

The lure of food: food as an attraction in destination marketing

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Abstract: In an era when economies are busily converting from the production of physical goods to the provision of services, tourism has frequently been promoted as a means of providing jobs and an inflow of revenues to communities. Places, both large and small, are promoting themselves as offering something different, yet trying to appeal to a broad spectrum of the tourism market. Not only is food essential to everyone's survival, it can be one of the more important attractions sought out by tourists in their craving for new and unforgettable experiences. Its contribution to the tourism economy is of considerable importance, and because of its intensive use of labour, it also contributes very heavily to the tourism employment sector. As a result, food is becoming increasingly important as an ingredient in marketing destinations to tourists. This paper examines some aspects of this phenomenon in Manitoba's tourism industry.

Introduction

Food is one of the most important attractions sought out by tourists in their craving for new and unforgettable experiences. However, food is a very much overlooked and unsung component of the tourism literature. Typically, food is lumped together with accommodation in compilations of tourism statistics, partly perhaps because of its being almost always part of another attraction, and also because of its being a necessary element of survival no matter where a person is located. Dining out is one of the most popular activities undertaken by Canadian tourists and the practice is rapidly growing (Coopers and Lybrand 1996 pp.14-15; Wilton 1997 p.28). Furthermore, the contribution of food to the tourism economy is of

very considerable importance, and because of their intensive use of labour, food preparation and services also contribute very heavily to the tourism employment sector. In Canada, nearly a million people work in the food service industry, and according to Statistics Canada, 21 per cent of a tourist's budget is spent on food and drink (Snapshots 1998 p.144). Manitoba statistics show an even higher percentage of the tourist dollar being spent in this way, with more than 28 per cent being spent on food and drink by intra-provincial travelers (Statistics Canada 1997). The promotion of regional cuisine is therefore an effective way of supporting local economies and agricultural production. This paper provides an overview of the relevance of food to Manitoba's tourism industry.

Manitoba's food attractions command scant attention from international food guides such as the Michelin Guide, nor do they receive much notice from Canadian productions featuring restaurant fare. As examples, Air Canada's in-flight magazine, *En Route* typically contains only a handful of entries for Manitoba, and a recent feature article, "Haute Canuck," in *Maclean's* magazine, barely mentions Manitoba's contribution to Canada's haute cuisine (Chidley 1998). But as the statistics indicate, revenues from the sale of food are a very large component of the total amount of tourism product sold. Fine dining is important in Manitoba, and as a recent survey shows, more than 50 per cent of travelers to Manitoba were motivated in part by the desire to try different foods (Travel Manitoba 1995). Manitoba restaurants boast a number of top-ranked chefs who have developed a distinctive "Manitoba Regional Cuisine," carrying off gold medals from the World Culinary Olympics and other international competitions (Tourism Winnipeg 1999a p.28; Tourism Winnipeg 1999b p.2). The Manitoba Restaurant Association is more than fifty years old, has more than 500 members, and takes an active role in promoting the province's food services industry. The association sponsors an annual trade fair, the Food and Beverage Expo, while some thirty of its more up-market restaurants are featured at the Manitoba Food Fair, one of the more popular of Winnipeg's annual visitor attractions (Manitoba Restaurant Association 2000).

But as the statistics also show, most food expenditures are for more mundane dietary needs. As with world tourism, it is the largely

ungung domestic tourist who consumes the bulk of the food and contributes most to the food tourism total. Thus, at the lower end of the hierarchy of culinary cuisine, there is a wealth of foods consumed by the local tourist and only to a lesser extent by the traveler from more distant parts, even though the latter may be critical to the success of the food outlets available.

Winnipeg Festivals

Nowhere is this more readily visible than at Folklorama, Manitoba's largest festival and most important annual tourist attraction. Begun in 1970 in celebration of Manitoba's centennial, Folklorama originally took place over a single weekend and was a totally volunteer operation comprising a mere handful of cultural groups. However, it became an instant success with the local population and is now a firmly established event in Winnipeg's calendar, normally spanning a two week period in mid-summer and consisting of around forty "pavilions" scattered through the city, each representing one of Winnipeg's diverse cultural groups. The pavilions present displays, crafts, dances and, most important, a sampling of distinctive foods which, along with drinks, generate substantial revenues for the festival and its participant groups. In 1998, the festival attracted more than 425,000 visits to its pavilions, serving up 600,000 meals and 1,000,000 beverages (Folklorama 2000). According to Tourism Winnipeg's research, Folklorama in 1996 contributed \$7,200,000 to Manitoba's GDP, more than twice as much as any other annually recurring event (Grant Meder 2000). With this growth, the character of the event has changed significantly.

