"EDUCATED FOOD FOR EDUCATED PEOPLE"

Richards Treat Cafeteria

1924–1957

Kate Roberts

The streets of downtown Minneapolis were slick with the season's first snowfall on the morning of Friday, November 7, 1924. Office chat centered on Coolidge's re-election to the White House, Christianson's move to the governor's office, and Central's defeat of Edison for the Minnesota high school football championship. Teachers in town for the Minnesota Education Association convention were invited to preview the new eight-story Donaldson's store and to pick up a stylish silk hat, on sale at Powers's for $3.88.[1]

Over at 114 Sixth Street South, two former teachers were anxiously awaiting the chance to put their theories into practice. That morning Lenore Richards and Nola Treat, fresh from the University of Minnesota's home economics department, were putting the finishing touches on the Richards Treat Cafeteria and Food Shop. Located in the heart of downtown Minneapolis's financial district, Richards Treat was the latest in the progression of cafeterias that dotted the city in the pre-fast-food era. "It was not without genuine trepidation that we resigned our positions with monthly salary checks at the University Farm," Richards and Treat recalled years later, "and announced our intention of starting a cafeteria of our own." Despite their ambivalence they forged ahead, and at dinnertime Miss Treat hung a hand-lettered sign in the window proclaiming, "The Cafeteria is open." By evening's end Richards Treat had served 22 customers and earned a grand total of $10.41 ($125.10 in 2007).[2]

Any worries that the fledgling restaurateurs nursed in the early days of their business partnership must have been quickly set aside. Their transition from the classroom to the cafeteria was an almost immediate success, and over the next 33 years the business grew steadily, turning a profit even during the lean years of the Great Depression. By the time Richards Treat closed in 1957, when its building was razed to make room for the new First National Bank of Minneapolis, the cafeteria was serving 3,000 customers a day.[3]

After Nola Treat died in 1983, her estate donated a large group of items to the Minnesota Historical Society. Self-avowed "savers," Richards and Treat amassed a fascinating collection of material related to their business and personal lives. The piles of handwritten notes detailing customers' comments, the stacks of diaries chronicling everything from business improvements to vacation plans, and the samples of silver, china, and wallpaper included in the Richards Treat collection offer a rare, behind-the-scenes look at a most successful business and personal partnership.

How did Lenore Richards and Nola Treat come to find themselves in a downtown Minneapolis storefront on that wintry morning in 1924? To understand why two home economics professors might go into the restaurant business, we need to look back to their predecessors—the

Kate Roberts is senior exhibit developer at the Minnesota Historical Society. She first learned of Richards and Treat when conducting research for Minnesota A to Z, *the inaugural exhibit at the Minnesota History Center.*

Proprietors Nola Treat and Lenore Richards pose proudly with the baked goods at their Minneapolis cafeteria, about 1950.

women who pioneered the home economics movement. The publication of Catharine Beecher's *Treatise on Domestic Economy* in 1841 is generally considered the opening act in the history of this movement in the United States. For Beecher, management of the home was a science that required formal training in addition to the traditional practice of passing techniques from mother to daughter.[4]

As the century progressed and students in public schools and female seminaries read Beecher's works, the scientific approach to domestic arts became more widespread. Home economics—or "household economy"—was added to the curricula of several land-grant colleges established under the Morrill Act of 1862. As the U.S. Commissioner of Agriculture wrote in his annual report for 1866, "It is not enough for the farmer's daughter to know how bread is made, she should understand 'the chemistry of bread making.'"[5]

Chemistry and bread baking were also converging in a new kind of institution: East Coast cooking schools, where young women were taught to value precise measurements, sterilized equipment, and nutritious, well-balanced meals. The professionalization of household management further advanced with the formation of the American Home Economics Association (AHEA) in 1909. One of AHEA's charter members was Nola Treat. Born in Gays, Illinois, in 1885, she had been in the first group of students to enroll at Millikin College in Decatur in 1903. She managed the Decatur High School cafeteria before continuing her education at Rockford (Illinois) College. Perhaps heeding the frequent references to the value of a good education published in AHEA's *Journal of Home Economics*, 24-year-old Treat left Illinois to complete her B.S. degree at Teachers College of Columbia University in

New York City. By the time she graduated in 1915, she was a 30-year-old with a fair amount of practical experience in cafeteria management.[6]

Treat in 1915 joined the home economics faculty of Kansas State Agricultural College in Manhattan. Another faculty newcomer that year was 22-year-old Lenore Richards, who had just received her B.A. from the University of Illinois. Born in Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1892, Richards was the daughter of an academic (her father was president of Lehigh University). The home economics department at Kansas State was well established by the time the future business partners arrived. One of the first land-grant colleges to offer home economics, Kansas State began teaching a course on bread, meat, and vegetables in 1875 and two years later outfitted a test kitchen for hands-on instruction.[7]

Treat had been hired to establish an institution-management specialization and to manage the college dining hall. Richards, who apparently had less practical experience in cafeteria management than her older colleague, was her assistant in both endeavors. Like their contemporaries, Richards and Treat most likely prepared students to become hospital dietitians, managers of lunchrooms in factories, office buildings, and department stores, owners of restaurants, cafeterias, and tearooms, and workers in the emerging field of cooking hot lunches for schoolchildren.[8]

Institution management would today be termed a "growth industry." In the early-twentieth century, many Americans were getting in the habit of eating one or more meals away from home each day. As cities expanded in size and complexity, the new class of office and retail workers, faced with short breaks and long commutes, were unable to go home for lunch. The growing number of women entering the work force added to the demand for inexpensive, nutritious meals, as working women with school-aged children ate out for lunch and relied on school-lunch programs to feed their children. "Every office, store and factory in the central districts of the large cities discharges into the streets, between the hours of eleven a. m. and two p. m., its quota of the hundreds and thousands seeking a hot or cold bite, but who must practice economy," wrote an industry analyst in 1923. "These are the people who have made possible the great cafeteria and lunchroom systems of today."[9]

