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Kansas City: A Food Biography (Big City Food Biographies)



Synopsis

While some cities owe their existence to lumber or oil, turpentine or steel, Kansas City owes its existence to food. From its earliest days, Kansas City was in the business of provisioning pioneers and traders headed west, and later with provisioning the nation with meat and wheat. Throughout its history, thousands of Kansas Citians have also made their living providing meals and hospitality to travelers passing through on their way elsewhere, be it by way of a steamboat, Conestoga wagon, train, automobile, or airplane. As Kansas City's adopted son, Fred Harvey sagely noted, "Travel follows good food routes, and Kansas City's identity as a food city is largely based on that fact. Kansas City: A Food Biography explores in fascinating detail how a frontier town on the edge of wilderness grew into a major metropolis, one famous for not only great cuisine but for a crossroads hospitality that continues to define it. Kansas City: A Food Biography also explores how politics, race, culture, gender, immigration, and art have forged the city's most iconic dishes, from chili and steak to fried chicken and barbecue. In lively detail, Andrea Broomfield brings the Kansas City food scene to life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Kansas City, Mo., home to Charlie Parker and the strains of modern jazz, also rests at the culinary crossroads of America, as culinary historian Broomfield observes in this straightforward survey, part of the Big City Food Biography series. The city is located in the fertile Central Plain, where the soil is

ideal for cultivating grain and producing fields of grass where cattle can graze.

Broomfield's tale of the life of food in the region begins with the earliest contributions of native tribes such as the Kaw, and their cultivation of maize and squash. Prior to the Civil War, Kansas City's food reflected the cuisine of the South, including beaten biscuits, pies, gumbos, fried chicken, and catfish. In the 19th century, a number of immigrant groups helped shape the city's cuisine with Mexican tamales and chilis, German beer, Swiss confections, and Italian minestrone and pastas. Broomfield offers a brief history of many of the markets and groceries that helped establish Kansas City as a center of culinary hospitality, such as the E. Whyte Grocery, Fruit & Wine Company; Wolferman's Grocery; and the City Market. Broomfield's guidebook also includes an overview of Kansas City's signature dishes (with recipes), such as Myron Green's cinnamon rolls and Harvey's Westport Room Chicken Maciel. Readers will enjoy this entertaining, in-depth look at the foods that have made Kansas City famous. (Publishers Weekly)

The latest in the Big City Food Biography series examines the culinary contributions made by the center of the heartland's bread basket, Kansas City. Broomfield's research is meticulous and balanced. She notes that Kansas City straddles a state line historically and culturally and pays equal attention to both sides. This is not a book for the casual cook looking for gastronomic descriptions and recipes. Her prose is engaging and lively, even though not an ingredient, restaurant, cook, or restaurateur detail goes unmentioned. Serious chefs and foodies will appreciate the history behind the Midwest's melting pot of cuisines and the people who made Kansas City's signature dishes burnt ends, KC strip, and green rice casserole the mainstays of hearty Kansas City fare. Of particular interest is the chapter on 'African American Contributions and Kansas City's Southern Traditions.' Readers will be fascinated by the ways music influenced restaurants in Kansas City's jazz age. A worthy addition to all collections serving the serious chef. (Booklist)

[T]he African-American chapter [is] particularly fascinating, [since] many of Kansas City's jazz and barbecue joints [were] among the first establishments to be racially integrated. (The Kansas City Star)

Kansas City: A Food Biography ... digs deep into the unexpectedly bountiful story of Kansas City foodways. With a longtime local's wealth of experience and an academic's depth of interests, Broomfield ... opens with a vivid description of the plentiful food and hospitality that have become trademarks of pregame tailgate parties outside Arrowhead Stadium.... With welcome detail, Broomfield explains native cultures' expansion of hunting, cooking and farming across centuries, as well as taste trends.... Kansas City is hardly unique in boasting a rich and proud culinary heritage. But Broomfield's brilliant mix of food's rich narrative and the region's historical stages