Although volunteers and the ethnocultural mosaic remain at the heart of the operation, there are now strong corporate and commercial interests involved. Folklorama is presently organized by the Folk Arts Council of Winnipeg, a non-profit corporation with a Board of Directors and a dozen permanent staff including four marketing personnel. Their efforts are supplemented by the activities of Travel Manitoba and Tourism Winnipeg, both of which feature Folklorama in their promotional work. More than 20,000 people still volunteer their time to the Festival, frequently giving

up part of their holidays to the event. Others spend weeks and months in advance preparations. However, the large scale of current operations has meant that the bigger pavilions now contract out their food preparation to professional caterers and have to rent space for their activities. In 1998, only six pavilions failed to earn a profit, while twenty made over \$6,000 (Folk Arts Council of Winnipeg 1998 p.14). There are guidelines in place which seek to prevent profiteering, keep prices in line, and ensure that the spirit of Folklorama is retained. However, participating organizations do use the event as a money-making venture to support their other activities and the event has now become very much a commercial operation (Sam Loschiavo 1999). According to some, new volunteers are becoming more difficult to recruit and there are dark suggestions that “money is being made on the backs of the babas,” the dedicated, but aging ladies who still spend countless hours of their time preparing foodstuffs for the occasion.

The Ukrainian Lviv Pavilion, one of the mid-sized pavilions operating out of the Ukrainian Labour Temple, still relies almost entirely on volunteer help. Its culinary crew meets in the spring to review past year’s orders and begins purchasing bulk foods in May. Food preparation starts in early June, over a month before the Festival opens. A fifteen person team spends a total of some 260 hours making, packaging and freezing more than 8000 pyrohi, a potato and cheese filled dumpling; another 150 hours is spent producing about 4000 holuptsi, or cabbage rolls; 60 hours making khrustyky, a light pastry dessert, along with the labour required to shred 100 lbs. of beets and 500 lbs. of cabbage for borscht and sauerkraut. These staple items are supported by freshly produced nalysnyky (cheese filled crepes), kapusta (baked sauerkraut, onions and cabbage), and kasha (buckwheat). Purchased headcheese, garlic sausage, bread, pastries and beverages round out the meal. Revenues from Folklorama net the Lviv Pavilion around \$12,000 with about 60 per cent of that coming from food and most of the remainder from entry passes (Stearns 2000). Clearly, the food component is central to the operation.

Tourists make a considerable contribution to the revenues. Many former Winnipeggers use Folklorama as an opportunity to visit with friends and relatives. Even if their visit is coincidental in

time, they are inevitably invited to take in some of the activities. There are also especial, major efforts to attract tourists to the event. The Folk Arts Council attends trade shows and arranges familiarisation (FAM) tours for tour operators and travel agents across the USA and Canada. Their efforts have led to Folklorama being recognized as an “Internationally Known Super Event” and the “Number One Event” in Canada by the American Bus Association. The Festival organizers claim that “thirty per cent of attendees are from outside of Winnipeg, some travelling from as far as Australia, Korea and Paraguay.” (Folklorama 2000). Between 70-110 bus loads of tourists take in the festival, most of them from the United States. The tour buses stay in Winnipeg between one and three days, are supplied with local guides, and transported between pre-designated pavilions. Typically, the visitors are served an appetizer at the first site, a meal and a show at the principal stop, and possibly a dessert at their third destination (Loschiavo 1999). Although food is only one component of the total Folklorama package, it is an essential ingredient, not only as an attraction, but as a supplementary revenue producer for the participant groups.

