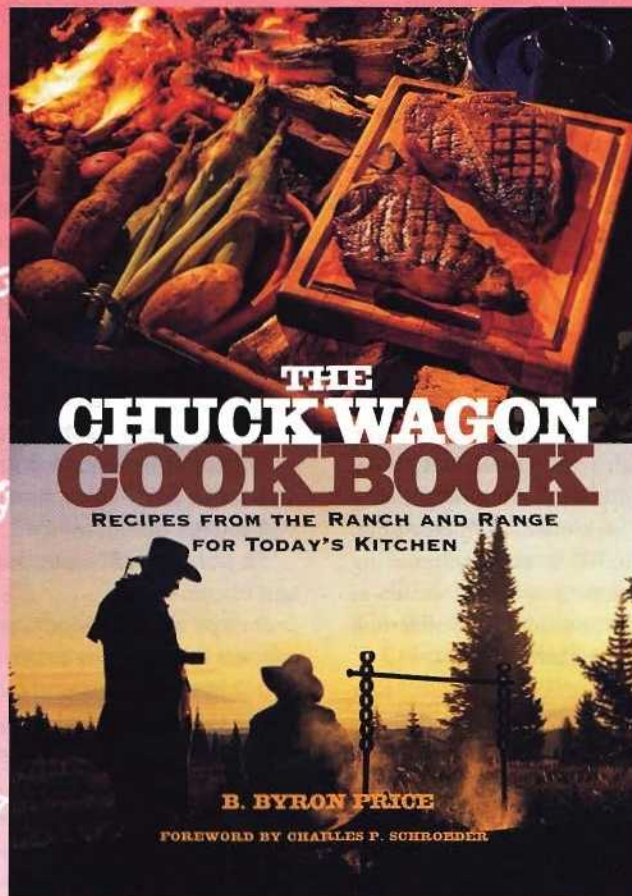


Cowboy fare was more than sowbelly,
beans and sourdough biscuits,
and the cook wasn't just a drover
who drew the short straw.

A decade ago when a major publisher came looking for someone to pay homage to the place of the chuck wagon cook in the history of the Old West, B. Byron Price was the perfect choice. Not only was he then the executive director of the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, he also had spent his early years on a ranch in close proximity to many of the cowboy cooks whose insights and recipes helped him create a cookbook/history that is a western treasure.

Today Price is the director of the University of Oklahoma's Charles Russell Center for the Study of Art of the American West and holder of the Charles Marion Russell Memorial Chair. The book also has come under the University's umbrella with a new edition from the University of Oklahoma Press, retitled *The Chuck Wagon Cookbook: Recipes from the Ranch and Range for Today's Kitchen*, slickly repackaged with a new foreword by Charles P. Schroeder, Price's successor as



BY CAROL J. BURR

executive director of the Oklahoma City museum.

The book is part history, part recipes—an ideal mix for the armchair chef whose tastes run more to reading cookbooks than cooking from them. But make no mistake: therein is the formula for down-home good eating, whether you are inspired to tackle a Dutch oven or

open fire outdoors or prefer conventional appliances in the sanctity of your own modern kitchen.

Price gleaned much of the history, as well as the recipes, from those who lived it—long-retired ranch cooks, who actually ran the chuck wagons at spring and fall roundups and fed the hungry ranch hands. Of particular value was historian and rancher J. Evetts Haley, of Midland, Texas, an accomplished chuck wagon cook and avid collector of lore about cowboy foodways. Conducting archival searches from Texas to Montana, Price sought out remembrances and regional influences from a broad section of the West.

His greatest resource, however, was the assemblage of cooks who gather each Memorial Day Weekend at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum to prepare chuck wagon food in the traditional way, presenting an opportunity for the public to see, smell and taste this kind of cooking. (OU's Sam Noble Okla-

homa Museum of Natural History presented a course in Dutch oven cooking last year.) From these retired “coosies”—and others whom they recommended—Price solicited recipes, many of which had evolved over time to include ingredients more readily available and more appetizing, perhaps, than mountain oysters and marrow guts.

