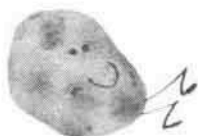
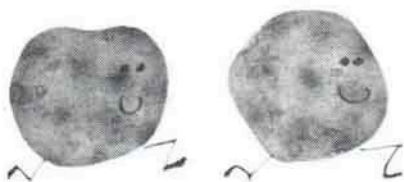


America's favorite snack and a culinary world-wide delight sprang from a Crum who was really a Speck and the whole thing was all a mistake



HOW THE POTATO CHIPPED IN



by Marion Meade

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AN UNSUNG American Indian invented them by accident.

Hubert Humphrey, Arlene Francis, Victor Borge, and Princess Grace confess their addiction to them.

Nikita Khrushchev gobbled them and urged all Russians do the same.

Back in horse-and-buggy days they were standard and beloved fare at the White House. Today astronauts reach for them while orbiting the earth, teen-agers adore them, dieters valiantly try to ignore them, and hostesses would be lost without them.

Potato chips are America's favorite snack. And, like apple pie and hot dogs, they have acquired the status of a national institution. The average man, woman and child dips, dunks, crunches, nibbles and munches nearly five pounds each year.

The potato chip was born one hundred and fourteen years ago. But the story of the chip started long before when an Iroquois Indian stumbled upon a sulphur spring in what is now New York State and named the spot "Floating Scum Upon the Waters." Little could he foresee that "Sar-agh-

oga" would someday be the birthplace of a famous culinary innovation and that one of his race's descendants would be responsible.

Saratoga Springs had not yet become a legendary summer resort in 1853. It would be another ten years before the first race track and gambling casino made their appearance. The quiet little town was not completely unknown, though. Ever since the days of John Quincy Adams, well-bred and genteel hypochondriacs had been going there to dose themselves with Saratoga's therapeutic mineral waters. If you suffered from gout, dropsy, ulcers, tired blood, chronic indigestion, or dissipation due to overindulgence with the demon rum, a week or two at Saratoga revitalized you for another year.

Both the health seekers and the local townspeople were known to be sober and pious types, understandably so because Saratoga happened to be the headquarters for the temperance movement. The town's favorite forms of entertainment, in fact the only ones, were public Bible readings and

prayer meetings.

Still, for a reason hard to pinpoint—perhaps the water or merely the results of clean living for a few weeks—there was something invigorating about Saratoga's atmosphere which gave people extraordinary appetites. The guests staying at the luxury hotels with their gingerbread trim, as well as those at the more modest boardinghouses, seemed to like eating above all else. So at the beginning of the 1853 season a smart hotelman named Cary B. Moon decided to open an elegant new restaurant on the edge of Saratoga Lake.

Presiding over the kitchen at Moon's Lake House was George Crum, a twenty-five-year old Indian chef. His assistant and chief cook was his older sister, Katie Weeks. Aunt Katie, as she was usually called in Saratoga, had been employed by Mr. Moon for many years at his boardinghouse, Montgomery Hall.

On one sweltering July afternoon, Aunt Katie was working alone in the kitchen at Moon's. Since the temperature was made all the more intense by the heat from her stove, she did not feel in the best of all possible moods. What's more, like all cooks she was attempting to do several tasks at once. While frying crullers in a huge cauldron of fat which was bubbling on the stove, she also tried to peel potatoes.

Now the plot thickens. Suddenly a sliver of potato flew off the sharp edge of her knife and plopped nicely

into the pot of frying crullers. Evidently it took Katie a few minutes to find her long fork and fish out the now crispy sliver of potato, which she absent-mindedly dropped on a handy plate and continued with her peeling.

If you think Katie is going to get credit for discovering the potato chip, you're wrong. Because precisely at this historic moment brother George conveniently makes his entrance and immediately pushes his way into the limelight. Spotting the chip, he is supposed to have asked, "What's this?" or words to that effect. George then proceeded to taste the golden morsel and decided it had definite possibilities.

"How did you make this?" he casually inquired, which should have tipped off Katie as to exactly what was on his mind. But poor Katie, who was either terribly honest or a mite slow-witted, answered truthfully and thereby lost her place as the creator of the potato chip.