Winnipeg’s two other major festivals operate along similar lines to Folklorama. However, there is less emphasis on food. The Festival du Voyageur, a ten-day event held in the French quarter of St. Boniface, is Western Canada’s largest annual winter festival and one of the three biggest Canadian winter festivals. As with Folklorama, Festival du Voyageur consists of a number of pavilions scattered through the community that are operated by sundry groups which offer entertainment and food services to their visitors. These highlight their French-Canadian, Metis, and fur-trading heritage, featuring favourites such as tortiere, pea soup, pork and beans, bannock and the like. Beaver tails, maple syrup and poutine have been more recent additions to the selections. The third largest festival, Winnipeg’s own week-long version of “Oktoberfest,” is billed as the world’s third largest, and is essentially an excuse for swilling beer. However, it also features an interesting blend of delicacies such as “Oktoberfest Sausage on a Bun with 4 Perogies,” “Knackwurst Pizza” and sundry other innovative, but hardly “authentic” dishes, which contribute to the event’s revenues.

The previously mentioned "Taste of Manitoba" festival is held on the July long weekend, also in Winnipeg. The more than thirty of "Manitoba's great restaurants," attract in excess of 50,000 visitors (Manitoba Restaurant Association 2000). Not only is the festival a major attraction in its own right, it also lures people to the participating restaurants. For example, because of its participation in the food fair, the Roblin Inn succeeded in bringing the 1991 Canadian Association of Geographers' Prairie Division conference to Russell, in rural Manitoba.

Another interesting development in Winnipeg has been the generation of street festivals with a neighbourhood focus that feature the distinctive foods of the district and which attract the so-called intraurban tourist. These are people who seldom, if ever, visit "foreign" parts of their city unless attracted to do so by some tourism-like promotion. Two such festivals come to mind. The first, the Corydon Avenue "Days of Wine and Roses" street festival was sponsored by the local Italian community and the speciality Italian restaurants along the Corydon commercial strip. What began as a local event promoting Italian culture and foods became so overwhelmingly popular, especially with the addition of huge bars pushing beer sales, that the whole scheme was eventually abandoned. As with some other tourist events, the festival's success in attracting massive numbers of visitors brought about its own destruction (Spina 1998). Another street festival has recently been initiated in the inner city's Wolseley district. This residential enclave, known as Winnipeg's "granola/muesli belt," has been experiencing a degree of gentrification, with its festival featuring 'veggie' burgers and carrot sticks, as well as the more conventional hamburgers and wieners.

An even less conventional festival featuring food, although not in the conventional sense, is the Winnipeg "Banana Festival." Not included in the mainstream tourism publicity and promotions of Travel Manitoba and Tourism Winnipeg, the Banana Festival is an annual week-long event in March sponsored by "Teasers," Winnipeg's principal burlesque house located in St Boniface. This event, dreamed up a decade ago by the proprietor, Sabino, began as a publicity stunt wherein patrons/exotic dancers participated in a simple banana eating contest. Now, nearly a decade after its

inception, the banana eating contest has evolved into its current format. The showroom, decked out in a variety of bananas, inflated and plastic, some of them up to six feet in length, form a backdrop suspended around the room. Bunches of real bananas hang from the ceiling around the stage, ready at hand to the exotic dancers. These are plucked by the dancers and incorporated into their dances. Dancers also feast on the bananas with gusto with all the lascivious gestures and mannerisms reminiscent of the classic feast scene in the movie "Tom Jones," urged on by the heavy beat and reverberation of the music, the deafening encouragement of the DJ, and the shouts and hooting of the patrons. The Banana Festival is advertised through mid-western cable TV Channels 8 and 4. Channel 8's primary market is Winnipeg, but it is also readily available to American audiences in Grand Forks, Fargo and the like in North Dakota, Minnesota. Channel 4 WDAZ, based in Fargo/Grand Forks, serves a similar region and also penetrates further south into the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, reaching a potential total audience of several million people.

The American pornographic magazine Cheri which dubs itself "the world's most explicit sex mag!" frequently features a multi-paged spread of Teasers' strippers, and in doing so, also promotes them as a north-of-the border tourist attraction. To quote from a recent issue:

Winnipeg, Manitoba, has been called "the dullest city in Canada, and therefore the world." Of course that was before CHERI Magazine showed up. We went to this medium-sized city in Canada's "wheat belt" to look for the finest flesh that the sleeping giant to the north has to offer.... They Searched - and they found.... Maybe Winnipeg ain't so boring after all! Any town with a hopping strip joint like Teasers within its borders can't all be bad... .And for anyone who thinks that Canadians are uptight or (pardon the pun) provincial, consider that even a farm town like Winnipeg permits bottomless dancing in establishments with liquor licenses - at a time when some clubs in New York can't even show topless. Kind of makes us here at CHERI want to apply for Canadian passports (Anonymous 1999).

