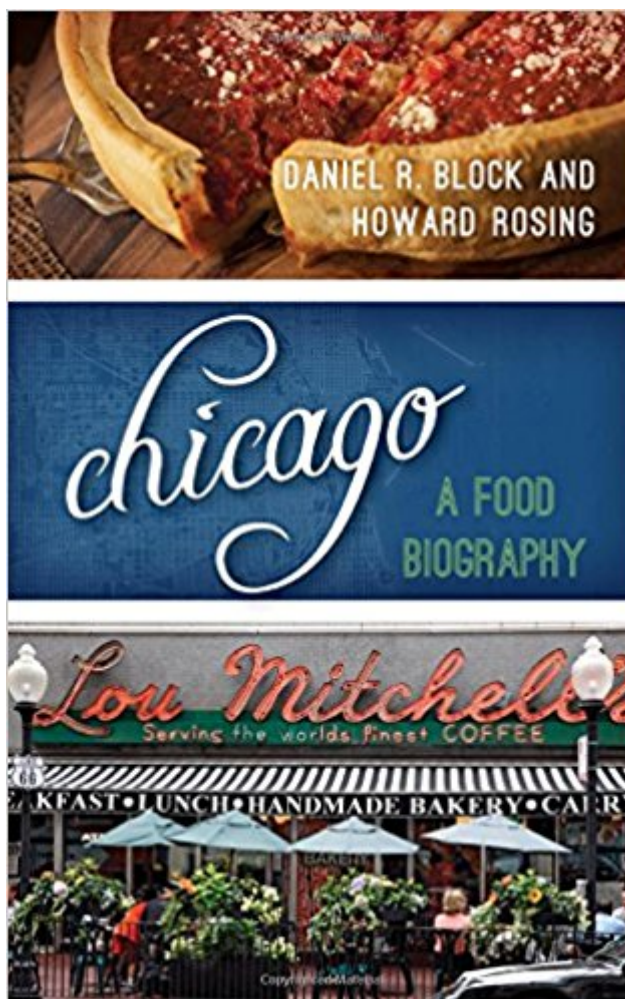


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# Chicago: A Food Biography (Big City Food Biographies)



## Synopsis

Chicago began as a frontier town on the edge of white settlement and as the product of removal of culturally rich and diverse indigenous populations. The town grew into a place of speculation with the planned building of the Illinois and Michigan canal, a boomtown, and finally a mature city of immigrants from both overseas and elsewhere in the US. In this environment, cultures mixed, first at the taverns around Wolf Point, where the forks of the Chicago River join, and later at the jazz and other clubs along the "Stroll" in the black belt, and in the storefront ethnic restaurants of today. Chicago was the place where the transcontinental railroads from the West and the "trunk" roads from the East met. Many downtown restaurants catered specifically to passengers transferring from train to train between one of the five major downtown railroad stations. This also led to "destination" restaurants, where Hollywood stars and their onlookers would dine during overnight layovers between trains. At the same time, Chicago became the candy capital of the US and a leading city for national conventions, catering to the many participants looking for a great steak and atmosphere. Beyond hosting conventions and commerce, Chicagoans also simply needed to eat safely and relatively cheaply. Chicago grew amazingly fast, becoming the second largest city in the US in 1890. Chicago itself and its immediate surrounding area was also the site of agriculture, both producing food for the city and for shipment elsewhere. Within the city, industrial food manufacturers prospered, highlighted by the meat processors at the Chicago stockyards, but also including candy makers such as Brach's and Curtiss, and companies such as Kraft Foods. At the same time, large markets for local consumption emerged. The food biography of Chicago is a story of not just culture, economics, and innovation, but also a history of regulation and regulators, as they protected Chicago's food supply and built Chicago into a city where people not only come to eat, but where locals rely on the availability of safe food and water. With vivid details and stories of local restaurants and food, Block and Rosing reveal Chicago to be one of the foremost eating destinations in the country.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In so many diverse ways, Chicago is America's heart. The nation's waterways, railroads, highways, and air corridors converge on the city by the lake. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, Chicago has played a key role in food distribution throughout the nation. Its notorious stockyards and its massive grain storage towers moved the heartland's bounty to the coasts and around the world. Immigrants brought their foodways, making the city a melting pot for every world cuisine. Block and Rosing document economic and cultural forces that have made the city a top destination for everyday eaters and earnest gourmets. They inventory unique creations beyond Chicago pizza and other native dishes, illustrating how the city's cooks have influenced all of America, redefining Italian, Greek, and Mexican cuisine as well as manufacturing grain products, candy, and even popcorn. Through its stellar chefs, Chicago has lately revolutionized restaurant dining. Casual readers and scholars will both find something to savor here. (Booklist) You don't need anybody to tell you Chicago is a food city or to extol the virtues of chicken Vesuvio, deep dish pizza, a jibarito, South Side rid tips or a Vienna Beef hot dog (on a poppy seed bun, of course). Perhaps less well known is how Chicago's cuisine developed, or how the city became the first modern industrial food center, both of which are explored in *Chicago: A Food Biography* by Daniel R. Block and Howard Rosing. (Chicago Tribune) This book is a well-documented text written by two professors, Daniel Block (Chicago State University) and Howard Rosing (DePaul University), not a gossipy tell-all tale packed with juicy tidbits and anecdotes. In short, the book is both interesting and well worth reading. (ChicagoNow) A fascinating food history of Chicago, revealing the reasons, many unexpected, why this city's cuisine is so diverse and rich. An essential read for anyone interested in food and culinary history. (Jennifer McLagan, the author of award winning *Bitter: A Taste of the World's Most Dangerous Flavor, with Recipes*) An interesting foray into Chicago's influence on food and food's influence on Chicago. (Denese Neu, PhD, author of *Chicago by the Pint: a Craft Beer History of the Windy*