If a creative cook ever lived, it was George Crum. Upon hearing that he was eating a mistake, an object bound for the garbage pail actually, George decided to fry up a batch of these luscious mistakes. It took him a few days to perfect the technique. First he experimented with the thickness of the potato slice, then he carefully tested the heat of the fat and varied the precise instant to retrieve the paper-thin slice from the oil. Naturally the important matter of salt had to be given serious thought also. At the last minute George realized he had no name for his creation; he christened them Saratoga Chips.

The stage was set. One day in mid-July, 1853—regrettably the exact date has been lost—the patrons of Moon's had a chance to sample the first potato chips. From all reports their debut was acclaimed a big hit.

Detailed information about the man who produced the chip is rather hard to come by. What is known, however, indicates that he must have been an unusual fellow. In the first place, at the time when he originated the chips, his name was not Crum at all. It was Speck. The story goes that one evening Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, the founder of the



RECENT OFFICE VISITORS: Loren Keel, Old London Foods, Cincinnati, Ohio; Ed E. Ruggles, FMC, American Viscose Division; Irv Mermelstein, Closure Corporation. Also a visitor, but not pictured, was Jacob P. Hawley, Olin Cellophane, Pisgah Forest, N. C.

famous family, arrived at Moon's with a party of guests. Orders were placed but, after an hour or so had elapsed, there was still no sign of food. Finally the hungry Vanderbilt shouted at a waiter: "Go to the kitchen and ask that Crumb how long before we eat!"

Despite his irritation, it is unlikely the Commodore meant the term "crumb" (or "crum") in the derogatory sense it might be used today. As slang, the word didn't come into common usage until the twentieth century. Obviously forgetting Speck's name, Vanderbilt confused a crumb with a speck. In any case, George must have been pleased with the Commodore's attention or else he possessed a peculiar sense of humor because he immediately changed his name to Crum.

As for his culinary talents, Crum *né* Speck surely had a considerable amount of innate ability since it is certain he didn't study at any fancy school for chefs. His boyhood days had been spent in the Adirondack Mountains where he'd won a reputation for being a first-class guide and hunter. Often he camped with a Frenchman who, it is said, was a superb cook. During lonely evenings around the campfire he is supposed to have passed along valuable cooking hints to Crum.

After his friend and teacher died, Crum decided to abandon the mountain trails for the more dignified calling of *chef de cuisine*. Later he liked to declare that he could cook anything and many have attested that it was not an empty boast.

A few years after his historic discovery, Crum left Moon's to open his own restaurant. There always seemed to be a waiting line at Crum's Place as customers queued up for his renowned homemade pickles and muffins, succulent roasts and canvas-back ducks and, of course, platters heaped with salty Saratoga Chips.

"Crum kept his tables laden with the best of food and did not neglect to charge the prices," crabbily recorded a Saratoga contemporary.

Crum's admiring customers included two Presidents, Chester A. Arthur and Grover Cleveland, not

to mention a continual parade of politicians, debutantes, financiers, industrial magnates, and also plenty of people who simply liked good food.

His restaurant had one disadvantage, which may partially account for the long lines. It was not famous for speedy service. And Crum treated everyone in the same high-handed manner by establishing a rule that every guest must wait his turn. As a result, William Vanderbilt once fidgeted for an hour. On another occasion railroad tycoon Jay Gould, a gentleman not accustomed to waiting for anything, was finally conducted to his table after two hours. Evidently he must have enjoyed his dinner because afterwards he congratulated Crum on the fairness of his seating system.

George Crum never became rich from his Saratoga Chips. Even had it been possible to patent his discovery, he probably wouldn't have bothered since he had so many other irons in the fire. Besides, there was no particular secret about making the chips, a fact borne out when other chefs in Saratoga began to serve them also. Before long some astute local businessman realized that chips didn't necessarily have to be eaten at the table and he began to hawk them around town to strolling tourists for five cents a cornucopia.