Cheri's reporters showed up at Teasers' first Banana Festival in 1991 and have continued to promote the burlesque palace since then (Anonymous 1991). Sabino, the former proprietor, claims that the Festival attracts visitors from as far away as Toronto, Vancouver, and other major Canadian cities, as well as from the United States. He estimates that the Festival attracts around sixty per cent of its audience from south of the border. Furthermore, Teasers is locally owned and most of the strippers are from Winnipeg, resulting in there being very little leakage from the community (Sabino 1999).

Rural Events

Food tourism is very important to the rural areas of Manitoba where there are literally dozens of festivals featuring food as their principal attraction. Virtually every Manitoba community of any size continues to put on its annual agricultural fair, an event dating back to the early days of settlement. Even more widespread and frequent are the harvest, fall/fowl suppers that take place around the province. These are concentrated in the autumn months, complementing the summer fairs and less frequent winter festivals and spring celebrations. The rural fairs and suppers feature local food specialities that include indigenous produce such as berries and fish, foods representative of ethnic concentrations of population, and agricultural produce special to the different regions. These differences are particularly noticeable in the south central part of the province with its higher population, rich chernozem soils, warmer climate and longer growing season that have encouraged the production of a wide range of speciality crops.

Among the larger rural summer festivals featuring food is the Morden 'Corn and Apple Festival' celebrated at the end of August. Formerly a two day event, it now extends over three days and attracts 40,000 to 50,000 visitors each year. Although the festival boasts a wide variety of attractions that include a midway, live stage entertainment, parade and a hundred or more booths and street displays, important lures are the free hot buttered corn on the cob and apple cider drink 'giveaways.' During the 1999 festival weekend some 32,000 corn cobs and 34,000 ciders were dispensed to the crowds. The Morden festival attracts numerous day visitors,

including a couple of bus loads from Winnipeg, just over 100 kilometres away. However, many visitors stay over the weekend at the 100 unit local beach permanent campgrounds or the 135 unit temporary campground in the school yard (Fehr, 2000; Batters, 2000).

At nearby Altona, the town's "Sunflower Festival" emphasises the importance of sunflower and vegetable oil production to the local farm economy. Altona's "Rhineland Agricultural Fair Day" dates back at least to the 1930s and the Sunflower Festival, inaugurated in 1965, originally ran independently of the older fair (Town of Altona, 1999). The two operations have now been amalgamated and the two-day festival is celebrated at the beginning of August. Whereas the Fair focused on the more traditional agriculturally based activities such as farm implement displays, livestock and produce shows, the July Festival features a more popular range of attractions and entertainments that include motocross races and a demolition derby. Distinctive food attractions have Mennonite origins, including "rollkuchen," a pastry rolled out and deep fat fried, as well as sunflower ice cream. However, the Festival's organisers have determined that they would not boost their budget to compete with other localities for outside visitors, but should instead concentrate on providing the local community with some summer fun. Nevertheless, they are still concerned to attract tourists and are promoting the Festival more widely (Epp, 2000). In contrast, Winkler, like Morden, has built its "Harvest Festival and Exhibition" into a major three day attraction with a wide variety of entertainments and bus tours laid on from Winnipeg. The event still includes the Municipality of Stanley's traditional "Agricultural Society Exhibits and Horse Show," but it also incorporates a parade, rodeo, fireworks, midway, Low German Theatre Festival, Victory Ball, Queen Pageant, Hutterite Colony Choir, Ukrainian Dance Ensemble, Skate Board Demonstration Teams, square dancing, Heritage Fashion Show, Dog Team Performances, Classic Car Show, and "exciting live entertainment all weekend long." Other highlights are free pancake breakfasts and a free barbeque with "lots of Great Mennonite Food." (Town of Winkler, 2000). Clearly, these events, although still featuring

agricultural produce, rely on other inducements to attract their visitors.

