



Menu de Mexico

by Lydia Lovell

From Aunt Olivia's Kitchen

Too far from Aunt Olivia and Uncle Henry's house to call neighbors, but near enough so the two couples could visit, lived the Hermans who had come to Cape Cod from Mexico via Cedar Key, Florida, in the days when cedar trees on the tiny islands off the gulf coast were being harvested to make pencils. Mr. Herman explained to Uncle Henry that his Mexican name had been Jose (he pronounced it Hosay) Hernandez, but when he became a citizen of the United States his name was changed to Joseph Herman.

Joseph's wife Carlotta and Aunt Olivia had much in common despite the language barrier. Although Aunt Olivia spoke no Spanish at all and Carlotta's English was limited, the two women became fast friends. At times, especially as Aunt Olivia grew older, she needed an extra hand to help turn out the chambers in the spring, lift the big kettles when she made preserves, or tackle heavy chores. At those times Carlotta welcomed the chance to work at Aunt Olivia's house just as Joseph was pleased when Uncle Henry needed his help.

A happy-go-lucky couple, laughter came easily to the Hermans. They found most every-day incidents amusing. With dark eyes sparkling and wide smiles lighting up their faces, they snatched at every opportunity to make jokes. The Lovells responded in kind.

Carlotta had her serious side, too, and that aspect of her character was seen whenever food was being prepared. In her own way, Carlotta was as dedicated a gourmet as Aunt Olivia. Somehow, within moments of their initial meeting, the two discovered their mutual interest in cooking. Whenever Aunt Olivia came upon a recipe she was specially impressed with, she invited Carlotta to learn it. Since Carlotta read no English, the way she learned was watching Aunt Olivia and making her own notes in Spanish. On such occasions, Carlotta and Joseph stayed to partake of the resulting meal.

Carlotta, of course, reciprocated, asking Aunt Olivia to share Mexican learning experiences in the Herman's small and spotless kitchen. The dinners were social occasions both couples anticipated with pleasure. The ladies wore their good dresses, protecting them with voluminous aprons while they cooked. When the foursome gathered to eat, all were properly attired for a party.

Because many Mexican spices and condiments were unavailable in Cape Cod groceries, Carlotta often found it necessary to experiment with substitutes until she felt satisfied with the resulting blend of flavors. Likely, too, Aunt Olivia made certain adjustments in Carlotta's measurements and ingredients, thereby achieving final products that best suited Lovell family tastes. You, in turn, may add or delete as you see fit when preparing **SPICY BEEF SALAD**.

1 lb. fresh extra-lean ground round
2 t. paprika
1/3 C. minced onion
1 C. diced celery
1/2 C. chopped green pepper
1 2-oz. jar pimiento, drained

Dash of black pepper
1 envelope unflavored gelatin
1/4 C. cold water
1 10-1/2 oz. can beef consommé
1/2 C. mayonnaisse
1 t. lemon juice
1/2 t. Tabasco sauce
4 hard-boiled eggs, sliced

In a skillet, cook meat over medium-high heat, stirring until all juices cook away and meat is in small fine pieces. (If necessary to remove excess fat, press meat gently with paper towels.) Sprinkle meat with paprika, remove from heat, and set aside.

In a large bowl, combine onion, celery, green pepper, pimiento, and sliced eggs. Combine meat and vegetables and dash of pepper. Bring consommé to a simmer. Dissolve gelatin in cold water, stir into consommé. Blend mayonnaise, lemon juice and Tabasco; add to consommé. Combine with meat and vegetables; pour into a greased ring mold; refrigerate an hour or more. Arrange on lettuce or spinach leaves and serve with creamy dressing spiced with horseradish sauce.

Beef salad is hearty enough to serve at lunchtime without side dishes; at dinner, yellow wax beans and **BAKED RICE** make tasty go-togethers.

3 T. butter
2 T. minced onion
1 clove garlic
1 C. uncooked rice
1/2 bay leaf

1-1/2 C. chicken broth
salt and pepper to taste
3 sprigs parsley
1 sprig fresh thyme

Preheat oven to 400°. Melt 2 T. butter in skillet, cook crushed garlic and onion until onion is soft. Add rice and stir over low heat to coat rice gains with butter. Turn into casserole, add broth, salt, and pepper. Lay herbs on top of rice, cover with tight lid, and bake 20 minutes. Turn off oven. Remove casserole cover, discard herbs, stir 1 T. butter into rice. Put lid back on and return to warm oven for 45 minutes.

Aunt Olivia enjoyed serving Carlotta's **MEXICAN ROAST BEEF CON NARANJA**.

1 5-lb. eye roast
3/4 t. pepper; 3 t. salt
3 C. orange juice
2 T. grated orange rind
2 cloves garlic, crushed

1 T. flour
2 C. boiling water
1/4 C. orange marmalade
2 t. prepared mustard

Rub roast with salt and pepper. Roast at 375° for 30 minutes. Drain fat from pan. Combine orange juice, grated rind, and garlic; pour over meat. Return to oven and roast another two hours, basting frequently with pan juices.

Remove meat from oven and transfer to platter. To make gravy, skim fat from pan drippings. Stir flour into drippings until smooth; add boiling water, then place roasting pan over direct heat, and stir constantly for five minutes during which time gravy will thicken and cook. Stir in marmalade and mustard. Serve in gravy boat.

Macaroni and Cheese casserole to accompany this roast is a good choice. Orange-flavored gravy on mashed potatoes never met with approval among the Lovells, but we did find orange-flavored beef zesty.

If you'd rather risk an orange-flavored meatloaf before investing in a five-pound eye roast, try **CARLOTTA'S ORANGE MEAT LOAF** and discover your own family's adventure-level.

Crusts from 3 slices fresh bread
1/2 C. milk
3 T. grated orange rind
1 t. salt
1/4 t. pepper

1 clove garlic crushed
1/4 t. sweet basil
1/2 C. chopped scallions
1/4 C. minced parsley
2 lbs. ground meat
3 slices bacon, halved

Soak bread crusts in milk. Mix with orange rind, seasonings, and herbs. Combine with ground meat (1 lb. beef, 1/2 lb. each veal and pork), and form into a loaf in a large shallow baking pan. Arrange bacons slices on top of loaf and bake at 350° for one hour.

To make gravy, drain fat from pan, add one can of beef consommé and a teaspoon of Gravy Master for color. Season to taste with garlic salt and freshly-ground black pepper. Bring to a boil, remove from heat, and thicken with 2 T. flour stirred into 1/4 C. cool water. Reheat, stirring constantly until cooked, about five minutes.

When roasting the meatloaf, cook vegetables in the same pan. Quarter and peel four large potatoes. Add to meatloaf pan. Cut the root end from four large unpeeled onions. Slice a 1/2"-deep cross in the cut end. Rub skins with olive oil. Add to meatloaf pan. Turn potatoes after 30 minutes. Everything will be done to perfection at the same time.

Give your dinner an authentic Mexican touch with a batch of **CORN MEAL MUFFINS**.

1 C. yellow corn meal
1 C. flour
1/4 C. sugar
4 t. baking powder

1/2 t. salt
1 C. milk
1 egg
1/8 stick melted margarine

Combine dry ingredients; add milk, egg, and shortening. Beat one minute. Pour batter into greased muffin tins. Bake fifteen to twenty minutes at 425°.

Buena Cena!