And so Professors Richards and Treat found themselves in the right place at the right time. They were starting their academic careers at the top—in a well-established department, teaching a subject that was sure to attract students. By teaming up in the college cafeteria, they were gaining practical experience and learning about each other's management style. Over the school year, the young professors became close friends as well as colleagues. Treat left Kansas in 1916 to establish a department of institution management at Indiana University, and letters during Richards's two years alone in Kansas reveal her dismay at the separation. "Let's get something to do together," she wrote to Treat in January 1918. "I can work and live so much happier when I am with you and I feel so stupid and uninspired when I am alone."[10]

Lenore's wish came true several months later, when she and Nola were hired for the home economics faculty of the College of Agriculture

A sampling of Richards Treat china (from left): teacup and saucer, covered mustard pot, creamer, sauceboat, and a dish for the cafeteria's famous chicken pie.

at the University of Minnesota. Once again, Professor Richards would assist Professor Treat in establishing an institution-management course and supervising the dining hall and cafeteria. "Honest Injun-to-goodness, Angel," Lenore wrote Nola in July 1918, "I am happy as happy to be going to Minnesota—*with you*, especially with you. I'm looking forward to it a lot. Hope you are too."

In 1918 Richards and Treat moved to the Twin Cities, where they lived and worked together for the rest of their lives. As their professional ties strengthened, their personal relationship flourished. The warm, affectionate messages in the cards and letters they saved from their first years together chronicle the start of a long-term, committed relationship that was to last until Lenore's death many decades later. A year after their arrival in St. Paul, Lenore wrote to Nola: "The further I go, and the more I think about the possibility of leaving you, the more I realize how happy I am, and how hard working without you would be. Just not worth the effort! For with no-one to work with, and no one to laugh with and no one to love with life would be too dull."

Professors Richards and Treat were on the faculty at the University of Minnesota from 1918 to 1924. One of their department's goals that first year was "to prepare women for vocations which have as their foundation work of the home economics group." Required coursework in institution management included large-quantity cookery, institutional experience (practical experience in the college cafeteria), institutional marketing ("the problems involved and methods employed in the purchasing of supplies"), institutional management, experimental cookery, economics, and retail marketing.[11]

Four years after their arrival in Minnesota, the two professors made their first move beyond the classroom. In 1922 they published *Quantity Cookery*, a guide to menu planning and food preparation for "the managers of food departments in institutions" as well as teachers. There were many cookbooks already on the market providing up-to-date information about nutrition and scientific measurement, of course, but few that addressed food preparation for large groups. "A valuable contribution to the meager institutional literature," as one reviewer described it, *Quantity Cookery* filled its niche quite nicely: its fourth and final edition appeared in 1966.[12]

In 1924—two years after *Quantity Cookery* was published and nine years after their professional collaboration had commenced—Richards and Treat began practicing what they had been preaching. On the one hand, their decision was a risky one that involved a shift not only in jobs but also in their status as working women. As Lenore Richards later recalled, "In the early days there was a stigma attached to anyone who worked in a restaurant."[13] To give up secure employment for the uncertainties of running a cafeteria was a bold move indeed.

On the other hand, Richards and Treat were not moving into completely uncharted territory. Since the days of Catharine Beecher, women had been considered, without question, better suited than men to teaching about domestic topics, and something of this attitude spilled over into the commercial world. Tearooms owned and managed by women were in vogue in the early 1900s. Quaint spots offering delicate sandwiches and pastries appeared as money-making ventures for women's clubs, in rest areas of department stores, and in roadside buildings that catered to automobile tourists. In the 1910s and 1920s restaurant management joined library work, millinery and dressmaking, stenography, and interior design as "acceptable" work for women.[14]

By the time Richards Treat opened in 1924, then, the idea of women as restaurant managers was no longer new. Grace E. Smith, whose very successful Toledo, Ohio, cafeteria served as a model for Richards Treat, had been in business since 1916. Mrs. Mary Love McGuckin had founded the Maramor, a Columbus, Ohio, tearoom with a national reputation, just after the end of World War I. They and others across the country inspired hundreds of women to try their hand at commercial cookery. In Minneapolis, a number of tearooms and lunchrooms had female managers. Edith Jones, who established the Minneapolis high-school cafeteria system in 1910, had been running the Jones Tea Shop at 108 South Eighth Street for several years before Richards and Treat began giving her some serious competition.[15]

It is true that one surveyor in 1928 found "a marked preference for men" in the hiring practices of "the high class restaurants and city clubs."

In 1918 Richards and Treat moved to the Twin Cities, where they lived and worked together for the rest of their lives.

Diners at the Minneapolis Business and Professional Women's tearoom, a rival of Richards Treat, about 1925

But an analyst in 1932 concluded that while men "after all, still remain the dominant power in the business world," nutrition was "one business they unanimously concede to be 'a woman's job.'" Richards and Treat themselves shared something of this attitude. For more than a decade they employed only women in their cafeteria, a fact they proclaimed proudly as proof of the superiority of their product. "It is the contention of both the proprietors," wrote a reviewer in 1937, "that foods are the natural field of women, and that they are obsessed with a mania for perfection often lacking in men."[16]

Richards and Treat are of interest not just because they operated a cafeteria, but because they did it so well for so many years. Their decision to enter the world of commercial cookery was not made lightly. "I shall never forget how creepy my backbone felt," Nola Treat recalled many years later, "when I saw my name at the bottom of that lease and obligating us to a term of years, an amount of money huge to us, and a lot of whereas-es and wherefores which even though a well recommended lawyer had assured us were harmless we still felt must carry concealed danger someplace." Nor was outside encouragement forthcoming. Downtown businessmen wagered Richards Treat would not last more than three months, and even the entrepreneurs' parents tried to discourage their venture.[17]

Nonetheless, the professors had done their homework and set a course they were able to follow with remarkably few deviations over the next three decades. There were several key ingredients in Richards Treat's recipe for success: a good location, cozy, comfortable ambience, impeccable credentials, excellent food, and a strong and lasting relationship between two innovative businesswomen.