Further north, in the cooler, mixed farming area near Riding Mountain, the town of Russell celebrates its “Beef and Barley Festival and Rodeo” in October. Further east, at Ste. Rose du Lac, the self-styled “Cattle Capital of Manitoba,” puts on its “Hoof and Holler Days” in the same month. These events feature “western style” foods such as pancake breakfasts and a beef barbeque. Fall events, and the prospect of Halloween, feature the pumpkin. An example is Teulon’s “Pumpkin Fest” with its competition for the “largest pumpkin, most perfect, most unusual and best carved pumpkin,” along with its farmers’ market and food booths. And then there’s Roland’s “Pumpkin Fair” featuring the giant pumpkin weigh-off and “pumpkin desserts in the Pumpkin Patch Tea Room.” (Travel Manitoba 1999a).

Other small towns base their festivals on natural resources, for example, the Garland “Blueberry Festival,” the St. Pierre Jolys’ “La Cabane a Sucre,” and Selkirk’s “Manitoba Catfish Festival.” These events have evolved as the different communities have sought to re-position themselves and lend uniqueness to their otherwise conventional summer festival fare. And then there are the more people-oriented celebrations: Brandon has its “Children’s Country Picnic,” there’s the “Mother’s Day Tea” at Piney, and the “Father’s Day Smorg” at Steep Rock. There’s even recognition given to expatriate Maritimers with the “Manitoba Maritimers Lobsterfest Picnic” at Bird’s Hill.

These events, as with most other Manitoba attractions, are largely directed at the local market. However, they have become essential ingredients in the drive to flesh out the menu of Manitoba’s tourism offerings directed at Canadian and international guests. For Manitoba, one of the most effective ways of increasing tourism revenues is to persuade visitors to stay a while longer than they are otherwise prone to do. The promotion of food based fairs and festivals is part of this strategy. Similarly, small town Manitoba hopes to cash in on the wider market and to encourage visiting friends and relatives to return home for perhaps an overnight stay.

The Fall Supper

Along similar lines, the fall, or fowl supper, is a Manitoban institution that appears to be undergoing a renewal despite the continuing depopulation of the countryside. Literally hundreds of these events occur each year, sponsored by church and community groups as a means of raising funds for a variety of purposes. Most suppers attract only a local clientele consisting of church members and neighbours, but many have risen in importance to attract ‘out-of-towners’ in large numbers. They are an important incentive to former residents and relatives of rural townspeople and surrounding countryside to return for a visit to their roots. As Lucille Chappellez says of the St. Claude fowl supper: “People come from far and wide to attend this event which doubles as a reunion/gathering of old friends and family. People who have moved away from St. Claude will often return on this occasion to visit with their loved ones” (Chappellez 1999). However, the fall supper is also an increasingly important mechanism for attracting the excursionist or paratourist, particularly Winnipeggers out for a drive into the country.

The fall supper has its origins far back in time. They have evolved from being a purely local and primarily religious celebration of the harvest to that of a major fund-raising event. Nowadays, organised church support groups or secular institutions such as the chamber of commerce sponsor the fall supper. There are carefully worked out marketing plans designed, not just to notify, but to attract visitors from far afield, increasingly from metropolitan Winnipeg, the principal population centre. The season starts in September and runs through virtually to the end of the year when “Christmas Suppers” take over.

The suppers are widely and intensively advertised locally using district newspapers, church announcements, posters and the like. However, to a growing degree, Winnipeg’s principal newspapers and radio stations are asked to publicise the events. Last fall, the number of requests to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s Winnipeg regional network for inclusion of fall supper dates in its public service announcements reached such proportions that they could no longer be accommodated “on air.” Fall suppers are also

now being listed by Travel Manitoba in its Events Guide. This season's Guide listed more than thirty suppers in its columns, more than doubling the previous year's entries (Travel Manitoba 1999b; Travel Manitoba 2000). Countless more suppers rely on solely on local advertising and word-of-mouth.

The popularity of the fall supper is quite immense, with the larger events drawing more than a 1000 people to share in the bounty of a single supper. In addition, many towns have several suppers in a single season. For example, Pilot Mound, some 200 kilometres from Winnipeg, hosts two fall suppers on consecutive weekends in October. Pilot Mound began its suppers back in 1963 to pay for the recently built community hall. From that time, the institution burgeoned to the point where more than 1000 people were being served at each of the suppers. However, over the past ten years or so, competition has increased so that a turnout of 600 or so is the norm. The suppers are advertised over a radius of approximately 100 kilometres, although some people are drawn from as far away as Winnipeg. Pilot Mound's suppers are operated by the Chamber of Commerce, which puts on four fund-raising smorgasbords a year, two in spring and two in the fall. The town also hosts a United Church fall supper and the Legion puts on a steak barbecue. Competition between communities is kept to a minimum by staggering the events among towns in the immediate vicinity of each other. Nevertheless, the district's local radio station at Portage-la-Prairie announced fifteen other suppers to be held on the same weekend as Pilot Mound's (Collins 1999).

