Hi, everyone, and welcome to Doc Chat. I'm Carmen Nigro. Doc Chat is a weekly program series from NYPL's Center for the Research in the Humanities that digs deep into the stories behind the library's most interesting collections and highlights ways that teachers can incorporate them in the classroom. In this episode, NYPL's Amanda Seigel is joined by Professor Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. They will discuss what's cooking in the Yiddish kitchen, recipes for immigrant women. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett is a Professor Emerita of Performance Studies at New York University and Ronald S. Lauder Chief Curator for Exhibition, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. Our guest will speak for about 15 minutes before we open up the conversation. During the program, please feel free to use the chat function to share general comments. Though, make sure that you change your chat mode to panelists and attendees, so that everyone is included. Once we begin the question and answer segment, please use Zoom's question and answer function rather than the chat function to post your questions. If you wish to remain anonymous, please click that option before submitting your question. So welcome to Doc Chat. This is Barbara and Amanda.

AMANDA SEIGEL Hi, Carmen. Thank you very much. And thank you, Barbara, for joining us today. The Dorot Jewish Division of the New York Public Library has one of the largest Jewish cookbook collections in the U.S. and, perhaps, the world. It includes more than 2,700 Jewish cookbooks in 18 languages from all over the world. And I must mention the important role that the late Barbara Saltzman, former Assistant Chief Curator of the Dorot Jewish Division played in building this collection. And you can read more about the collection and some of the resources we'll be sharing later. So this collection includes 20 cookbooks in Yiddish. And I was surprised to find that many of these Yiddish cookbooks were published by food companies, not just food companies that make Jewish or kosher products. For example, we have Yiddish cookbooks from companies like Manischewitz and Roquette that are known for making Jewish products, but we also have cookbooks in Yiddish from food companies like Planters, makers of Hi-Hat Peanut Oil, Gordon's Farm Products Company, Royal Baking Powder Company, Wolff Brothers Milling Company, and Crisco, which we'll see today. So we're actually -- the advertised image for this program was a booklet called "Crisco Recipes by the Yiddish Balaboosta" or "Crisco Recipes for the Jewish Housewife." Crisco is a vegetable oil-based shortening originally made from cottonseed oil, and as you can see here is an illustration of the bilingual cookbook. And this cooking fat was marketed as being useful in kosher cooking because it was neither meat nor milk-based. So I'm thrilled to be joined by Professor Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett to talk more about this item and about Yiddish food product cookbooks which represent a fascinating subset of the collection. So thank you, Barbara. And the first question I have for you is, as we
can see, some of the cookbooks are Yiddish, some are in English, and some like this one are bilingual. So what's the role of language here? You're muted.