Location was a top priority for the fledgling business partners. Before signing their first lease, Richards and Treat scouted with their customary thoroughness. "Two facts stood out as practical to us," they wrote years later. "One, that we must go where the people, whom we wished to serve, were; second that if possible, we must put our cafeteria near other successful eating places . . . on the theory that demand has been built up . . . and people are accustomed to going to this particular section for food." They settled on a location that they described as "the office and banking district," in a building "within one block . . . of eleven eating places." Theirs was a busy, bustling section of downtown Minneapolis, with a steady stream of working men and women seeking efficient, reliable venues for coffee breaks, lunches, and dinners. Gertrude Newman, an insurance underwriter for U.S. Fidelity and Guaranty Company from 1925 to 1945, worked just across the street from Richards Treat. In 1996 she recalled, "We used to go there for lunch every day. . . . I always thought it was delicious. Your whole lunch was 15 or 20 cents. I didn't buy coffee because that would have brought it over 25 cents, and that was my limit for lunch."[18]

Many of the cafeteria's first customers were doctors with offices in the Metropolitan Bank Building, just across Sixth Street. Other business people that soon became regulars came from the First National/Soo Line Building and the New York Life Building on their block and the Federal Reserve Bank across Marquette Avenue. The highest-profile lunch spot in the vicinity was probably Donaldson's tearoom, but there were many others, including Baltimore Dairy Lunch across Sixth Street, Langford's, the Eat Shop, Christiansen's, and the Nankin. Richards Treat attracted not only business people but also folks who traveled down-

town to shop and then stopped in for afternoon coffee or an early dinner. According to Dr. Robert Ashton Morgan, who ate at Richards Treat as a child and later befriended the partners while a minister at Westminster Presbyterian Church, the cafeteria's food was so good that shoppers didn't mind going out of their way to eat there.[19]

Indeed, its location proved to be a major contributor to the popularity of Richards Treat. The year after the cafeteria opened, Thorpe Brothers Realty established an office building on the same block, and Samuel Thorpe and his associates became regular customers. In 1929 the Rand Tower was built on the corner of Sixth Street and Marquette, next door to Richards Treat, and in 1930 Northwestern National Bank constructed a new building nearby. Many of the professionals from these buildings became regulars at Richards Treat. The "judges' table," as it is remembered by former Richards Treat employees, attracted judges, lawyers, and others who worked in the Rand Tower, the Soo Line Building, the District Court building at 300 Sixth Street South, and the Builders' Exchange building at 609 Second Avenue South. Another group of regulars from the *Minneapolis Star* made a daily dinnertime trek from their offices at 427 Sixth Avenue South, often hurrying to meet their story deadlines so they could get to the cafeteria before closing time.[20]

But a good location is only one of the keys to success in the restaurant business. The proper atmosphere is important, too. Richards and Treat found a winning balance by placing their efficient, state-of-the-art cafeteria in a homey, comfortable setting. Why a cafeteria? The simple answer, of course, is that the partners, especially Treat, had years of experience managing them. The idea of the cafeteria went back to 1885, when the Exchange Buffet in New York first offered over-the-counter meals to men only, who consumed their food standing up. Eight years later, John Kruger opened a self-service eatery at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, based on the Swedish smorgasbord concept. Kruger called his establishment a "cafeteria" after the Spanish word for "coffee shop." After this well-publicized beginning, cafeterias began popping up across the country.[21]

"Cafeteria" meant quick service, good prices, and plenty of choices—all appealing prospects for the workers Richards and Treat chose as their desired clientele. But "cafeteria" could also mean long lines, featureless rooms, and the incessant noise of wooden trays clattering against stainless steel. Richards and Treat took great care to counteract these negative associations while pursuing their oft-repeated goal of delivering "the best possible food in the most home like surroundings to the greatest number of people in the shortest space of time."[22]

"We tried to stress simple but different and effective decoration," Richards later recalled. "Our first purchase was made by my family at an auction in Pennsylvania and consisted of an outstandingly perfect old curly maple cupboard for which to our horror they paid the sum of $165 out of our precious capital. . . . We got most gratifying response to this especially from homeless men [renters] who enjoyed the homelike

Sidewalk appeal: Inviting exterior sporting the cafeteria's AAA approval, 1950s

atmosphere and the feeling of leisure at the evening meal."[23]

The decor at Richards Treat went far enough toward the colonial to seem comforting and homelike, without incorporating the decorative spinning wheels and chintz-covered tables familiar to the tearoom crowd. Thus, it appealed to both men and women as a reassuringly lived-in atmosphere and a counterpoint to the stainless-steel efficiency of the cafeteria line. Those weren't reproduction candlesticks that adorned each table; they were the genuine article, right there to see and touch—just like at home. The advertising slogan, "Your Home Downtown," that Richards and Treat adopted a few years after opening—and used until they closed in 1957—was a logical outgrowth of the decorating scheme in place on their first day in business.[24]

The partners served up variations on their theme throughout the years. It was the little things—the bowl of chrysanthemums on the cashier's table, the ceramic chickens placed in the front windows to advertise their chicken pies—that captivated customers. The cafeteria's comment books overflow with descriptions of aesthetic triumphs, some of them comically homespun to the modern reader. "You have so many cute ideas here," enthused one customer in 1934. "I never realized how very pretty an assortment of fresh vegetables can look in a bowl." But not all their efforts were appreciated, as demonstrated by the sentiments of one irritated diner in 1935: "I don't like all those squash and flowers on the table. They don't leave any place to move your arms. (This complaint from a man.)"[25]

Main dining room with its pewter, china, and colonial-style furniture, 1936

Models of trustworthiness and self-assurance, the professors-turned-restaurateurs posed beside their $165 sideboard for the front cover of American Restaurant Magazine, *July 1944.*

As business boomed and Richards Treat expanded over the years, the partners continued to smooth the sharp edges of modernization with homey touches. In 1936, after lengthy discussions of having outgrown its original 90-seat space, Richards Treat added the "East Room," a pristine dining area with light-blue walls and deep red tables and chairs. The room was, according to a promotional mailing, "modern in feeling, but sympathetic in treatment to the American antiques and early pewter collection which have contributed to make Richards Treat famous the country over." The sleek, backlit jardinières topping the fluted columns along the walls reinforced the modern feel—at least until they were loaded up with bunches of lilacs or other seasonal treatments.

