory and take better care of their families.

From this utilitarian perspective, Prohibition also made sense. Excessive drinking that affected workers’ health and their work ethic cost companies and their customers dearly, while many mothers and children suffered from drunken
and abusive husbands and fathers. Strangely, however, there was never a full-scale test of the impact of a dry regime on workers and families in America. Indeed, through illegal speakeasies, bathtub gin, and the legal production of wine at home, the consumption of alcohol actually continued at a brisk pace. As a result, Americans emerged from the Depression with a taste for cocktails and an even weaker inclination toward the moderate consumption of wine with dinner so central to the gourmet ideal.

In short, while Americans possessed many of the material and intellectual resources to support a gourmet movement, the majority values in the mid-1930s were hostile to importing gourmet dining from France. That limited, but did not prevent, the movement from making headway. However, in order to widen their appeal, gourmet advocates would have to convert their fellow Americans to the appreciation of leisure and sensuality. Among other things, they would have to discard the old adage that “time is money” in favor of something like “time is pleasure.” Only then would it be possible to extend the dinner hour to permit greater enjoyment of a meal and of the company of fellow diners.

Equally challenging was the idea of embracing sensual experiences rather than regarding them as a threat to virtuous behavior. Indeed, only if Americans agreed to this proposition would they be able to welcome the work of skilled artisans, who created tasty dinners and an environment including visual and auditory experiences in which to enjoy them. The success of gourmet dining thus rested on the possibility of converting Americans to values that seemed alien to many of them. In the absence of a major educational campaign, the gap between the growing population of gourmet diners, who were exposed to French cuisine through their travels and magazine reading, and their majority counterparts, whose resources and opportunities were more limited, was likely to widen.