

# AN AMERICAN CLASSIC

HOW THE HUMBLE HAMBURGER HAS CAPTURED OUR HEARTS AND STOMACHS



Photo illustration by Mark Giaimo

Nothing signals summer like the smell of burgers on the grill. Sure, we've all added steak, fish, vegetables and even fruit to our grilling repertoire, but let's face it: In America, a barbecue's not a barbecue without the burgers.

When German immigrants brought the hamburger steak to the U.S. at the turn of the 19th century, they could not have foreseen how their patty-shaped ground beef seasoned with salt and pepper and held together with raw egg would become a national culinary staple.

Today, Americans consume 40 billion hamburgers every year — and there's no other food more closely identified with American culture than the hamburger.

America's love for the burger has led to the creation of not one but two halls of fame. The International Hamburger Hall of Fame is housed in the Daytona Beach, Florida, home of collector Harry Sperl, who has more than 1,500 pieces of burger memorabilia at last count, including a burger-shaped waterbed with a sesame seed-covered bedspread.

German-born Sperl began collecting hamburgers because of his love for Americana, but he credits convenience for the burger's incredi-

ble growth in popularity.

"You don't have to wait long and they taste good," he says. "There's nothing else you can eat in a hurry that tastes as good."

The Hamburger Hall of Fame in Seymour,

make it easier for his customers to enjoy while they toured the fairgrounds.

Others credit Louis Lassen, founder of Louis' Lunch in New Haven, Connecticut, with serving the first burger from his lunch wagon in 1895.

According to his grandson, Ken Lassen Sr., Lassen ground the beef left over at the end of the day, broiled it and served it between two slices of toast. His business flourished and Louis' Lunch has been passed through the Lassen family for generations.

Lassen prepared his burgers seasoned with salt and pepper, broiled and served with a choice of cheese, tomato or onion — which is how they're still served today.

"We still use the same broilers my grandfather used in 1895," says Ken Lassen, Sr.

Over time, the hamburger has evolved not only in preparation but also in price. In the 1920s, lunch carts like the one Lassen started with sold two hamburgers for a nickel. Today, chef Daniel Boulud sells his Original db Burger, a high-end combination of braised short ribs, truffles and foie gras, for \$29 at DB Bistro Moderne in New York City.

Whatever your palate or budget, there's a burger out there with your name on it. So fire up your grills or hit the drive-in and enjoy an American staple.

— By Danielle Neal

## Mixin' the Fixins

### STANDARDS

Yellow mustard



Mayonnaise



Ketchup

Dill pickle



Tomato

Lettuce

Onion



Cheddar cheese

### NON-STANDARDS

Raspberry wasabi

Aoli

Pepper relish

Bread-and-butter pickle

Sun-dried tomato

Spinach/watercress

Caramelized Vidalia onion/leeks

Herbed Havarti/Stilton

Art courtesy Clipart.com

Wisconsin, is a tribute to Charlie Nagreen, who some say served the first hamburger in 1885. Nagreen reportedly set up a meatball stand at a fair but later flattened the meatballs and served them between two slices of bread to