BARBARA KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT I find the bilingual ones to be among the most interesting. I think of them as, really, very emblematic of the story of Jewish immigration to the United States. And I think of them as transitional objects, which is to say that they are poised between a Yiddish-speaking mother and an English-speaking daughter. That's how I imagine the company is thinking when it is creating a bilingual cookbook. It's obviously more economical to produce the cookbook in two languages than to produce a Yiddish edition and an English edition. And just to give you a sense of, you know, what's actually in them, here's a table of contents. This is a table of contents in English. But you can see that it's a combination of traditional dishes. So you have, for example, gefilte fish and varenikis and kasha and kugels, you know, matzah balls. But at the same time, you also have a Crisco sponge cake, a black devil's food cake, a French cheesecake, a Dutch apple cake, a seven-minute icing. But really, in fact, most of the recipes are for traditional dishes. And this strikes me as really very, very interesting. So if you want -- let me put it this way. A lot of these product cookbooks were directed to ethnic markets and their niche markets. And in the case of Crisco, it was actually marketed as the food that the Jews had been waiting for 4,000 years, because it was the food -- it was a shortening that could replace other hard fats. What are the other hard fats? The schmaltz, that is to say either rendered goose fat or rendered chicken fat or rendered duck fat, and, of course, butter. So by creating a neutral, one that was neither milk nor meat, it could basically, whatever you produce with it, you could eat universally. I mean it's the beginning of non-dairy creamers and all of the things that we know today. But what's so fascinating for me about this cookbook is that, in order to introduce such a novel ingredient, what better way than to show how it can be used in familiar foods? So at the same time, that of course, they're also introducing pecan tarts and things that are innovative. But overall, the idea was that the best way to somehow rather infiltrate the Jewish kitchen with this novel ingredient was by showing how it can be used in traditional foods. And what's very important here is that you cannot substitute one for one, Crisco and butter, Crisco and schmaltz. You actually need to reformulate the recipe. But just one last image here. And that is to show you the layout of the book, which, in this instance, the Yiddish and the English are on the same page. And there are other books in which, you open it from the right, it's in Yiddish, you open it from the left, it's in English. But I chose specifically the page on hamantaschen because Purim is coming up. And what I find really very, very interesting here is that this hamantaschen recipe calls for yeast, not for baking powder. And that's another whole conversation. But basically, this is a cookbook that is a transitional object that sits on this cusp between generations, an immigrant mother who would be more comfortable in Yiddish and her daughter who would presumably be very comfortable, if not more comfortable, in English, and an innovative ingredient that is repurposed or purposed within the traditional classic repertoire of Jewish dishes.

SEIGEL So it sounds like they were trying to use this product for traditional recipes, but at the same time they were also encouraging innovation, not just in those traditional recipes but also in learning, as you said, other recipes that weren't traditional. So that's very interesting. How did
they decide that the Yiddish market was waiting for this? Do you think it was really just based on kosher cooking needs, or did they just see kind of an untapped market that they wanted to take advantage of?

KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT Well, I think that, if you look at, for example, baking powder, you know, there are numerous products, as you indicated in your opening remarks, and also in cookbooks for the Jewish market that were only in English. But I would say that these novel products were in stiff competition because Crisco was not the only maker of hydrogenated fat. Roquette was making hydrogenated fat. And Crisco was preceded by all kinds of other hydrogenated fats made with palm oil. And that were being advertised actually at the end of the 19th century in the Jewish press in German and basically in the European Jewish press. So, if you will, there's stiff competition. And one of the ways in which these companies addressed that competition was to market to ethnic markets and in multiple languages. So Jews are not the only ethnic market. Yiddish is not the only language other than English in which they are marketing. But what's so interesting is how they target that Jewish market. And for how long do they actually use Yiddish? And we've actually got some of these cookbooks in Yiddish well until the '40s, which I found amazing. I sort of thought that, you know, by the time we got to after the war, the Yiddish versions would be gone, but they're not. They actually continue. And then, of course, they drop away.

SEIGEL Well, I'm really interested to see some of these other cookbooks that you have and what kind of recipes you've discovered.

KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT So you know, the opposite situation was for the [inaudible] Company. You know, for Crisco, it is this neutral solid fat that can be incorporated into everything. And in the case of matzah, why only eat it for the few days of Passover? What happens to the rest of the days of the year? So the challenge for Manischewitz is to take a food, a prepared food, not a raw ingredient, a prepared food that is already ready to eat, treat it as a raw ingredient, and show how it can be used the whole year long and not only on the eight days of Passover. So here's a case where this traditional food is the basis for, I would say, unregulated innovation. And so, would you like to make a pineapple upside-down cake from matzah? Why not an asparagus wheel for a matzah? And here, in this case, you have the Yiddish is in one section and the English is in a separate section. So it's not as if a mother and daughter are cooking together and are reading the same page. Here, either, they're reading -- they're either using it as a Yiddish cookbook or they're using it as an English cookbook. But here, I thought these were really interesting. And that is -- and of course, it's in English. I mean it's this very American, this -- you know the boundaries of a language. I think these cookbooks are very interesting for thinking about what are the boundaries of the language. And here's a very, very good case. So it's the mock or lokshen pudding and a matzah pie and cream puffs and Cincinnati -- no, that's the name of the company -- and chocolate souffle, meaning souffle, all made with matzah. And so here, I would say the -- I'm not -- you know, I'm trying to think to myself who made these dishes? I mean did you -- you know, presumably, many of them, not all of them but maybe I would have to go through to see whether it's all of them. But this could really transform your
matzah eating days of Passover. You know, I don't know whether you get to the end of Passover and the only thing you can think about is bread and whether you get tired of matzah. This, you'll never get tired of matzah if you're able to make all these things out of matzah, not only all year long but specifically on Passover where another way to use matzah would be very welcome because that's the only "bread" you're eating. So I think this one is a really interesting one as well.