City) Anyone interested in American food history must know a lot about the indispensable heart: Chicago. The nation's historic food production and commodity distribution center, home to every ethnic food in America, Chicago always has been an innovative culinary center. How this came about is told in Block and Rosing's well researched and engagingly written work. A complex story very well told, it is the best survey to date. (Bruce Kraig, co-editor, *Food City: The Encyclopedia of Chicago Food and Man Bites Dog: Hot Dog Culture in America*) Chicago: A Food Biography is as much a history of today's industrial food system as a story of the evolving food culture of Chicago. While Chicago has been a melting pot for today's food industry, the city has remained a veritable stew of ethnic cuisine. The book is a good read for anyone interested in food and a must read for anyone interested in both food and Chicago. (John E. Ikerd, professor emeritus, University of Missouri Columbia) Chicago's food traditions are no less towering than the skyscrapers that define its skyline. Deep-dish pizza and Chicago-style hot dogs loom large in the culinary landscape, as does the influence of Chicago chefs like Rick Bayless, Grant Achatz, and the late Charlie Trotter. In *Chicago: A Food Biography*, geographer Daniel R. Block and anthropologist Howard B. Rosing chronicle Chicago's swift evolution from frontier town to food capital—a path paved by meat and corn, migration, and modern industrialization—and make a strong case for Chicago as the most American of cities. (Meryl Rosofsky, MD, writer and adjunct professor of Food Studies, New York University) Everyone is likely to learn something about Chicago food from this book, which has clear documentation and an impressive bibliography.... Given the wide scale of the historical and geographical approach in this volume, a reader who is looking for an overview of aspects of food in Chicago may find it useful to start here. (*Digest: A Journal of Foodways & Culture*)

Daniel R. Block, PhD, is a professor of geography and director of the Fred Blum Neighborhood Assistance Center at Chicago State University. He has particular interests in inner-city food access issues, the history of the modern food system, and Chicago food history and policy. He has completed a number of food access studies, including the Northeastern Illinois Community Food Security Assessment, a large scale food access study of the six-county Chicago metro area. In addition, Block is currently on the board of the Chicago Food Policy Advisory Council, has been a member many community commissions on food access issues, is a past president of the Agriculture, Food, and Human Values Society and was the founding chair of the Geographies of Food and Agriculture Specialty Group of the Association of American Geographers. Howard Rosing, PhD, is a cultural anthropologist whose research focuses on urban food access, economic

restructuring, community food systems, and food justice movements in Chicago and the Dominican Republic. He is the Executive Director of the Steans Center for Community-based Service Learning and Community Service Studies at DePaul University and co-director of DePaul's graduate program in Sustainable Urban Development (SUD). Rosing teaches courses on community food systems and food justice and his current research focuses on the role of urban agriculture in improving food access in economically distressed neighborhoods. He is also co-developer of the Chicago Urban Agriculture Mapping Project (cuamp.org), a public resource for documenting the city's food production.

Excellent!

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