

# FDR and his favorite foods

By Chef Marti Mongiello, Senior Curator

As shown during the “Inside the Presidents’ Cabinet” shows

[www.insidethepresidentscabinet.com](http://www.insidethepresidentscabinet.com)



The Presidential  
**Culinary  
Museum**  
GROVER, NC

FDR was always interested in ships and sailing. "I love to be on the water," he said. Although his love of the sea came from his Delano ancestors who were seafarers, it was his father who taught him how to handle the Half-Moon, the family sailboat, on trips up the Hudson River and in the Bay of Fundy near their Campobello Island summer home. At the age of sixteen, he had his own twenty-one foot knockabout, the New Moon. It is no wonder that he loved fish chowders.

Ice-boating was a very popular pastime on the Hudson River during the second half of the nineteenth century. FDR owned a twenty-eight foot ice-boat, the Hawk, which he frequently sailed on the Hudson as a young man.

FDR also enjoyed canoeing. One of the canoes that he used at Campobello was a birch bark canoe made by Tomah Joseph, the last chief of the Passamaquoddy Indians, the tribe living in Eastport, Maine, across the bay from Campobello Island. The canoe is on loan from the Presidential Library and Museum to the Franklin D. Roosevelt International Park Commission, New Brunswick, Canada.

FDR bought Vireo, a small sailboat, after the Half-Moon II, a sixty-foot auxiliary schooner his father bought in 1900, was sold to the United States government in 1917 for naval use. August 10, 1921, the day that FDR took his family for a sail on the Vireo, was the day FDR contracted poliomyelitis. The sailboat is owned and exhibited by the Marine Historical Association at Mystic Seaport, Connecticut.

According to Henrietta Nesbitt, the White House housekeeper, FDR had very simple American tastes in foods; he liked foods "he could dig into." Among his favorite dishes were scrambled eggs, fish chowder, grilled cheese sandwiches, hot dogs, and fruitcake.

For several winters after the attack of polio, FDR cruised the warm Florida waters on the houseboat Larocco. The sun and swimming seemed to help, but he made no lasting improvements. The Larocco was destroyed in a hurricane in 1926.

On August 10, 1921, FDR developed acute symptoms of poliomyelitis while visiting his summer home on Campobello Island, New Brunswick, Canada. He was thirty-nine years old. Based on the incubation period of the polio virus, it is believed that FDR most likely was infected while visiting a large Boy Scout encampment at Bear Mountain, New York on July 28, 1921.

The first Roosevelt to come to America was Claes Martenszen van Rosenvelt, meaning Nicholas the son of Martin of the Rose Field. Claes and his wife Jennetjke (Jannetje) were from the Netherlands and they arrived in New York (then called "New Amsterdam") around 1649.

-Information from and encouragement to visit The Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum

*"The Roosevelts enjoyed hearty, typically American food--like creamed chipped beef, bread puddings, and fried cornmeal mush... Welsh rabbits (or rarebits) were a family favorite for Sunday-night suppers, and cheeses of all types were always on hand for Roosevelt snacks or desserts. The family liked doughnuts both at breakfast and teatime...The President took his breakfast on a tray in his room. His choice of coffee was a dark French roast, prepared in the White House kitchens from green coffee beans. A coffee maker was placed on the President's breakfast tray so that he could regulate the brewing to his satisfaction.... Luncheon was not really a family meal for the President. Very often he would lunch at his desk from a tray...Dinner brought the Roosevelt family together...Sunday-night suppers at the White House were intimate occasions...Supper consisted of Mrs. Roosevelt's scrambled eggs, ham, bacon, or sausage, a dessert and coffee...Mrs. Roosevelt...redesign[ed] the kitchens, equipping them with electric stoves and dishwashers..."---The Presidents' Cookbook, Poppy Cannon and Patricia Brooks [Funk & Wagnalls:New York] 1968 (p. 430-440)*

*"Left to themselves, the Roosevelts were the plainest sort of people, so far as eating habits went. What we served family fashion in the White House was the simplest of American cookery, of the standards set by Mrs. Sara Delano Roosevelt, or "Mrs. James," as we call her, and which were preferred by her president son. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt went along with their tastes, since hers didn't run so much to food. But she wanted the best to be given the guests, for, after the President, the White House guest was king... Most of the recipe used came from my own family files, because there wasn't a single recipe card, not even a cookbook, left in the White House when I went in, along with the Roosevelt family, back in 1933. If ever humans were what their eating habits were, it was the Roosevelts. The President and his family liked the hearty, vitamin-filled dishes that are typically America. Regularly we served creamed chipped beef and corned beef hash and poached eggs, because they wanted these dishes, and they liked bread pudding. They loved fried corn-meal mush with maple sirup, sometimes even as a dessert...They desserts they liked best were fruit and cheese...I don't think Mr. and Mrs. Roosevelt would ever have ordered a canape themselves. They just weren't the hors- d'oeuvre sort...Caviar was often sent in*