The East Room was the third in a series of capital improvements the partners made in the mid-1930s. After ten years, Richards and Treat must have decided they were in the cafeteria business for the long haul. On January 6, 1934, Treat recorded the arrival of the cafeteria's new oven (on which they received a 5 percent discount for paying cash) in her business diary. Later that year, the partners installed air conditioning. This improvement, along with a 10 percent evening discount throughout

Postcard of the modern East Room with its sleek, backlit jardinières, about 1940

the summer, kept customers coming, even though many were feeling the pinch of the Great Depression. Diners enjoyed the cafeteria's cool air: "Would you ask the management if I might bring my cot down here?" one asked. Another quipped, "How about a job selling doughnuts this afternoon. I'd do it free too just to stay here." By the end of July 1934, Richards was ready to pronounce the air conditioning a success: "Advantages Cooling System," she entered in her business diary. "Got new business. Got *lost* old business. . . . Artesian water for drinking. Big night business."[26]

In 1942, despite wartime food and labor shortages, Richards and Treat opened the basement Fireplace Room, which was dominated by a wood-burning fireplace with an iron kettle suspended from a pothook, colonial andirons, and more pewter-filled cupboards. During the war years the partners also relaxed their employment rules. They began by hiring returned GIs to help in the storeroom and on production lines; later, high-school boys were employed to bus tables, wash dishes, and perform odd jobs around the cafeteria. Bruce Middleton, a high-schooler when he worked at Richards Treat in the 1950s, recalls working with several men who had recently been released from prison.[27]

By 1944 the cafeteria seated 300 diners in five areas.

The owners finally admitted a man into their management team in 1949, when George LeSauvage Jr. was hired as general manager. Alan Hesdorffer, who worked at Richards Treat as a high-school student in the early 1950s, has vivid memories of a male manager who "ran a tight ship [and] would fire people right and left." This "reign of terror," in Hesdorffer's words, apparently did not last long—Minneapolis city directories show no record of LeSauvage after 1952.[28]

By 1944 the cafeteria seated 300 diners in five areas: the original dining room, the East Room, the Fireplace Room, the Red Room (a cheery space in the rear of the restaurant decorated with tin wall lanterns the partners had collected while on vacation in Mexico), and an upstairs room reserved for men, with wood paneling and oak tables. A photograph taken that year, Richards Treat's twentieth in operation, shows that the candlesticks and kettles weren't the only solidly reassuring features of the cafeteria. Its proprietors, too, projected an image of quiet competence and reliability. Like other Minneapolis restaurateurs of their time, Richards and Treat were fixtures in their own establishment. Customers and staff remember them overseeing the food line or chatting with regulars and eating at the same table at the front of the main dining room every evening.[29]

By their cafeteria's twentieth anniversary, Richards and Treat were well established both locally and nationally. Nola Treat had been appointed the first woman on the board of the Minneapolis Civic Council in 1943, and in 1945, Lenore Richards became a director of the National Restaurant Association. Advertisements and newspaper articles often alluded to the qualifications they held by virtue of their past lives as teachers. "If you want to see what a college education can do to community cooking, you just 'oughter' try the Richards-Treat," wrote a reviewer on their second anniversary in 1926. "You'll like the food, the prices and the friendly wholesome atmosphere." Several years later, restaurant critic Duncan Hines praised the offerings at Richards Treat as "Educated Food for Educated People," a catch phrase the cafeteria adopted as an advertising slogan. Professionalism extended

to Richards Treat's staff, too: women in key managerial positions were typically home economics graduates, often from the University of Minnesota. Richards and Treat also hired home economics students as summer interns to fill in for vacationing staff. "One does not escape teaching by going into business," they later recalled, "when there are 35 to 40 employees who are not to be trained but rather are actively in training."[30]

A few employees, like personnel manager Minda Olson and head meat cook Alma Anderson, were with the business for most of its years, rising through the ranks from the tray line to managerial positions. More typical, however, were the hundreds who worked stints lasting from a few months to a few years—students from Minneapolis Vocational High School and Technical Institute who cleared tables after school, recent college graduates, housewives who earned a few extra dollars by working while their children were in school. Former employees' memories of the partners vary, depending on when they worked at the cafeteria. Those from the 1920s and 1930s remember Richards and Treat as hands-on managers who greeted their employees by name when they arrived at work each day, hosted staff holiday parties at their south Minneapolis home, and presented each staff member with a cake and congratulatory note on her one-year anniversary at the cafeteria. In the 1940s and 1950s, as the business grew in popularity and complexity, staff members saw more and more of middle management and less and less of the owners. For the most part, however, employees remember Richards and Treat as fair but exacting employers who offered generous meal discounts and health insurance—"taskmasters" who "ran the cafeteria like clockwork" and for whom staff "really had to toe the line."[31]

Richards Treat's building and staffing may have evolved over time, but its menu offerings seem to have remained fairly constant. As *Minneapolis Star Tribune* columnist Barbara Flanagan recalled in 1996, "There was no variation on the theme, by golly! I could go in there today and eat the same ham loaf . . . because it was always the same." The gospel of good nutrition was preached in many ways at Richards Treat, from the copies of *Quantity Cookery* offered for sale, to the hand-lettered signs listing the nutritional value of items on the food line, to the window displays touting the importance of precise measurements in food preparation. The message would not have hit home with customers, of course, if the early decades of the century had not seen a gradual awakening to the "much-discussed and little-understood dietary mysteries" of a well-balanced diet, as one writer described them. County extension agents had preached the need for proper amounts of protein and other essentials, especially during the food shortages of World War I. After the war, the Smith-Hughes Act provided funding for home economics education in public secondary schools. By the late 1920s, according to historian Harvey A. Levenstein, "the basic ideas . . . that vitamins and minerals were essential to stimulating growth, protecting good health, and even prolonging life—prevailed in middle-class America."[32]

Richards and Treat took the "home cooking" formula quite seriously.

