

A Major Beef! Who Invented the Hamburger?

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"Where's the beef?"

That was the question from the Wendy's ad campaign back in the 1980s. It is an important question to be sure, but not nearly as contentious as the question about the evolution of hamburgers: namely, "where was the beef, first?"

Who invented the hamburger? You might think there is an easy answer. There is not. George Motz, the director of the definitive documentary on hamburgers, says a hamburger should be defined as ground beef that has been patted, cooked somehow and put on bread. So, the question is, who performed that complicated and blessed operation first?

It is a fight that spans from Texas to Connecticut, and beyond.

Texas state legislator Betty Brown is proposing a bill saying a man named Fletcher Davis first put the cooked, patted ground beef on bread in Athens, Texas in the 1880s. "We believe it is very well documented that it began in Athens, Texas, in the late 1880s," Brown says.

As their story goes, Davis then brought his invention to the World's Fair in St. Louis in 1904, where the invention took off and became an American icon.

His burgers are no longer served in Athens these days, but a tiny plaque marks the spot where old Fletch Davis allegedly made his invention, and locals can still be found who are proud of that history.

"There is no doubt, Fletch did this all on his own," says Athens resident Peggy Gould, "and people looooooved it."

There is just one big problem with that theory. In New Haven, Conn., if you ask who invented the hamburger, this is the answer you get: Louis Lassen, in 1900.

Connecticut's Ketchup-less Burger

Forty-seven-year-old Jeff Lassen, the great-grandson of Louis Lassen, swears the invention of the hamburger is part of his family heritage, and he snarls at any who claim otherwise.

"We're not happy about it. It's, for us, a great matter of pride, tradition, family heritage. We'll fight every one of them for as long as we can as far as we can until we prove we're right."

Jeff has a couple of important facts on his side. First, the Library of Congress agrees it was Louis Lassen who invented the burger when he put scraps of ground meat between slices of bread for fast, easy eating. And second, Lassen's burgers are still served at Louis Lunch, a small hamburger shack in New Haven where Jeff Lassen is the fourth-generation proprietor.

At Louis Lunch, they still serve the burgers exactly the way they did more than 100 years ago. They're cooked in small upright gas ovens and served on toast, with cheese, tomatoes and onions.

But if you're thinking of visiting for a taste of burger history, there is one important detail to remember: do not ask for ketchup. If you do, you are likely to receive the glares of local patrons

and perhaps a one-way ticket to the door. Old Louis didn't serve it with ketchup back in the day, so why should they now?

"No. No way. No How. Never," declares Jeff Lassen.

Little Historical Hamburger Documentation

For all the fire and bluster of the great burger debate, filmmaker George Motz thinks there might never be a resolution.

"I don't think there is going to be any way to definitively figure out who invented the hamburger in America," says Motz, whose film, "Hamburger America," documented hamburgers across the U.S. and the people who make them.

One problem is that there is little written history. Another issue is that the spread of the burger happened largely at the World's Fair, from tiny vendors that came and went in an instant. And it is entirely possible that more than one person came up with the idea at the same time in different parts of the country.

You really want to be confused? The town of Seymour, Wisc., has a claim as the original home of the hamburger that seems as reasonable as anyone else's.

It is destined to remain an historic debate. And I'll take my historic debate with cheese, pickles and onions... just hold the ketchup.

AMERICA'S TOP 5 HAMBURGER-LOVING U.S. CITIES

- #1 — Seattle
- #2 — Philadelphia
- #3 — Boston
- #4 — Baltimore
- #5 — Miami



National Hamburger Day, May 28, 2019

The hamburger is a classic staple of western culture. Historically, it's most likely that the first hamburger sandwich first appeared in the 19th or early 20th centuries, but there is much controversy over its origin. Over the years, the hamburger has risen as a culinary icon in America. Burger joints, takeaway food outlets and all-night-eateries serve them up in their millions – with cheese, salad, pickles, bacon and sauces. Why not celebrate National Hamburger Day by making hamburgers your own way on May 28, 2019?

TOP 5 BURGER TOPPINGS THAT AMERICANS LOVE

Cheese	79%	
Lettuce	71%	
Tomato	66%	
Onion	58%	
Pickle	54%	

OR
IS IT.....

National Burger Day - August 27, 2019