makes us feel especially blessed to dine within a crossroads where rich resources and creative people combined forces to create so much good food. (Kansas Alumni Magazine)Joining others (not seen by this reviewer) in the 'Big City Food Biographies' series is a survey of dining and food in Kansas City, a town well known for both its music and its barbecue. Readers who plan a trip to Kansas City or who want to know more of its culinary history will appreciate the focus on how its foods evolved and how the town's growth led it to develop unique dishes and special Midwestern flavors. It should be noted that Kansas City: A Food Biography is no light coverage: anticipate a college-level reader that includes discussions of Kansas City's evolving culture, politics, social atmosphere, and immigrant influences: all of which contributed to the region's culinary heritage. (Donovan's Bookshelf)Kansas City: A Food Biography is perhaps the best brief survey of Kansas City foodways and history—the two completely intertwined—in print.... With excellent footnotes and bibliography, along with a discussion of markets and restaurants past and present, all set in physical and cultural environments, this is an excellent guide to what makes Kansas City worthy of a full-fledged food biography. (Missouri Historical Review)In Kansas City: A Food Biography, Andrea Broomfield provides the reader with a rich and engaging portrait of the evolution of a truly unique culinary scene. Combining robust historical documentation with keen insights into social, cultural, economic and political contexts, she highlights the dynamic development of foodways in a quintessential crossroads setting. In the process we learn important lessons about what food has meant to the generations of diverse peoples who have made it their home. (Stephen Wooten, PhD, Associate Professor of International Studies & Anthropology, Director of the Food Studies Program, University of Oregon)Many of us know that Kansas City is one of the best places in the world to eat and drink—burnt ends, a Kansas City strip, and a Boulevard is about as good as life gets. Fewer know how Kansas City became the place to be. In Kansas City: A Food Biography, Andrea Broomfield weaves together an impressive collection of primary sources and previous writing on the topic to tell the compelling story of the struggles and richness, from prehistoric times through today, of how people continue to come—and celebrate—this midwestern gastropolis. (Jonathan Deutsch, PhD, Professor of Culinary Arts and Food Science)Food culture in the U.S. has been co-opted by quick service and processed foods; Broomfield's book is an important contribution to our attempts to discover what Kansas City tastes like. She does an excellent job of researching not only the native foods of the city but also the ones that arrived here "in the pockets" of the immigrants who built this city. She also thoroughly documents how the peoples of Kansas City used those foods to build a strong culture of food-tied-to-place in our town. (Aaron Prater, a culinary professor at Johnson County Community

College and co-owner of the Sundry Market & Kitchen (in Kansas City, Missouri)) And interesting and authoritative book. Well worth reading! A real pleasure! (Joseph William (Bill) Gilbert, founding member of the Gilbert-Robinson Restaurant Group)

Andrea Broomfield is a culinary historian and an English professor at Johnson County Community College. She is the author of *Food and Cooking in Victorian England: A History* (2007) and writes extensively about the Victorian era.

Every place has a food history, but I didn't get that until I read this book. Perhaps it felt that there was no history because I live in what seems like the franchise food capital of the world, Overland Park, Kansas, next door to Kansas City. But Overland Park is named for the Overland Trail, and folks had to park their Conestoga wagons here while they got provisions for the long, franchise-free trek to the west. Provisioning is the heritage of this place, and that takes many forms: farmers' markets, grocery stores, local specialty restaurants, and, of course, a lot of franchises. I buy corn (local) that can be husked at the store to complement the Copper River salmon (not local, obviously) bought at the same grocery store. That store got started in 1936. Who knew? Now every time I shop there I am aware of how I am entwined with a bit of history. And importing luxurious seafood is not new; in the late 1800s it was fresh oysters that were in demand. Prohibition shut down breweries, but the craft beer movement re-inspired them. The writing helped me realize that the way we eat (and drink) is part of a continuum. If you think that something is new, you just haven't looked deeply enough into the past. There is a lot packed into this book. The research was thorough and the writing engaging. I would have given another star if the maps had been bigger and clearer and if more maps had been included. I couldn't find some key words in the index that would have made it easier to find sections I wanted to reread, so an even bigger index would have been nice.

Anyone who grew up in Kansas City will love this food "biography" of the Cowtown. It's a great history as well.

What a gorgeously written and thoroughly researched book not only on Kansas City's food history but on the food history really of the nation. I savored this book--worth every penny--for it is a beautifully told story of the human relationship with food and sustenance from the deepest roots in the heartland and crossroads of America. That Broomfield took the effort and time to go all the way

to the beginning with Native American life and foodways and then all the way through the many layers since to the present offers a rare and remarkable accounting of the city and region's importance. This is what culinary histories ought to be. Bravo to Broomfield for her passion, research, and eloquence in sharing this important and hefty slice of American culinary history.

Looks like a great book. But \$38?? What makes it worth 3 times more than others.

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