A thorough knowledge of the chemical composition of food means little to your customers if you can't cook. By all accounts, though, the fare at Richards Treat was memorable—a cut above what was served at the many downtown restaurants that were promoted as economical and affordable. From the start, Richards and Treat specialized in what they often termed "home cooking"—fresh, wholesome foods prepared in small batches, excellent baked goods, and an assortment of desserts. This specialization was a wise decision. As the century progressed, increasing numbers of servantless households and working mothers meant that fewer and fewer American families were getting their three square meals at home. The day after Richards Treat opened in 1924, in fact, American grocers kicked off National Canned Food Week with displays and demonstrations urging homemakers to save time and energy by serving canned fruits and vegetables. By the time Richards Treat closed in 1957, convenience foods had been taken to a whole new level with the introduction of TV dinners and other frozen fare. "When I say I give people home cooking," stated the president of the Schrafft's restaurant chain a few years after Richards Treat opened, "I mean I give them the kind of food they ought to get in the home but don't."[33]

The offerings at Richards Treat changed each day, and only a few mimeographed menus survive—typically because the cafeteria's thrifty managers used them as scratch paper. One such survivor lists the evening offerings for Thursday, November 23, 1933. Imagine having your choice of roast turkey with all the fixings, ham

loaf with horseradish, oyster stew, mashed potatoes, fresh apple pie, and devil's food cake, all prepared from scratch by women who had been to college to learn what was good for you. Those who remember Richards Treat fondly recall foods just like this, along with favorites like chicken pie and "'Tis Delish," a dessert resembling bread pudding.[34]

Richards and Treat took the "home cooking" formula quite seriously. Like homemakers with many mouths to feed on restricted budgets, they elevated the "waste not, want not" philosophy to a science. Theirs was a "penny business," as they described it, in which they duly noted the precise amount each serving spoon could hold—and the corresponding price necessary to make a profit. They monitored the size of portions served on the cafeteria line and routinely checked garbage cans for wasted food. And, like any efficient homemakers, they served leftovers whenever they could. One former employee recalls how, after she overestimated the amount of lemon juice for lemon meringue pie, the filling wouldn't thicken and "We had loads of lemon sauce that next week." Another remembers Brown Betty, a popular dessert made by dumping "dishes of puddings, fruit, jello, pieces of pie and cake and sweet rolls . . . into a large container in the refrigerator. When enough had accumulated, more crumbs were added and it was baked and served." Richards and Treat demonstrated their Brown Betty technique at a pudding clinic sponsored by the National Restaurant Association in 1951; a reviewer observed, "This is a big profit maker, as nearly all the ingredients have been already charged off as food costs."[35]

Decorative cover for a printed lunch menu and typed menu listing April 13, 1933's dinner special

A good location, the proper ambience, strong credentials, and excellent food kept Richards Treat in business for more than three decades. An equally important factor in the success of this memorable partnership was the close relationship of its principals. Richards and Treat shared a home, socialized, and spent most of their leisure time together. One friend remembers them as "life partners as well as business partners," making Richards Treat very similar to the most successful of family businesses.[36]

Careful reading of the many business records and notes the partners kept suggests that they were astute and innovative businesswomen who lived and breathed their work. Letters they exchanged over the years (each traveled frequently to conferences, served on the boards of professional groups and as consultants to cafeteria managers across the country) are sprinkled with frequent references to the quality of restaurant fare, suggestions for improvement, and encouraging words for each other. "Miss Treat claims that I never left town but what she got an anonymous letter of complaints which she must solve alone," Lenore Richards later recalled. "I can assure you my situation was no better. . . . We felt that in union there was strength." After Treat's 91-year-old mother broke her hip in 1945, Nola spent a great deal of time caring for her in Illinois. During this unsettling period, the partners exchanged letters almost every day. In one, Lenore despaired over the wartime food shortages: "Our meat situation and chicken is *bad*. You'd die at our menus & yet mostly counter looks *well* I think. I may have lost my standards. . . . It scarcely pays to make a menu—except to have something to

depart from!" Later, Nola responded, "Such a time as we are all having. . . . Well if everything gets too much for you—put R.T. on the market and we'll start something else sometime, if we like."[37]

Like all good business people, Richards and Treat understood the value of diversification. From the start, they installed a take-out counter, the Food Shop, at the front of the cafeteria. In the early years the shop sold complete meals; later, when demand for meals decreased, it offered only baked goods and homemade candies. The Food Shop was also the launching point for the thousands of cookies, pies, and cakes sent to servicemen and women during World War II and the cakes known as "Great Northerns" that were served in railroad dining cars. Besides its obvious appeal—shelves and counters piled high with mouth-watering treats—the Food Shop had a further advantage: The baked goods that were its mainstay, especially the breads and cakes, produced a much higher profit margin than the more labor-intensive chicken pies and steamed vegetables (always made in small batches to maximize freshness) that were best-sellers on the cafeteria line. Over the years, profits from the Food Shop no doubt helped keep meal prices reasonable.[38]

In the early years, the cafeteria was open seven days a week, offering breakfast, lunch, dinner, and take-out meals. By the early 1930s, Richards Treat had settled into a six-day schedule—closed Sundays and holidays, but otherwise open from 8:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M. The business made most of its money from the lunch crowd, which not only ate there but also purchased a steady supply of bread, cakes, pies, and cookies. A number of innovations over the years pleased customers and probably increased profits, too. In 1933, for example, waitresses began offering free coffee refills. Presented with a steaming cup of coffee, many diners no doubt lingered a little longer than they planned—and went back to the counter for dessert. In the same year, Richards Treat began offering complete meals at a set price—an option that negated the cafeteria concept but moved the line along, always a concern for profit-minded managers.[39]

Advertisements and special promotions also figured prominently in the cafeteria's recipe for success. The earliest Richards Treat ads appeared in teachers' publications. "Eat a meal with us and take a meal home from our HOME-COOKED FOOD SHOP," urged a 1925 ad in *The Bulletin of the Classroom Teachers' Association*, likely aiming at young women tired of attempting home cooking in the cramped kitchenettes of their efficiency apartments. These marketing experiments must have proved successful, for by the mid-1930s Richards Treat advertisements appeared regularly in both Minneapolis newspapers—five times a week by 1938, much more frequently than any of their competitors'. As might be expected, Richards Treat advertisements from the depression-plagued 1930s highlighted low prices and daily specials: the "New Economy Deal" of April 1934 was a 10 percent evening meal discount. "Thank you for the discount," was a typical customer response. "Every little bit helps. I think your food is so good I would love to come oftener, if I could afford it."[40]

The April 1934 advertisement also invited readers to "Bring the Family Down to Dinner." Even though the cafeteria was a favorite of the downtown lunch crowd, it did count families among its regular customers. Venturing downtown for a weekday family meal was not all that unusual in those days—especially on Thursdays, known as "maid's night out" long after most families were servantless. The cafeteria went to great pains to cater to its younger customers, offering cookies "on the house" and birthday parties complete with cakes and candles.[41]

More than 1,450 customers visited Richards Treat on its last day: July 16, 1957.