Part of the attraction of the fall supper excursion lies with the multi-cultural structure of Manitoba's communities, which lend diversity to the meals. Pilot Mound, in the south-west of the province, is an area substantially pioneered by British migrants. Their fall supper menu is therefore pretty conventional and representative of the majority of the population: roast ham, roast beef, baked chicken, a variety of salads, aspics and pickles, followed by pies and other deserts, washed down with tea and coffee. However, at St. Claude, a French Canadian community a hundred or so kilometres to the east, essentially the same menu is slightly more flavourful. As an added touch, the very attractive table centre pieces of wheat ears, miniature squash and corn enhance the

presentation of the meal. Further east again, at St. Joseph, the flavour is even more distinctively French Canadian. There, tortiere is featured, along with hominy corn, bean pie, and sugar pie. There is also wine available. At Dufrost, some eighty kilometres south of Winnipeg, there is a mixture of French Canadian and Ukrainian. As a result, perogies, holuptsi and home baked beans appear on the menu, along with the ubiquitous meats, salads, pies and deserts. Dufrost, with only a handful of local population, is a much more “homespun” affair, although it does feed about 450 people over the course of the meal (Durbowski 1999). Its suppers are held in a small hall that was formerly a church (Figure 1), creating a very different ambience from the much more spacious and more recently built community halls of the larger communities (Figure 2). It is interesting to note that many of these halls are being paid for by the proceeds from fall suppers.

It has not been possible to obtain conclusive data on the total number of fall suppers prepared during a season, but there can be no doubt that the numbers are high. Using a rough estimate of 300 people per supper, ten suppers per weekend, and a twelve week season, this would suggest that in the order of 36,000 meals are served. At current prices per plate now at around \$8.00, this would generate in the order of \$288,000 a year. Given the much higher numbers generated by some of the larger suppers, this is a very conservative estimate. With these numbers, it is obvious that the suppers perform valuable services to the host communities and to those who patronise them. For smaller communities they are a “mini-mega” event, providing them with revenues to support a wide variety of facilities and services. These range from general support for community infrastructure to special projects such as the purchase of a wheel chair for a needy invalid. They foster community spirit in giving a sense of pride and purpose to residents in presenting the suppers. They also offer excellent value for money to the patrons who also enjoy the opportunity to socialise and to take advantage of these occasions to get out and enjoy the fall countryside. Weather conditions and the pressures of farm work can have a considerable effect on visitor numbers. Finer weather brings out more people, except farmers, who take the opportunity to work their fields. Adverse conditions reduce turnout. However, many people attend



Figure 1: *Dufrost Community Hall (top). The interior (bottom) shows typical buffet style serving and dining table arrangement.*



Figure 2: St. Joseph Community Hall and featured haricot bean icon. Note the tour bus and extended line-up for admission (bottom).

several suppers during the course of the season, often travelling much further than necessary because they “enjoy the ride,” or go out of their way to take in a supper destination more renowned for its cuisine than what is available closer to home.

These numbers have brought changes to the manner of food preparation, although almost everywhere the emphasis is on local volunteer contributions. In Pilot Mound, one of the more “commercial” operations, major food items are purchased from local suppliers and cooked in the town bakery rented for the occasion. These include four whole hams of about 80 pounds each, a hip roast of beef of about 100 pounds, and 1200 pieces of chicken. Initially, volunteers would start peeling potatoes at five in the morning for the dinner, but now powdered mix is used. However, volunteers still prepare the salads, pies and other deserts, with the country ladies producing them for one of the suppers and the town ladies for the other. The women slave over the dishes in the kitchen down in the basement, while the men serve the meals. The school’s student council is given a \$100 for providing clean-up assistance. Because the hall seats only 250 people, clean-up is continuous throughout the meal period. As elsewhere, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find the necessary volunteers to meet the demand (Krotz 1993; Simon 1999). Pilot Mound used to have fifty or so men to call on; now there are forty volunteers altogether. Declining rural population, changing demographic structure and reduced volunteerism are taking their toll. Nevertheless, net proceeds from Pilot Mound’s two suppers amount to between \$7,000-8,000 a year - a profit similar to that produced by the St. Claude supper (Collins 1999; Chappellaz 1999).