SEIGEL Yeah, it's also interesting to me, the idea, like you said, of using packaged food as a raw ingredient because that's something I think that traditionally was not possible. Matzah was really a seasonal food. And now, it's available all year, so people will buy it all year. And certainly, I know that, in the library's collection for example in the Nahum Stutchkoff's radio scripts, Manischewitz was one of his sponsors. So there's many ads for Manischewitz matzah and how it's so good, you can eat it any time of the year, and also for other products. So I think that's very --

KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT So it's really -- you know, you think about it, it's hard to imagine in Eastern Europe before the war. It's hard to imagine promoting matzah as an everyday food, to take a food that is so ceremonial and so tightly connected to Passover. And particularly, when you think about matzah for Passover, the idea that you don't eat it before the right time. Actually, a couple of people have once said to me, do these ceremonial foods taste better if you only eat them on the holiday? Or do they lose their specialness if you make them an everyday food? And clearly, this is completely commercially motivated. It isn't just that it's available. It's that it's being marketed and promoted so as to be more profitable by having people consume this, not only as matzah but as an ingredient for making other things.

SEIGEL This is an amazing display. Can you tell us a little about these? And then I think we'll start taking some questions in a moment.

KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT Sure. Well, I wanted to show you the Manischewitz bilingual cookbook 1949 at the lower left. So that strikes me as really interesting. But also, you'd mentioned Planters Peanut Oil. And there it is. It's interesting question as to why, because is the peanut, you know, acceptable for Passover or not. Is it in the category of forbidden grains or legumes? You've got the Wolff's kasha and Jell-O, 1924, my favorite was the discovery of the baking powder cookbook from before World War I, which is the -- well, the baking powder story, which I think led to the demise of the classic hamantaschen is another whole conversation. And then, of course, Jell-O, 1924. So just some examples of the other ones.

SEIGEL Wow. Thank you so much. This is really interesting. I think we're going to start taking some questions now.

NIGRO This is wonderful. Thank you for sharing these today. Has anybody made any of these historic recipes here from this particular cookbook? Barbara?
KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT No, I don’t know because I know that I have not -- I had -- well, first of all, Crisco and I do not have a working relationship. So there is no way that Crisco will find its way into my kitchen. So that, and I, frankly, am not -- I’m not interested in fake foods and substitutes and the like. Butter is butter. Schmaltz are schmaltz, never the twain shall meet. And Crisco is not going to come between them. So that’s out of the question. No Crisco.

NIGRO Okay.

KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT As for matzah, you know, actually there are traditional dishes that use matzah as a raw ingredient. So, you know, these little pancakes, these bubaleh and matzo brei, there are -- and matzo meal for making, you know, teiglach, for making matzo balls. So in fact, there are traditional ways of using matzah as a raw ingredient. So certainly, I have done things like that. But it’s a good question. I’ll have to give it some thought.

NIGRO Maybe as just an experiment for experiment’s sake. How good are the translations for the recipes? When you’re looking at the English and the Yiddish together, are they good translations?

KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT Well, it depends on what you stand -- what's your criteria are. If they -- if the translation will produce a usable workable recipe, the answer is yes. If the translation will be in [inaudible] Yiddish, you know, to medieval standard, no, because in many ways, there is a kind of an American message in these cookbooks. And it's reflected in a highly Americanized form of Yiddish with a lot of English. So you could say that there's a kind of that -- what would have made Yiddish sound elegant in, let's say, a 19th century east European context, which would be to approximate it to German, here, the way in which, in a sense, it's elevated is to approximate it to English. So the Americanization of Yiddish in these cookbooks, I think, is, you know, one of their messages. I think it's part of what makes them what they are.

NIGRO Okay. Judith [assumed spelling] asks, "Did all of these recipes include Crisco, or was it broader? How do you see Crisco important, for example?"

KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT Every single recipe in the Crisco cookbook uses Crisco. Every single recipe in the baking powder Planters Oil, matzah, there is never a recipe that doesn't use that product. They are relentless.

NIGRO Okay. And Sherry [assumed spelling] asks, is anything known about who created or transcribed the traditional recipes?

KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT We really don't know. But you know, I'll tell you what we do know actually, we actually do know. What we know is that, during the latter part of the 19th century, especially the 1890s, there is the emergence of a whole new profession of domestic science and home economics. And you have Jewish women going into this field. And they become -- not only Jewish women but more generally. But especially, we see cookbooks by women like
Florence Greenbaum by -- there are several others -- that actually have degrees in nutrition, domestic science, home economics. They become extremely important in the test kitchens of these product companies. And they are responsible for developing the recipes on the cookbooks.

NIGRO That's fascinating history about the people behind them. Deborah [assumed spelling] asks, "How would you compare your own personal cookbook collection, Barbara, with the collection of NYPL Dorot?"

KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT Unfortunately, smaller.

SEIGEL Well, you're welcome to come in and use our [multiple speakers].

KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT However, I have to say that I am thrilled that New York Public Library's Dorot Division has formed such a substantial cookbook collection. I think it's marvelous. And I'm already putting aside cookbooks that I can spare that you don't have that I will make as a gift.

NIGRO That's great.

KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT So I will contribute to my nemesis, which is a collection larger than my own.

NIGRO Nora [assumed spelling] says or asks, where would you get a cookbook like this during the time? Like would it be at the grocery store as part of like the Crisco display?

KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT Well, I don't think so. Well, maybe, you know, to tell you the truth I don't know. But I have a feeling that it would be the -- you know, that you send off for it, that, oh, incidentally. Actually, the earlier question. I think Manischewitz. Maybe the other companies, too. But some of the companies actually solicited recipes from the readers of magazines. And then, what the prize would be that, if you send us your recipes and we use them, we will give you a copy of the cookbook. So in fact, they crowdsourced. Some of these companies actually crowdsourced the recipes, which would have been tested by the professionals in the test kitchens of the product -- of the companies themselves. So it's a combination of recipes. I can't imagine that matzah tortillas is going to be a recipe that a reader is going to send in. But recipes for more traditional dishes they would. So it was a combination of the two. Now, these were very, very -- they're very much promoted in magazines and in newspapers. So I have a feeling that the major -- the main way would have been to send off for them. That, I think, would have been the main way. It's hard for me to imagine -- and some of them you had to pay for, and some of them you got for free. I just don't know to what extent they were distributed through other channels. But it's a good question.

NIGRO Yeah, mail order is very much of the time. That's for sure. Deborah asks, "Barbara
hinted at a story about yeast and baking powder. Could you share more about that, please?"

KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT Oh, my God. Well, okay. So baking powder is not invented until the second half of the 19th century. And well, there are a couple of things, like baking. First of all, baking was -- how do you make things rise before baking powder and before compressed or dried yeast? You have to make the yeast yourself. You have to do it through having some kind of a starter. You know, sourdough wasn't really the right word for it because these starters may not, you know, weren't necessarily sour. But you basically had to make the yeast yourself. You had to form the yeast. Baking was really transformed in the middle of the 19th century and in the second half of the 19th century by companies like Fleischmann who actually started to produce yeast, either in a cake form and then eventually in these packets in a dried -- as an instant dried form, and by the last quarter of the 19th century by creating baking powder. Although, a version of baking powder was already known but not very reliable earlier than that. So what you had were very much more convenient, more reliable ways to leaven, particularly for cakes and biscuits and quick breads, much more reliable. And because yeast really -- or baking with real yeast requires time, it requires skill, it's less reliable. Now, once baking powder arrived, it took over and absolutely drove out yeast. So I was really fascinated. Basically, when I grew up, the hamantaschen was a yeast bun. Essentially, it was a very nice sort of soft, mildly sweet dough, with lots of poppy seeds inside or a poppy seed sort of mixture inside, or [inaudible] prune, kind of a lekvar, prunes inside. But it wasn't a cookie. It was more of a bun, and not even a pastry. And it was lovely. So that really -- I was fascinated to see in cookbooks the disappearance to see nothing in kitchens, to see nothing in bakeries. You try and find a yeast hamantaschen today. It's really difficult. You're going to find this cookie hamantaschen, and basically, cookies with -- to my way of thinking, a really, and with all kinds of innovative whatever, you know, it's so far from what I think of as a classic hamantaschen. And that is because of the aggressive relentless marketing of the baking powder companies. But by the early years of the 20th century, there are innumerable recipes in The Settlement House Cook Book that are all baking powder. It's baking powder all the way. And that's extraordinary because these German Jewish women, they really knew how to cook with yeast. I mean they were either baking with yeast or they were baking with egg whites. In other words, there are various ways to create an airy or light or rich dough. But baking powder took over. And today, it's really, you tell me how many women are actually baking cakes and pastries with yeast. It's almost exclusively with baking powder, which I think is tragic.

NIGRO So thank you. Gail [assumed spelling] has asked, "What are some of the other ethnic groups to whom these types of cookbooks were targeted?"

KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT Well, I know they would probably -- you know, I shouldn't really answer because I haven't looked into it, but I would guess that it would be probably like Italian, Spanish, maybe German. But you know, it would be worth -- that would be actually a very interesting study, would be to take some of these products and then actually look to see what were the niche, what were the ethnic markets that they tapped into, and when. So when did they start? And also when did they stop? And whether -- because, for example, that Calumet
cookbook, that early one, there are no ethnic recipes in it. It's all basically just simply straight translation from their English language cookbook. So there's no accommodation to anything specifically Jewish, which is quite different from some of the other product cookbooks.

NIGRO Okay. Nathan or Natan [assumed spelling] says, do we know if there were similar cookbooks directed at Jewish immigrants in other countries, such as the UK, other parts of Europe, and Latin America?

KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT Yes, I actually have one from a flour company in the UK that's in Yiddish. So yes, the answer is yes. And also, I think I've seen some also in the German-Jewish press in Europe, the Jewish president in the German language because that includes Austria and Germany. It isn't just Germany. But the answer is yes. And not to the same extent. I haven't looked at it in as much depth, but to my knowledge, for what I have seen, not as extensively as in the United States. And I think, in part, it has to do with immigration because they're bilingual. And I somehow, rather that immigrant market seems to be important.

NIGRO Well, we certainly didn't have enough time to get to all of these great questions. If we didn't get to your question today and you'd like to still receive an answer, please email us at DorotJewish@NYPL.org. If you would like to sign up for next week's Doc Chat titled "Exploring Irish American Experience through the Emigrant Savings Bank Records," I've just dropped the link in the chat for that. Again, we thank you all for coming out today. You can follow us on social media. I will drop our Twitter and Instagram handles into the chat. I want to thank Amanda for putting this together and Barbara for joining us with all of your fascinating cooking history knowledge. I hope we can have you back sometime soon.

KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT Thank you.

NIGRO And thank you all for joining us today for Doc Chat. See you next week.