*as gifts by the Russians, and sometimes we had presents of pate de foie gras--two delicacies the President liked. he was also very fond of terrapin. These and heavy cream were hsi only luxurious tastes."---The Presidential Cookbook: Feeding the Roosevelts and Their Guests, Henrietta Nesbitt [DoubleDay & Co.:Garden City NY] 1951 (p. 1-2)*

*"There never was such a family for soups as the Roosevelts. All the years they occupied the White House we kept the big steel soup kettles singing in the White House--clear soup for dinner and cream soup for lunch. Pretty nearly every usable variety of fish, fowl, beast, mineral, vegetable, and condiment was used in our White House soups...Give Mrs. Roosevelt a bowl of soup and a dish of fruit for lunch and she'd be off with recharged vitality on one of her trips. She always ordered something light for lunch if she was going awa. Cream of almond--L'Amande soup--was one of her special favorites...The President was partial to fish soups... Among the recipes his mother gave me was the one for clam chowder...Another of his favorites was the green turtle soup, and there was always a great fuss when it was made...I remember making it for Will Rogers and other celebrities. We served soup in the White House form eleven in the monring on--for every meal, in fact, except breakfast.... We served Fairy Toast with the White House soups. This toast which is sliced even thinner than Melba. We also served toast fingers, which is toast cut in narrow strips, and bread sticks, and sometimes whole-wheat crackers, and saltines."---ibid (p. 8-9)*

*"Birthdays, of course, were special White House occasions and we went to great pains with the cakes... We used twenty-one candles always; no one ever grew any older than that in the White House, at least on their birthdays. We always had angel food for Mrs. Roosevelt's birthday and fruitcake for the President's, the latter made by the old English recipe my husband's mother brought from Ireland. But the original recipe called for currants, which I consider too dry, so I substituted chopped dates. 'Perfectly delicious,' the President always said."---ibid, (p. 160)*

*"The Roosevelts liked doughnuts, either at breakfast or teatime, and I made them by the hundreds at Hyde Park. I used to make the Berliner pfann kuchen for the Roosevelts, which are the small round cookie-sized dougnuts without holes and rolled in sugar. Once Mrs. Roosevelt ordered twenty-four dozen of them at one time for the governor's mansion. We served them at the White House too."---The Presidential Cookbook: Feeding the Roosevelts and Their Guests, Henrietta Nesbitt [Doubleday & Company:Garden City NY] 1951 (p. 141)*

*"We always had angel food for Mrs. Roosevelt's birthday and fruicake for the President's, the latter made by the old English recipe my husband's mother brought from Ireland...Candy was always brought on with the coffee. Nuts were on the table... Apple pie was the President's preference among pies."---ibid (p. 160-161)*

*"The Roosevelts liked cheese as an appetizer, in salads, for snacks, and as a main course, or a dessert, and I often thought it was the President's favorite dessert. He liked Camembert, Roquefort, Swiss, Gruyere, and Liederkranz...along with sharp American cheese that was the mainstay of many a meal and also had to be kept on hand for the any-old-hour sandwiches and the Welsh rabbits made for Sunday-night suppers and family buffet."---ibid (p. 138)*

*"...the Roosevelts were unusually fond of fish...There was nothing the President liked better than Lake Superior whitefish, boned and planked...Lobsters were great favorites of his, and a blessing during the rationing period. We served the cold, stuffed, broiled, boiled, in salad, Imperial, Newburg, Thermidor...Kedigree was served over and over during the thirteen years, and Mrs. Roosevelt liked it best of all. The President loved kippered herring for breakfast, also salt mackerel."---ibid (p. 23-24)*

*"If there is one cut of meat that bespeaks America to my mind it is steak. When President Roosevelt fell ill...suddenly he spoke the words that made the skies open up again. 'I'd like a steak,' the President said."---ibid ((p. 50-51)*

*"A guest list more distinguished than usually graces a formal White House dinner was represented today at a "hot dog" luncheon given by President Roosevelt at his cottage, located two miles from the Summer White House. There was no particular reason for the party except that this seemed to be the last opportunity for an al fresco picnic luncheon before the President's departure for Washington sometime next week. As it was, the rain spoiled the picnic plans, and the party was moved into the tiny cottage...Among those present were Bernard M. Baruch...In the meantime the facilities of the small kitchen in the house were being taxed while Mrs. Roosevelt and a group of her friends broiled weiners, baked macaroni and prepared great bowls of mixed vegetable and tomato salad and coffee...Since the picnic obviously could not be held on the lawn, long tables were placed on the screened-on porch of the cottage. A table was set in the living room of the cottage, where the president and his mother, Mrs. Sara Delano Roosevelt, who yesterday celebrated her eightieth birthday, were served. The guests, ranging from prominent ones to chauffeurs, found paper plates, paper cups and knife and forks and filed past the serving tables in line. The various guests of honor were invited to take turns sitting at one table and chatting with the President."---"President is Host at 'Hot Dog' Feast," New York Times, September 23, 1934 (p. N1)*