During the last decades of the nineteenth century Saratoga Springs blossomed into the most famous and



Bake and serve soft pretzels are now being marketed in a plastic container. Poly package shown in photo holds six Little Dutchman Pennsylvania Dutch Soft Pretzels made by Mealtime Foods, Inc., Lebanon, Pa.

notorious spa in America. Its name synonymous with pleasure, the town became a mecca for millionaire gentlemen and society ladies, for all the fabled personalities of the day. It was also a gourmet's paradise. It is not surprising that Saratoga was the scene of a famous eating contest between actress Lillian Russell and Diamond Jim Brady, the legendary trencherman who, it is said, "liked his sirloin steaks smothered in veal cutlets." In the middle of the gargantuan meal lasting over five hours, Lillian excused herself and skipped off to the ladies' room where she removed her corset. She returned to eat Brady under the table. No record remains of how many Saratoga Chips were consumed on that occasion but the quantity must have been staggering.

With such high-class publicity, the fame of the chip spread rapidly. The recipe was printed the first time in the White House Cookbook of 1887:

"Peel good-sized potatoes and slice them as evenly as possible. Drop them into ice water. Put a few at a time into a towel and shake to dry the moisture out of them. Drop them into a kettle of boiling lard. Stir occasionally and when light brown take them out with a skimmer, and they will be crisp and not greasy. Sprinkle salt over them while hot."

In the Century Cookbook published in 1895, authoress Mary Ronald listed them as an indispensable

element of a "sylvan repast." (Translation: picnic.)

Before long the popular chip had traveled to the Midwest and then followed the frontier as it moved westward. Somewhere along the way, however, they lost their original distinctive name. Possibly people were confused about what exactly was a Saratoga Chip. So they became simply potato chips.

The first commercial manufacturers of potato chips can best be described as mom-and-pop operations. With mother in the kitchen frying potatoes, pop and the kids peddled the paper cornucopias by horse-drawn wagon. If business happened to boom, they would move the operation to the family's basement or garage. Because it required a large kettle and a small amount of capital, this became a favorite venture for small businessmen.

The quality of the early chips varied greatly, much depending on the size, shape, and type of potato used. Since they were fried in lard, the chips tended to be greasier than those we have today. In addition, they had an unfortunate habit of turning rancid if not eaten within a week or ten days.

Since the early potato-chip makers were local and often fly-by-night operators, it is hard to find many old companies surviving today. One of the oldest well-known manufacturers is the Wise Potato Chip Company, now a subsidiary of the Borden Company. In 1920 a Berwick, Pennsylvania, grocer, Earl V. Wise, found himself overstocked with potatoes. While trying to figure out how to use his inventory of spuds, he recalled watching his mother make potato chips when he was a child. So the young grocer began by peeling the potatoes by hand, slicing them on a cabbage slicer, and frying them in his kitchen. Packaging them in kraft bags, he delivered the chips to local grocers on his bicycle.

Mr. Wise's elementary methods of manufacture and distribution were typical of the industry for many years. Not until recently did companies become fully automated so

[Turn to page 32]



Prexy and Mrs. Frank Woodard visit the PCII offices in Cleveland.

HOW THE POTATO CHIPPED IN (Continued)

that now the industry can boast that human hands never touch the chips. In fact, it has only been during the past twenty-five years that the popularity of potato chips really began to zoom. After World War II came great mass exoduses to the suburbs, an emphasis on outdoor living, housewives' demand for quickly-prepared, convenient foods, and the emergence of a new national pastime—television—which encouraged nibbling. Potato chips became the perfect solution.

Potato chips have long been known as the drinking man's best friend. Fifty years ago, however, the cocktail party did not exist nor did the practice of serving predinner cocktails at home. Nonetheless, potato chips were available at the corner saloon and every self-respecting establishment offered a "free lunch." For the price of a drink or two, a gentleman could help himself to an inexhaustible supply of perhaps twenty-five or thirty hot and cold dishes, including chips. Today of course they are a staple in bars and cocktail lounges where they may be the only free item in sight, the last vestige of an almost forgotten era in tipping.

In recent years chips have become an international favorite which are munched in nearly every country of the world. The Japanese eat them in place of cookies, some African tribes like them for breakfast, the Swiss use them as croutons and float them on soups, and the French crush them for piecrust and upside-down cakes.

Like many innovators, George Crum has been neglected by posterity. Not one statue of him has ever been erected, not even in Saratoga Springs. But his idea has girdled the globe and, if it's any consolation to him, it is likely that when the first U.S. astronauts land on the moon their space kits will contain a bag of potato chips.