Richards and Treat also kept keen eyes trained on their competitors. "Mr. Miller in for dinner—To open September 1," reads an entry in their 1931 business diary. (Miller's Cafeteria had just relocated from Hennepin Avenue to 20 Seventh Street South, a few doors from the Forum Cafeteria.) The entry continues, "Can make a go of it on 2,000 [customers] per day. . . . Mr. Miller figures 160 employees at Forum—they are geared for 5000 daily—so far 3500 during wk. Saturdays 4700-4900. Probably made no money to date." Such details are sprinkled throughout the many journals that the partners kept.[42]

Senior staff members were also sent on reconnaissance missions to nearby competitors such as the Courtyard in the Baker Arcade and the Rand Tower cafeteria (both operated by Edith Jones and similar in quality and ambience to Richards Treat), B & G Sandwich Shop, Christiansen's, Miller's, and

the Forum. The scouts would return with lists of prices, daily specials, customer counts, and other tidbits. And it wasn't just local restaurants that Richards and Treat scrutinized. They took note of memorable meals while traveling, too. "The green salad was well seasoned with some herb," wrote Lenore to Nola after visiting a Stouffer's in Pennsylvania. "We should get into herb cookery better."[43]

As the years went by, Richards Treat's reputation continued to grow. In 1936 the cafeteria appeared in a "Most Popular Restaurant" poll conducted by *National Restaurant* magazine. A few years later, Duncan Hines—who listed it in his *Adventures in Good Eating* for years—singled out its "mushrooms and superior vegetables" in a *Saturday Evening Post* article. The photo of Lenore and Nola and their $165 sideboard made the cover of *American Restaurant* magazine on the cafeteria's twentieth anniversary in 1944, supported by a lengthy article describing it as "one of the greatest restaurants in the country." And in 1957, its owners were named to *American Restaurant*'s Hall of Fame.[44]

No matter how great their cooking, their business acumen, or their fame, nothing could stop the wrecking ball that finally ended the partners' business venture. A new First National Bank of Minneapolis was being built on the spot, and so, as one loyal patron recalled, "The hunt was on, after they closed, for another place to eat." More than 1,450 customers visited Richards Treat on its last day: July 16, 1957. Free cupcakes were handed out, just as they had been at every Richards Treat anniversary party since November 1925. Nola Treat's diary entry for the day was succinct: "Tues. Close at 2 PM—keeping open till 4 for late comers—32¾ years of R.T. ends." A handwritten draft of a letter to "Dearest Ones," tucked into the pages of the diary, reads, in part: "At last it is almost over and what a terrific time as we have had. The work of deciding on every darn monkey wrench plus parting with employees plus being gay with the customers plus the whole tout en *scramble* should have got us down however each of us got a little teary or collapsible at different times and now we feel relief."[45]

Although Richards and Treat offered no other reasons, there may have been more to the closing than the loss of their building. Two new restaurants that had opened across the street—Flameburger and Lee's Broiler—were no doubt giving their old-style cafeteria a run for its money. The rise of suburban shops and restaurants in the 1950s lured families away from downtown Minneapolis. Perhaps most importantly, the partners were at the points in their lives when many people consider retiring: Nola Treat was 72 years old, and Lenore Richards was 65.

And so the Richards Treat era came to an end. The restaurateurs entertained ideas of opening another eatery—"I guess it will be in a modern place," they told *Minneapolis Tribune* columnist George Grim. Two weeks before closing, they had promised employees, "If the Richards Treat goes back into business sometime this fall we will hope to contact as many of you as we can use at that time and we sincerely hope you will want to cast your lot again with Richards Treat." And Solveig Sundahl, a cashier at the cafeteria in the 1930s, remembers that, during a chance encounter after the business closed,

"Primex makes everything we use it in taste 'Homemade,'" declare Richards and Treat, famous enough to promote shortening for Proctor and Gamble.

her former employers asked whether she'd be interested in working for them again. Nevertheless, in the days following their closing, the partners auctioned off their large equipment and put their pots, pans, and pewter in storage, where they remained until being auctioned off 11 years later.[46]

Nola Treat and Lenore Richards remained almost as active after retirement as they had been before, serving as consultants for food-related institutions locally and across the country. At the Minneapolis Woman's Club dining room, for example, they recommended a number of innovations familiar from their Richards Treat days, such as children's birthday parties and sophisticated advertising campaigns. They published their final edition of *Quantity Cookery*, continued their involvement in the National Restaurant Association, and ate out every evening. They also traveled extensively and summered at their cabin near Bemidji, where they loved to fish.[47]

After Lenore Richards died suddenly at the age of 79 in 1971, Nola Treat continued the philanthropy that had been the partners' habit since their early days in business. She funded a dining hall—the Richards Treat Center—at Millikin University in Decatur, made a major donation in Lenore's name to Lehigh University, and gave several gifts to Abbott Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis, where she spent much of the last few years of her life, to fund a cafeteria and a lecture series focusing on nutrition.[48]

Nola Treat died in 1983, at age 98. Her grave at Lakewood Cemetery in Minneapolis is next to that of her partner. Even after years of retirement, she never gave up hope that someone, somewhere, would carry on where she and Lenore had left off. As she told *Minneapolis Star* columnist Barbara Flanagan in 1968, while preparing to auction off the last of her restaurant equipment, "This business could be good to some young person serving home-cooked food. If only somebody would open up and serve home cooking, good, fresh vegetables and pay some attention to the nutrition of the customer. More businessmen tell me that's what they want."[49]

Remembering Richards Treat

Did you work or eat at this now vanished Minneapolis landmark? Or, perhaps you succumbed to the lure of the desserts in the Food Shop or received a care package of Richards Treat's delectable baked goods. To share your memory of the place, the owners, or the food, visit *www.mnhs.org/richardstreat.*

Notes

1. *Minneapolis Journal*, Nov. 6, 1924, p. 19, Nov. 7, 1924, p. 1; *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, Nov. 7, 1924, p. 24. Research for this project was supported, in part, by a grant from the Minnesota Historical Society's Charles E. Flandrau Fund. Many thanks for their good counsel to my colleagues at the Society, especially Brian Horrigan and Debbie Miller, and former staff members Benjamin Filene, Timothy Glines, Marx Swanholm, and Mary Weiland.

