

Stories in Stone: Virginia “Jennie” Carter Benedict

By: Alex Luken

Jennie Benedict began her cooking career in 1893, baking fruitcake and plum cakes in a kitchen she constructed behind her parents’ home at 1327 South Third Street. Within six months, she raised enough money from selling cakes to pay off the builder for the construction of the kitchen. Using what today would be considered a highly effective direct marketing campaign, Benedict sent out a mailer to solicit catering work from friends and family. Her efforts landed her a 4-year contract to provide chicken salad sandwich lunches to school children, truly launching her career into a new realm.



Benedict taught cooking lessons out of her catering kitchen, and wrote her first cookbook, *100 Tested Receipts*. She ran a well-known lunch program for the Louisville Businesswoman’s Club, and in 1900, she purchased the established and lucrative confectionery business of Madame August Pargny. The confectionery purchase included a Ladies Ice Cream Parlor and Tea Shop with Miss Salome E Kerr and Charles Scribner. Her second cookbook, *The Blue Ribbon Cookbook*, was published in 1902. It was met with such popularity, that a second edition was printed in 1904. As her business venture continued to expand, she eventually opened Benedict’s Restaurant in 1911. By this time, she had a total of 65 employees between the restaurant, catering business, and confectionery. The famous Benedictine Sandwich was invented at Benedict’s Restaurant as part of the afternoon tea spread.

Jennie Benedict was very active in social welfare work and was president of the King’s Daughters District Nurses Union for many years. In 1919, the organization had over 1,600 members. The organization laid the groundwork for the Good Samaritan and the Public Health Nursing Associations in Louisville.

In 1925, she sold the business and her family’s home on Third Street, and relocated to a house off of Mellwood Avenue, which she called “Dream Acre.” The house, located in the Indianola subdivision on Warren Road, still stands. She died there in 1928 of pneumonia.

In total, five editions of *The Blue Ribbon Cookbook* have been published. The latest edition, published in 2008, with a forward written by Louisville Courier Journal’s Food Editor, Susan Reigler, is the first edition to include the recipe for the legendary Benedictine Sandwich spread.

Over the years, Louisville cooks have made signature changes to the original recipe, ranging from the type of bread used for the sandwich, to adding grated cucumber into the spread. Some variations also include the addition of dillweed, to a very exotic contemporary version which gets its green coloring from mashed avocado.

Jennie Benedict’s Benedictine

Recipe courtesy of the Filson Historical Society

8 ounces cream cheese, softened
3 tablespoons cucumber juice
1 tablespoon onion juice
1 teaspoon salt

A few grains of cayenne pepper or dash Tabasco sauce
2 drops green food coloring
Mayonnaise to spread on bread

To get the cucumber juice, peel, seed, and grate the cucumber. Sprinkle with salt, then let sit for 30 minutes to draw out liquid. Drain and reserve liquid, then wrap the grated cucumber in a clean dish towel and squeeze the excess juice into a dish. Discard pulp.

Do the same for the onion.

Mix all ingredients together with a fork (not food processor) until well-blended.

Serve on soft white bread with crusts removed. Before spreading with Benedictine spread, gently roll bread slices with a rolling pin to achieve a genteel tea sandwich thickness.

<https://theseasonedcynic.com/home/2019/4/30/fond-of-louisville-jennie-carter-benedict>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benedictine_\(spread\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benedictine_(spread))

<https://filsonhistorical.org/cucumbers-cream-cheese-oh-my/>

<http://researchingfoodhistory.blogspot.com/2019/04/advice-from-creator-of-kentucky-derby.html>

<https://www.newspapers.com/clip/49230170/the-courier-journal/>