*"President Roosevelt entertained Crown Princess Louise of Sweden and her party atop Dutchess Hill, the site of his future cottage home, this afternoon, and the breezes that whistled through the encircling oaks and pines carried before them the inviting smell of typical American fare--hot dogs and coffee...The hot dogs were served at the insistence of Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of the president, Mrs. James Roosevelt, the President's 83-year-old-mother, who never eats the American road-side dish, had wanted to serve pork sausages on finger rolls, but these were ruled out by her daughter-in-law, the hostess of the day. The hot dogs, dripping with mustard, were tucked into the familiar rolls. They were washed down by beer. Although she held aloof from the hot dogs, the President's mother clung to a glass of beer. For her, ham and chicken sandwiches were added to the picnic menu."---New York Times, July 3, 1938 (p. 1)*

*"Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, wife of the President, wants to give a picnic for them [the King and Queen of England], with hot dogs if the weather is pleasantly cool, but thermometer should register 100 degrees in the shade, in which case more appropriate refreshments will be provided. There probably will be a picnic, over which at present, however, a 'friendly family argument' is in progress, Mrs. Roosevelt said today."---"Roosevelts Plan Hot Dogs for King," New York Times, May 18, 1939 (p. 21)*

*"King George VI ate his first hot dog, was chauffeured by the President of the United States and turned his own hand motion-picture camera against his photographers at a typical Roosevelt picnic party today on the slope of Dutchess Hill, where the Chief Executive's new stone cottage provided an informal backdrop for a high point of the visit of the British sovereigns with the nation's First Family...The King himself clinched the informality of the outing by going swimming with the President in the spring-fed tile pool on the lawn of Mrs. Roosevelt's Val Kill cottage...There were no other swimmers, other guests who came from the picnic to have tea at the Val Kill cottage remaining about the lawn...The royal visitors and the other principal guests did not have to hold paper plates on their laps. Tables had been arranged for them about the front porch under its gently sloping Dutch colonial roof...It was with some obvious misgivings that Mr. McDermott first conceded, in answer to questions, that the King had eaten hot dogs at the picnic. He said that it was safe to assume that the King had done so since he had announced that he had been looking forward to the chance of sampling the favorite American snack. Later it was ascertained that the King not only came back for more hot-dog sandwiches but that he drank beer with them, the beer being served from a tap manned by experts from near-by Poughkeepsie. Added to the picnic fare were cold ham from various sections of the country, smoked and plain roast turkey, lettuce and tomato salad, soft drinks, hot and iced coffee and iced tea. The orange and lime soda pop seemed the favorite beverage of those who stood or sat about the lawn or amid the shade trees, although a number of guests followed the example of the King and drank beer."--"King Tries Hot Dog and Asks for More," New York Times, June 12, 1939 (p. 1)*

## **FDR's Light Summer Seafood Soup – Executive Chef Marti Mongiello**

FDR's love of chowders in the deep snows of winter were not about to be extinguished for the rest of the year come Spring and Summer! His creative US Navy Chefs from the yacht, White House Staff Mess (Restaurants staffed by only US Navy Chefs) and swabbie Valets came up with new ideas to please him when it got hot.

Servings: 6 as a lunch or dinner entrée/8 as a starter

### **INGREDIENTS:**

1 sweet Vidalia onion, chopped

2 cloves garlic, minced

3 fresh Pomodoro diced tomatoes

2 (14 ounce) cans fish broth or 28 ounces of homemade fish broth (in the case of being unable to find fish broth in your store or fish stock default to vegetable or chicken stock/broth/bullion)

1/2 cup dry white wine (optional only – not required)

2 bay leaves, prefer fresh (1 if dried)

10 strands of fresh Thyme

Himala Salt and four color Organic Pepper

1 pound medium Shrimp - peeled and deveined

2 or 3 filets of fresh Flounder or other white fish you can find

1 can of whole, baby Clams with all of the juice or shuck fresh clams (equal to)

1 pound smaller sized Scallops

1 Lobster tail chopped up small

1 packaged, plastic, small tub of excellent crab meat, prefer whole lump or premium

2 cups chopped, firm, boiled red potatoes (the size of dice is nice

1 or 2 cups grilled, drained, chopped, thick-cut, hickory smoked bacon

## **DIRECTIONS:**

1. Sautee down the onion until translucent but not browned or carmelized!
2. Begin to heat up the broth and add the bay leaf to release its flavor.
3. Broil or bake the fish and hold to add to the broth later – pull it from the oven and let it stiffen up.
4. Saute shrimp and scallops until plump and keep them tender – do not harden stiff.
5. Add tomatoes, wine (if using) to the broth and pepper.
6. Add the chopped lobster and crab meat and cook tenderly – the broth does not need to be at boil.
7. Add the clams with juice, garlic (taste to likeness depending on small or large cloves) and strip off the fresh thyme into the broth.
8. Add the bacon and potatoes tossing around
9. Allow to mingle and test for your preference to decide if it NEEDS ANY salt or not at this point.
10. Serve.
11. During winter we thicken this with heavy cream and sometimes add a flour and butter mixed roux. It just depends on how thick you would like to have it!