2. Nola Treat and Lenore Richards, "Testing Theory in a Downtown Restaurant," Articles and Speeches, Nola Treat and Treat Family series, Richards Treat, Inc., Corporate and Family Records (hereinafter RT), Minnesota Historical Society. Richards was superstitious about starting anything important on a Friday, so the "official" opening was November 6, when two friends of the owners paid ten cents each for soup and pie.

3. George Grim, "I Like It Here," *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 5, 1957, p. 9. For proof of Richards Treat's early success, see "Club Gossip," *Minneapolis Business Woman* (Feb. 1925): 9, about the struggling tearoom of the Business and Professional Women's Club of Minneapolis. Four months after Richards Treat opened, the club chided members: "Have you been at the Tea Room since Margaret Lawson has had charge? Come for lunch some day . . . . Why not give Richard a rest, Margaret's treat is the best."

4. Beecher, *Treatise on Domestic Economy for the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School* (New York: Marsh, Capen, Lyon, Webb, 1841) and *The Domestic Receipt Book* (New York: Harper, 1846).

5. Paul V. Betters, quoted in *The Bureau of Home Economics: Its History, Activities and Organization* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1930), 4. Land-grant colleges were established especially to teach agriculture and mechanic arts. Rising interest in home economics coincided with concerns that the growing ranks of female students receive appropriate instruction.

6. *Journal of Home Economics* 1(Feb. 1909): 1; Sally Michener, "Doorway to Delightful Dining," *American Restaurant*, July 1944, p. 76. The New York Cooking School was founded in 1876; the Boston Cooking School, three years later. Fannie Farmer launched her best-selling *Boston Cook Book* in 1896.

7. Hazel T. Craig, *The History of Home Economics* (New York: Practical Home Economics, 1945), 5; Michener, "Doorway," 76.

8. Craig, *History of Home Economics*; Nola Treat and Lenore Richards, "An Analysis of the Field of Institution Management and the Preparation for It," *Journal of Home Economics* 14(Aug. 1922): 370–72.

9. "Feeding the Nooners," *Ideas for Refreshment Rooms* (Chicago: Hotel Monthly Press, 1923), 156. AHEA formed an Institution Economics section in 1910; see Karen Fiedler and Virginia Norton, "Trends in Management of Food Service Outside the Home," *Definitive Themes in Home Economics and Their Impact on Families 1909–1984*, ed. Marjorie East and Joan Thomson (Washington, D.C.: American Home Economics Association, 1984), 88.

10. Here and two paragraphs below, Richards to Treat, Jan. 2, 1918, July 1918, May 9, 1919, Lenore Richards and Richards Family series, RT.

11. "Courses in Home Economics for the Year 1918–1919," *Bulletin of the University of Minnesota*, July 22, 1918.

12. Nola Treat and Lenore Richards, *Quantity Cookery* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1922); review by Mabel C. Little, *Journal of Home Economics* 14(Sept. 1922): 452. *Quantity Cookery* became a standard institutional-management text and was also used by the military during World War II. Ensuring its continuing success, Richards and Treat updated their work; in the third edition (1951), for example, they cut the size of many recipes to accommodate church groups and women's clubs, and the fourth edition (1966) addresses "the problems which arise when using convenience foods and ready foods" (p. vii).

13. Lenore Richards, "Employee Training in the Commercial Food Service," Articles and Speeches, Richards series, RT.

14. William B. Rhoads, "Roadside Colonial: Early American Design for the Automobile Age, 1900–1940," *Winterthur Portfolio* 21 (Summer/Autumn 1986): 133–52.

15. On Jones, see *Minneapolis Tribune*, Oct. 24, 1950, p. S3. Smith's career provides an interesting parallel to Treat's. Both taught and managed institutional cafeterias before starting their own ventures, and both were elected president of the National Restaurant Association. For more on Smith, McGuckin, and other pioneers (including Richards and Treat), see Alberta M. MacFarlane, "They Know Their Onions," *Independent Woman* 21(Sept. 1942): 266–67. See also Barbara Wright, *Home Economics Positions In Minneapolis* (Minneapolis: Woman's Occupational Bureau, 1922).

16. William H. Stead, *Opportunities for Women Trained in Home Economics* (Minneapolis: Woman's Occupational Bureau, 1928), 33; Catharine Oglesby, *Business Opportunities for Women* (New York: Harper, 1932), 172–73; Milt Hoffman, "They Sell What They Tell," *Restaurant Management* (May 1937): 405–07.

17. Treat, "Adventuring in Business," Ar-

ticles and Speeches, Treat series; *Minneapolis Journal*, Aug. 16, 1936, women's sec., p. 12. Parents' misgivings from Mary Briggs, executrix of Treat's estate, telephone interview with author, June 11, 1996. All interviews were with the author.

18. Gertrude Newman, recorded interview, Sept. 11, 1996.

19. Treat and Richards, "Testing Theory"; Robert Ashton Morgan, telephone interview, Aug. 5, 1996.

20. A twentieth-anniversary card "from the Supreme Court" was signed by many "judges' table" habitués; Anniversary Cards and Notices, Richards Treat, Inc. series, RT. *Minneapolis Star* columnist Barbara Flanagan, recorded interview, Aug. 26, 1996.

21. Kruger's cafeterias and similar ventures were known as "conscience joints" because customers tallied their own bills. For more on the history of cafeterias, see John Mariani, *America Eats Out* (New York: William Morrow, 1991); Richard Pillsbury, *From Boarding House to Bistro: The American Restaurant Then and Now* (Boston: Urwin Hyman, 1990). For an alternate explanation, see "The Origin of the Cafeteria—The Institution," *Journal of Home Economics* 17 (July 1925): 390–93.