Many of the time-tested recipes were retested by the original publisher, Hearst Books, an imprint of HarperCollins, to ensure that the measurements and directions had translated accurately from cowboyses to modern cook-talk.

When the book was ready for publication, Price dedicated his efforts to his mother, who cooked on the eastern New Mexico ranch managed by his father in the early 1950s. “We lived 28 miles from town,” he remembers, “and she never knew how many would show up for dinner—yet there was always plenty of food. I don’t know how she did that. She would even take strips of dough and create different cattle brands on the tops of her pies.”

When the first cookbook edition came out in 1995, Price found himself cooking on national television. Furnished with all the accouterments of the gourmet chef, he prepared one of his favorites, Green Chile Stew, on ABC’s “Good Morning America,” assuring the audience that beef or pork work equally well but cautioning that “you really do want to take the seeds out of those green chiles.”

His subsequent appearance on “Home Matters,” a Discovery Channel show then hosted by former Miss Oklahoma and Miss America Susan Powell, was less high tech. Price and chuck wagon cook Cliff Tinert had to tote all their own cooking utensils from Oklahoma to a state park outside Philadelphia, looking for all the world, Price recalls, like a couple of traveling peddlers. Supplied only with broken-up packing crates as firewood, the two despaired when their sourdough biscuits took 1½ hours to cook—but the results were perfect.

Challenging as that foray east may have been, it was still a far cry from the old-time trail “biscuit shooters,” who on cold nights would sleep with their sourdough crocks to keep the starter from freezing. How these intrepid coosies managed to keep the food flowing on the cattle drives and create real culinary masterpieces on the far-flung ranches of the early West makes fascinating reading. Price deals with the men themselves, the living and cooking conditions, their ingenuity and grit, and the evolution of the foods stuffs they had to work with—the introduction of canned goods (“air-tights”), fresh vegetables and fruit with the coming of the railroad, desserts like “spotted pup” (boiled rice and raisins) and “shiverin’ Liz” (gelatin), and always plenty of strong, black coffee.

The modern-day recipes run the gamut from the classic Sourdough Chicken-Fried Steak with Cream Gravy and Roast Duck with Sweet and Sour Grapes to Buckaroo Saucy Beans and Double Crust Apricot Cobbler. Not hungry yet? How about Mocha Pecan Layer Cake? Or the Green Chile Stew and Huevos Rancheros with Guacamole and Ranchero Sauce reprinted here.

B. Byron Price has done his subject proud, creating a fitting

tribute to all those grizzled, old chuck wagon cooks of a bygone era and to the mother who inspired him to undertake the task.

The Chuck Wagon Cookbook: Recipes from the Ranch and Range for Today’s Kitchen by B. Byron Price is available in bookstores or by contacting the University of Oklahoma Press at 405/325-2000. Hardcover \$39.95; paperback \$19.95.



GREEN CHILE STEW

National Cowboy Hall of Fame, Oklahoma City

Makes 6 to 8 servings

Dark green poblano chiles (sometimes called ancho chiles) give this chunky stew its special character. If they are unavailable, you can use Italian frying peppers, but the flavor won’t be authentic. Some cooks add potato cubes during the last 30 minutes or stir in a can of hominy just at the end of cooking. Try the stew as a stuffing for burritos.

- 4 tablespoons olive oil, plus more as needed
- 3 pounds pork shoulder, trimmed of excess fat and cut into 1-inch pieces
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- ⅓ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 12 poblano chile peppers, roasted, peeled, seeded and chopped
- 2 cups chicken stock, preferably homemade, or canned low-sodium broth
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro (coriander), optional

1. In a large flameproof casserole, heat 2 tablespoons of the oil over medium-high heat. Season the pork with salt and pepper and coat with the flour, shaking off the excess. Working in batches to avoid crowding, and adding more oil as needed, cook the pork, turning occasionally, until browned on all sides, about 8 minutes. Transfer to a plate.

