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2024 Orange Tree Lane, Redlands CA 92374
909-307-2669 • www.sbcountymuseum.org

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY MUSEUM

FEAST FOR THE EYES

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contact:
Jennifer Reynolds, media specialist,
909-307-2669 ext. 278
Michele Nielsen, curator of history,
909-307-2669 ext. 240

A FEAST FOR THE EYES

Tables, chairs, and linens. China, flatware, epergnes, and pickle forks. See the accoutrements of dining from the 1860s to the 1940s in "A Feast for the Eyes: dining in style," at the San Bernardino County Museum in Redlands. This special exhibit, free with museum admission, opens March 1 and continues through October 26.

If you have ever wondered what to do with a celery vase, how a pickle castor works, or where the tradition of napkin rings came from, you won't want to miss the San Bernardino County Museum's upcoming exhibit, "A Feast for the Eyes."

Join us in the museum's Hall of History to find out more about food preparation and dining between the 1860s and the 1940s and how this relates to the ways we eat today. Perhaps you enjoy using decorative napkin rings on your dining table. In the past, people used personalized or distinctive napkin rings so they could use the same one at each meal, since napkins were laundered infrequently.

Do you host Super Bowl parties with a special "game day" menu featuring Buffalo wings or chili? Perhaps you serve a favorite type of finger food when it is your turn to have the Poker or Bunko group at your house. In the 1920s and 1930s, Mahjong and card parties were all the rage. Hosts used table linens and set out special dishes for foods players could snack on in the heat of the game.

Eating meals someplace other than home is common today, but was also a custom of the past. Some people enjoyed dining out when they traveled or for special occasions. Restaurant menus are a fascinating way to study food customs, social and environmental history, regional cooking styles, and ingredients. Recipes, or receipts as they were called, are another treasure trove of information about cooking methods, food preferences, and family and cultural traditions.

Serving and eating utensils have changed, too. In the 1880s, you might have needed a map to find your way around a dining table set for a special occasion and then directions to figure out how to use all of the equipment found there, including a multitude of serving dishes and a plethora of forks. People of means often had household help who cooked and even served the food and did the washing up afterward. By the early 1900s and on into the 1920s, simple, classic, modern design was the trend, making all of the frippery of the last century obsolete. Technological breakthroughs made meal preparation and service easier, as food trends and tastes changed with the times.

Cooking and serving took on a "do-it-yourself" approach. Electrical appliances like the waffle iron and toaster oven, and tableware like batter sets allowed the "lady of the house" to sit at the dining table and prepare waffles herself instead of needing someone else to do the same task over a stove in the kitchen. Sanitation theory and the angst many people felt over unseen germs and food-borne health hazards popularized the all-white kitchen for a time, because it was seemingly

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A FEAST FOR THE EYES continues

easier to keep clean. As food science advanced, people made connections between eating, activity level and overall physical well-being. Eating habits and recipe trends changed, making simpler meals popular.

Many things, including technology, culture, and world events, affected eating and influenced foodways over the years. During World War II, commodity shortages and rationing programs encouraged the creative use of available foods, and was an opportunity for processed food companies to promote their products. Mock apple pie made from Ritz crackers may not have tasted like the real thing, but people did their part for the war effort and tried new and innovative recipes. Folks living in urban or suburban areas who did not normally grow their own produce used whatever soil was available and planted Victory Gardens, integrating what they grew into their daily diets, and preserving or trading the excess.

As we think about how people ate in the past and how we eat today, table manners and even table setting customs come to mind. Have you ever wondered why it is so terrible to put your elbows on the table, or where the idea of passing food to the right came from? Down through the years, there have been plenty of "table etiquette experts" who have influenced behavior in relation to eating. In the past, not only were certain behaviors taboo at the table, but even certain topics of discussion came under fire! Visit A Feast for the Eyes to find more, and to see how your table manners stack up.

The San Bernardino County Museum is at the California Street exit from Interstate 10 in Redlands. The museum is open Tuesdays through Sundays and holiday Mondays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is \$6 (adult), \$5 (student or senior), and \$4 (child aged 5 to 12). Children under five and Museum Association members are admitted free. The Exploration Station is open from 1 to 4 p.m. Parking is free. For more information, visit www.sbcountymuseum.org.

The museum is accessible to persons with disabilities. If assistive listening devices or other auxiliary aids are needed in order to participate in museum exhibits or programs, requests should be made through Museum Visitor Services at least three business days prior to your visit. Visitor Services telephone number is 909-307-2669 ext. 229 or (TDD) 909-792-1462.