22. Lenore Richards, "Launching the Ship," Articles and Speeches, Richards series. She also observed that their customers "wanted meals served quickly and wanted them on six working days without regard to weather or sales or season," and "Our sign . . . carried . . . the words 'Serve yourself,' rather than the much used 'cafeteria' or 'eats.'"

23. Richards, "Launching the Ship." "Homeless" probably described unmarried men who rented rooms without kitchen facilities in residential hotels and boardinghouses, a practice common for young professionals of the period.

24. The cafeteria *was* just like home for Richards and Treat, avid antique collectors who lived in a brick colonial revival house at 1733 Knox Avenue South in Minneapolis throughout the 1930s and '40s. On housing modern necessities such as gas stations in colonial exteriors, see Rhoads, "Roadside Colonial," 133–52.

25. Here and below, "Cafeteria Com. Apr. 26," Lenore Richards, Richards Treat diary, 1934; "Sept. 28 [1935] Cafeteria," Comments from Customers, vol. 15; mailing, Anniversaries and Notices—Richards Treat, Inc. series. Lilacs from Aileen Stougaard, telephone interview, June 18, 1996.

26. The oven cost $1,225; Lenore Richards, Richards Treat Business Diary, Dec. 9, 1933, Jan. 6, 1934. On air conditioning, see "Cooling Comments," July 10–12, Comments from Customers, 1934, vol. 14; Richards, Richards Treat diary, July 31, 1934—all Richards Treat series.

27. Bruce Middleton, telephone interview, June 11, 1996.

28. *Minneapolis Journal*, Oct. 1, 1947, p. 38; Waldemar Olsen and Alan Hesdorffer, telephone interviews, June 10, 1996.

29. Michener, "Doorway," cover and p. 29, 70–72. Employees Marilyn Ingman and Nina Irey, among others, recalled the owners mixing with customers; telephone interviews, June 11, Aug. 8, 1996. Solveig Sundahl commented on their usual table; recorded interview, Sept. 18, 1996.

30. Copy of undated review, Anniversary Cards and Notices; Duncan Hines, "How to Find a Decent Meal," *Saturday Evening Post*, Apr. 26, 1947, p. 18–19; Treat and Richards, "Testing Theory." By this time, Richards and Treat had also expanded to a second location, a coffee shop in the Northwestern Bank Building.

31. Sundahl, Irey, and Ingman interviews; Helen Westby, telephone interview, June 28, 1996.

32. Flanagan interview; Anne Boustead, unpublished memoir of the cafeteria, author's files; Window display, 1944, in snapshot of employee Marion Thuma, Employee Reminiscences, Richards Treat, Inc., series. "Vitamins as News," *Journal of Home Economics* 16(June 1924): 326; Harvey A. Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 160.

33. *Minneapolis Journal*, Nov. 7, 1924, p. 12; Rose C. Feld, "Home Cooking Made This Man Famous," *American Restaurant* 9(Dec. 1926): 38–39.

34. Michener, "Doorway," 66, noted that chicken pie had been on the menu every day of Richards Treat's first 20 years except for a few weeks in spring 1943 when food shortages made acquiring chickens impossible. 'Tis Delish from Joyce Cordes, telephone interview, June 11, 1996.

35. Susan Gross, telephone interview, Fall 1996; Carol Palm, telephone interview, June 11, 1996; Margaret O'Keefe Henry to author, June 28, 1996; Marion Thuma to author, July 8, 1996; "Restaurateurs Hash Over Way to Break Down Tough Meats," *Wall Street Journal*, May 9, 1951, p. 15.

36. Morgan interview.

37. Richards to Treat, [1945], Mother's Illness/Death, and Treat to Richards, Mar. 5, 1945, both in Treat series.

38. MacFarlane, "They Know Their Onions," 267. Samantha Peterson, who managed the Food Shop in the early 1950s, described Richards Treat's Christmas orders as "unbelievable"; telephone interview, July 23, 1996. The staff started baking cookies in late November, storing the large quantities in the restaurant's attic until they were packed for sale.

39. Charles M. Ripley, manager of General Electric Company's Schenectady Works Restaurant, installed a conveyor belt on the cafeteria tray line. Moving 65 feet per minute, it allowed each customer 15 seconds to select a full meal, so that patrons would not

dawdle over food choices; "Engineer Solves Quick Service Problem," *Ideas for Refreshment Rooms*, 174–76.

40. *Bulletin of the Classroom Teachers' Association* 13(Dec. 1925): inside front cover; *Minneapolis Journal*, Apr. 22, 1934, p. 3; "Caf. Com. Apr. 23," Richards, Richards Treat diary, 1934. Marketing efforts also included distributing picture postcards of the cafeteria, a practice highly unusual for a restaurant of that size, according to postcard historian Bonnie Wilson.

41. Phebe Smith, who grew up in Minneapolis's Prospect Park neighborhood, remembers frequenting the cafeteria on Thursday nights with her parents and sister; Smith to the author, June 24, 1996.

42. Nola Treat, Treat business diary 1931–33, entry dated May 12, 1931, but written on Mar. 3 page, RT, Inc. series.

43. Flanagan interview; Richards to Treat, July 6, [1942], Richards series.

44. Poll quoted in "The Twelfth Anniversary of The Richards Treat Cafeteria," Anniversary Cards and Notices; Duncan Hines, "How to Find a Decent Meal," 18–19; Michener, "Doorway," front cover, 27–30; *American Restaurant*, Dec. 1957, p. 102.

45. Patrick Fitzgerald, telephone interview, June 13, 1996; Treat, business diary 1953–57, July 16, 1957, and letter inserted at July 31, Treat series.

46. *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 5, 1957, p. 9; Sundahl interview; message to employees and auction notice, Closing Files, RT, Inc. series.

47. Jeannette Ludcke, *You've Come a Long Way, Lady*! (Minneapolis: Woman's Club of Minneapolis, 1982), 254; Richard Kelley, telephone interview, June 18, 1996.

48. *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, Dec. 30, 1983, p. 4B; *Millikin Milestone*, Oct. 1977, p. 1.

49. *Minneapolis Star*, July 12, 1968, p. 1B; *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, Dec. 30, 1983, p. 4B.

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