2. Heat the remaining 2 tablespoons of oil in the casserole over medium heat. Add the onion and garlic and cook, stirring often, until the onion is softened, about 4 minutes. Stir in the chiles. Transfer half of the vegetables to a blender. Add 1 cup of the chicken stock and process until smooth.

3. Return the green sauce and the pork cubes to the casserole. Stir in the remaining 1 cup of chicken stock, the cumin, and oregano. Bring to a simmer over medium heat. Reduce the heat

to low and cover. Simmer, stirring occasionally and adding water if the sauce thickens too much, until the pork is tender, about 1 1/2 hours. During the last 10 minutes, stir in the cilantro if desired. Serve hot.



HUEVOS RANCHEROS

National Cowboy Hall of Fame, Oklahoma City
Makes 6 servings

While Huevos Rancheros are *muy buenos* by themselves, they are even better when served with fried chorizo sausages. The secret to fine Huevos Rancheros is the sauce, and there's a great one used in this recipe.

- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 6 corn tortillas
- 1 1/2 cups guacamole, removed from the refrigerator 1 hour before serving
- 6 large eggs
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- 2 cups Ranchero Sauce, heated
- Chopped fresh cilantro (coriander), for garnish

1. In a large skillet, heat the oil over medium heat until very hot but not smoking. One at a time, fry the tortillas, turning once, until crisp and golden brown, about 2 minutes. Transfer the tortillas to paper towels to drain and cool. Spread each tortilla evenly with about 1/4 cup guacamole and set aside.

2. In the same skillet carefully break the eggs into the oil remaining in the skillet. Fry, spooning the oil over the tops of the eggs, until the whites are set, about 3 minutes. Season the eggs with salt and pepper to taste. (Huevos Rancheros are usually served sunny side up, but you may turn the eggs and cook to your desired doneness.)

3. Place each tortilla on a warmed dinner plate and top with a fried egg. Spoon about 1/3 cup of Ranchero Sauce in a ring around each egg, sprinkle with the cilantro, and serve immediately.



GUACAMOLE

National Cowboy Hall of Fame, Oklahoma City
Makes about 2 cups

For the best guacamole, use Hass avocados with dark, pebbly skins. And never make guacamole in a blender—it should be chunky, not smooth.

- 3 ripe medium avocados, halved, pitted and peeled

- 1/4 cup finely chopped onion, preferably white onion
- 1 ripe plum tomato, seeded and finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic, crushed through a press
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro (coriander), optional
- 1 hot fresh chile pepper (such as jalapeño), seeded and minced, or to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

1. In a medium bowl, mash all of the ingredients together with a fork until well mixed but still chunky. Press a piece of plastic wrap directly on the surface and refrigerate until ready to serve, up to 2 days.



RANCHERO SAUCE

Greta and William L. Arrington
Rocking Chair Ranch, Pampa, Texas
Makes about 4 cups

Ranchero Sauce is an important ingredient in Huevos Rancheros, but also hits the bull's-eye when served with grilled steaks or pork chops. This recipe makes a large batch, and it freezes well.

- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 small stalk celery, chopped
- 1 medium green bell pepper, seeded and chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 (28-oz.) can chopped tomatoes, undrained
- 1 (4-oz.) can chopped mild green chile peppers, drained
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
- 2 teaspoons sweet or hot Hungarian paprika
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon hot red pepper sauce, or to taste

1. In a medium saucepan, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the onion, celery, bell pepper and garlic and cook, covered, until the vegetables are lightly browned, about 10 minutes.

2. Add the tomatoes with their juices, green chiles, Worcestershire sauce, parsley, paprika, oregano and pepper and bring to a simmer. Reduce the heat to low and simmer, uncovered, until slightly thickened and the tomato juices are almost evaporated, about 30 minutes. Stir in the hot sauce. Serve the sauce hot, warm or at room temperature. (The sauce can be prepared up to 5 days ahead, cooled, covered and refrigerated. Reheat gently before serving.)

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