

Native Menu Instead of State Grub?

REMARKS in this column a couple of weeks ago about lack of genuine, identifiable native Oklahoma grub brought forth quite a number of comments but no distinctively Oklahoma foods.

Dick Ranney of Oklahoma Today magazine called to report the staff there had been discussing the subject just before the column appeared in print. They were looking for foods that might be served to visiting dignitaries and writers. Did they find something?

"No, there were a lot of suggestions," Ranney said, "but we found just what you reported. The foods originated somewhere else."

Therese T. Tarvin of Okemah wrote: "If you are an Okie, how about poke greens and sassafras tea? Had both for lunch today. Use poke berries for my arthritis and spring clean the body with poke greens." She gave recipes and suggested blackberry pie for dessert.

Poke greens grow wild in Oklahoma, sassafras may be found and blackberries are available seasonally. However, use of poke and sas-

safra may be traced to herb lore of the Appalachians and Ozarks.

A reader in the Panhandle writes "I always considered cornbread and beans as real Oklahoma food. I was raised on them." So were a lot of the rest of us, along with folks in other states.

It looks like Oklahomans may have to settle for a native menu, rather than for a native food. Pioneer settlers had one basic menu: They ate whatever was available.

In the spring, this might include prairie chicken and vegetables. In summer, maybe it was fish and fruit. After a dry summer, the menu might be turnips, dry salt pork or rabbit, and pecan pie.

As my father was in the cattle business at Ada and we butchered our own, I was about grown before I realized that not everybody ate steak for breakfast. We worked off the energy before noon and refueled with roast beef, homegrown vegetables and home canned fruit.

Therefore, any Oklahoma menu, to suit me, would have to start with beef. That brings up the definition of an OKIE steak promoted for a time

about 15 years ago.

Specifications called for a boneless rib steak with the tail called the "panhandle." The steak must be at least 1 1/4 inches thick, weigh 8 ounces or more, have no more than three-eighths inch of fat and be U.S. Choice grade or higher. Doneness may vary to diners' tastes.

Almost every kind of vegetable and many fruits can be grown here, so Oklahoma menus could offer considerable selection. If blackberries are out of season, make do with delicious pecan pie.

At the Midsouthwest Foodservice convention held in Oklahoma City recently, one of the principal speakers declared that "theme restaurants are the up-and-coming thing for the '80s." These are distinguished by signs, graphics and employee dress as well as food.

Oklahoma has a lot of theme restaurants, offering a variety of foods and it seems there would be opportunities for others offering solid, tasty pioneer foods. So far we haven't seen even an Okie-burger or Chickasaw pizza!