Because of these potential profits, many communities are now aggressively marketing their suppers and developing new initiatives. St. Claude, for example, advertises in six district newspapers as well as notifying the Winnipeg press; five television stations are notified; posters are displayed in all towns within a 40-mile radius of St. Claude, and larger billboards are placed on Highway No.2, which passes the town. St. Claude is also involved with the “Gathering of Nations Festival,” an annual rotating festival including St. Claude, Treherne, Swan Lake, Somerset and Pilot Mound (Chappellaz 1999). Other communities have learned the

benefits of cross marketing their supper with other events. Eriksdale, for example, now schedules its fall supper to coincide with the town's "Cream of the Crop" horse sale, an important regional attraction in the Interlake. Some communities, like Miami, St. Joseph and Cook's Creek have also attracted organised bus tours out of Winnipeg (Fehr 1999). Smaller communities are also benefiting from one-off tours by special interest groups such as the Manitoba Historical Society and geographical associations which for years have led groups of their members and other interested parties on trips around the province. These tours rely very heavily indeed for their success on the dining component of the trip. Itineraries are built around places which are able to offer the trippers a "unique" dining experience offering "authentic" recipes prepared in the traditional manner, and often served up in a relatively rustic setting.

Discussion and Conclusion

Food is fundamental to survival. Eating is an acknowledged part of the tourist experience and is featured in a significant amount of tourism promotion. The tourist is necessarily eating away from home, but food is also a strong motive for travel. To many, dining out is relaxing and an opportunity to relieve the cook from the drudgery of everyday living. While eating away from home is enjoying a massive following, so combining it with an element of travel and a more exotic location is also growing in popularity. Food is a reminder of one's roots, a window into the identity of other cultures, and a pleasurable experience. For the tourist therefore, the consumption of food is likely to be a central part of the travel experience.

Although much of what has been discussed in this paper pertains to the excursionist and therefore is not tourism in the strictest sense, the events described are nevertheless taking on the trappings of mass tourism and pushing local organizers to larger scale production to cater for the growing demand. To the small community it is immaterial as to whether the visitor is from Timbuctu or from another town. The small town, or community based organization, is putting on its fowl supper as a revenue

producing device and it is of no consequence that at a regional level the money redistribution amounts to a zero sum game. The local sees it as a means of obtaining visitor dollars to finance and help support the local parish or community facility. To the extent that the smaller communities can attract people from Winnipeg to their events, it is a reversal of the normal pattern of money flows and a worthwhile strategy in the struggle to maintain the health of the rural economy.

As post-modernists have observed, the world today is full of contradictions and counter movements. The same can be said of the lure of food and current trends in food tourism. Globalisation has led to homogeneity. Cuisine has been internationalised, food has become genetically modified, allowing it to be shipped worldwide, uniform in shape, taste and lasting for ever. To even the most unsophisticated palate, the loss of taste, texture and flavour is conspicuous. Food is beautiful in appearance, even aroma, but in the eating a disappointment. It tastes the same. There is shape over substance. For mass marketing, these characteristics are acceptable and also desirable to many consumers. However, this leads to the counter revolution. The jaded palate, recalling the succulence, juiciness, sweetness and variety of the taste experience, searches for the "authentic." There is a growing demand for organic farming, maintainance of the foodstuff gene pool, and the restoration of food varieties. This counter movement expresses a desire for uniqueness, distinctiveness, and the taste of authentic foods prepared in the traditional manner. Food fairs and festivals attempt to service both demands, appealing to those who want the convenience of eating out, and offering distinctive tastes to those who are seeking something different. However, in catering to these contrasting wants, compromises in preparation become necessary. Menus lose some of their authenticity by being produced in large quantities for a diversity of tastes. Just as with most other tourism attractions, as food becomes commodified, it is adapted to satisfy tourism demands.

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